

# Enabling Social Innovation in Malta

## Country Snapshot



**Social innovation: "the processes and outcomes of developing novel approaches to address societal challenges facing people and planet." <sup>1</sup>**

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from Malta's social innovation ecosystem

 Direct focus on social innovation    Connected but indirect focus on social innovation    No focus on social innovation

## INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

### Official Definition of Social Innovation

Malta does not have an official legal definition of *social innovation*. Instead, policy discussions focus on **social enterprises and the social economy**, referring to organizations that pursue social objectives through entrepreneurial activity while reinvesting profits for public benefit <sup>1 2</sup>.

### Government Body for Social Innovation

Rather than a dedicated social innovation body, responsibilities are distributed across several institutions. The **Ministry for the Economy, Enterprise and Strategic Projects** oversees policies related to entrepreneurship and social enterprise development, while the **Office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations (OCVO)** regulates and supports voluntary organizations delivering many socially innovative initiatives <sup>2 3</sup>.

### Government Strategy for Social Innovation

Malta does not have a standalone national strategy specifically focused on social innovation. However, social innovation is indirectly supported through broader policy frameworks such as the **Social Enterprise Act implementation framework** and EU-funded programmes supporting the social economy and social entrepreneurship, including funding within the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) 2021–2027 programme** <sup>2 4</sup>.

### Policies, Laws & Regulations

#### Social Enterprise Act (2022)

- Establishes a legal framework for recognizing and regulating social enterprises, defining their governance requirements and social mission objectives <sup>2 4</sup>.

#### Voluntary Organisations Act (2007, amended)

- Provides the legal framework governing voluntary organizations and establishes the Office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations, which registers and supervises nonprofit entities delivering community initiatives <sup>3 5</sup>.

#### Co-operative Societies Act (2001, amended)

- Regulates cooperatives and other collective enterprise structures that form part of Malta's broader social economy ecosystem <sup>5</sup>.

### Official Statistics

Malta does not currently collect official statistics specifically on social innovation. Government reporting instead focuses on **voluntary organizations, cooperatives, and social enterprises**, which together represent the country's social economy sector <sup>2</sup>.

## Government Programs

### Voluntary Organisations Project Scheme (VOPS)

- Provides grants for projects implemented by voluntary organizations that address social challenges and benefit local communities <sup>6</sup>.

### Small Initiatives Support Scheme (SIS)

- Offers small-scale grants to voluntary organizations implementing community initiatives and socially beneficial projects <sup>7</sup>.

### EU-supported social economy initiatives

- Through ESF+ programmes and EU initiatives, Malta supports the development of social enterprises and social economy actors through funding and capacity-building programmes <sup>4</sup>.

# ECOSYSTEM

## Stakeholders

Several public and civil society organizations play important roles in Malta's social innovation ecosystem.

### Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector (MCVS) (2008)

- A national body that supports voluntary organizations through capacity-building, networking, and policy advocacy <sup>8</sup>.

### Office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations (2007)

- Public authority responsible for registering, monitoring, and supporting voluntary organizations in Malta <sup>3</sup>.

## Sectoral Networks

Malta does not have a large number of networks dedicated specifically to social innovation. Instead, networks supporting **voluntary organizations, cooperatives, and social enterprises** play an important ecosystem role.

### Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector network

- A national platform connecting civil society organizations and promoting cooperation and capacity-building within the nonprofit sector <sup>8</sup>.

## Non-Financial Support Organisations

Key organizations providing non-financial support for social innovation include:

- **Civil society support organizations:** Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector.
- **Academic institutions:** University of Malta offering research and training in social enterprise and nonprofit management.
- **European and international initiatives:** EU programmes supporting the development of social economy ecosystems <sup>4 2</sup>.

## Support Initiatives

The most common forms of non-financial support for social innovation in Malta include:

- **Training and capacity-building programmes** for voluntary organizations and social enterprises.
- **Incubation and entrepreneurship support** initiatives connected to innovation and startup ecosystems.
- **EU-funded programmes** aimed at strengthening social enterprise development and civic engagement <sup>4 8</sup>.

## Collaboration

Partnerships between government agencies, voluntary organizations, and EU programmes are relatively common in Malta's social economy ecosystem.

Examples include:

- Collaboration between government institutions and voluntary organizations in delivering social services and community projects funded through national schemes such as VOPS.
- Partnerships between Maltese organizations and EU programmes supporting social enterprise development and innovation ecosystems <sup>4 6</sup>.

## Events & Awards

### Events

- Social entrepreneurship workshops, nonprofit sector conferences, and innovation events organized by the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector and other stakeholders.

### Awards

#### Malta Social Impact Awards

- Recognizes organizations and initiatives addressing social challenges and promoting socially impactful innovation <sup>10</sup>.

## FINANCE

### Financing Schemes

Reliable estimates of the total annual funding directed specifically to social innovation in Malta are not publicly available. However, several funding channels support socially impactful initiatives through social enterprise and voluntary sector funding programmes <sup>2 4</sup>.

#### Key sources of financing include:

- **Government grants:** funding schemes such as the Voluntary Organisations Project Scheme and Small Initiatives Support Scheme.
- **EU funding:** European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and other EU programmes supporting social enterprise and social economy development.
- **Philanthropy and private sector contributions:** including donations and sponsorships supporting nonprofit and community initiatives.

### Inclusiveness of Financing

Funding initiatives frequently prioritize projects that address social inclusion and community development, particularly those targeting:

- vulnerable or marginalized groups
- community development initiatives
- youth and education initiatives
- social welfare and health-related programmes <sup>6 7</sup>.

## SOCIETY

### Public Awareness of Social Innovation

Public discourse in Malta more commonly refers to **social entrepreneurship, voluntary sector initiatives, and social economy development** rather than explicitly using the term “social innovation,” though these concepts increasingly overlap in policy and public discussions <sup>2</sup>.

### Research

Research on social innovation and social enterprise in Malta is emerging, with contributions from academic institutions such as the **University of Malta** and research produced through EU-supported social economy initiatives <sup>2</sup>.

Practitioner research initiatives include ecosystem analyses and reports produced by EU social economy programmes and national voluntary sector organizations <sup>4 8</sup>.

### Education

Formal educational programmes focused specifically on social innovation are limited. However, universities and training institutions increasingly integrate **social entrepreneurship and nonprofit management topics** into entrepreneurship and business curricula <sup>2</sup>.

Reliable estimates of the proportion of graduates specializing in social innovation are not publicly available.

## Entrepreneurship



### Business Environment

Malta has a relatively strong entrepreneurship environment supported by government initiatives promoting startup development and innovation.



### Innovation Capacity

Malta ranks 27th globally in the Global Innovation Index 2025, indicating strong innovation capacity relative to many countries <sup>11</sup>.

Global Innovation Index 2025



### Social entrepreneurship prevalence

Social entrepreneurship is present but relatively small and is often driven by voluntary organizations and nonprofit initiatives <sup>2</sup>.

## Social & Environmental Consciousness



### Solidarity

Malta demonstrates strong community solidarity through active civil society organizations and high participation in charitable activities <sup>12</sup>.



### Political participation

Malta's political participation score in the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2024 is 6.67/10 <sup>13</sup>.



### Volunteering

56% of people in Malta reported volunteering time according to the

CAF World Giving Index 2024 <sup>12</sup>.



### Sustainability

Malta ranks 13th globally in the 2024 Environmental Performance Index and 8th globally in the Climate Change dimension <sup>14,15</sup>.

Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2024