

Enabling Social Innovation in Italian Republic

Country Snapshot

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

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from Italy'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 🔗



- While there is no single statutory definition of "social innovation" in national law, the concept appears in policy instruments such as the Social Innovation Fund (Fondo di innovazione sociale), which frames social innovation as interventions addressing social needs and strengthening public administrations' capacity in line with European standards ².
- Italy instead relies on adjacent frameworks such as Third Sector entities (ETS), social enterprises, and social cooperatives to structure social innovation activity ^{3 4 5 6}.

Government Body for Social Innovation ✓



- Rather than a dedicated agency, responsibility is cross-cutting:
 1. The Social Innovation Fund, established by a Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers, provides a national mechanism supporting public administrations in designing and implementing social innovation interventions ².
 2. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies plays a central coordinating role for the Third Sector, including guidance on co-programming and co-design between public administrations and civil society actors ⁷.
 3. A permanent evaluation/monitoring committee (Comitato permanente) is established "without additional burden" within the Department of the Public Services within the Ministry of Public Administration to evaluate interventions and monitor programme delivery ³¹.

Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓



- While no standalone national strategy exists, the Social Innovation Fund functions as a structured multi-year implementation framework supporting experimentation and scaling of social innovation at local level ².
- At EU level, Italy's Recovery and Resilience Plan includes stakeholder consultation mechanisms involving civil society, reinforcing collaborative governance approaches relevant to social innovation ⁸.

Policies, Laws & Regulations

Italy's enabling environment is anchored in the Third Sector reform:

- Law No. 106/2016 and Legislative Decree No. 117/2017 (Third Sector Code) establish a unified legal framework for Third Sector entities ^{3 4}.
- Legislative Decree No. 112/2017 regulates social enterprises, defining their mission and governance ⁵.
- Law No. 381/1991 on social cooperatives establishes work integration and service delivery roles ⁵.
- Partnership-based delivery is enabled through national guidelines on co-programming and co-design between public administrations and Third Sector entities ⁷.
- Impact measurement is supported through national guidelines on social impact evaluation, setting methodologies for assessing outcomes ⁹.
- Public procurement includes social clauses and reserved contracts supporting access for social economy actors ^{10 11}.

Official Statistics

- While no dedicated statistics on social innovation exist, Italy collects extensive official data on the non-profit sector through the national statistics office's (ISTAT) Permanent Census and administrative registers ¹².
- The RUNTS (National Register of the Third Sector) provides publicly accessible data on over 119,000 entities (2023), and ISTAT explicitly includes measurement of "processes of social innovation generated" within its statistical framework ^{12 13}.

Government Programs

- Fondo di innovazione sociale (2018; operationalised 2019) : national funding instrument supporting feasibility, experimentation, and scaling of social innovation, with €25 million allocated over 2018–2020 ².
- Italia Economia Sociale (from 2022) : blended finance instrument supporting investment and growth in social enterprises and cooperatives, with a budget of €223 million ^{14 15}.

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders

Italy's ecosystem is strongly anchored in the Third Sector and social economy:

- Forum Nazionale del Terzo Settore: umbrella network representing civil society organisations and promoting collaboration (national level) ¹⁶.
- Research centres such as TIREZIA (Politecnico di Milano) and EURICSE contribute to impact measurement and social innovation research ^{16 17}.
- Place-based ecosystems such as Torino Social Impact bring together public, private, and civil society actors to advance impact-oriented development ¹⁸.

Support Initiatives

Support is delivered through research centres, incubators, and local ecosystems:

- TIREZIA provides training, advisory, and executive education on social innovation and impact finance ¹⁷.
- Regional ecosystems (e.g., Torino Social Impact) offer structured collaboration platforms, capacity-building, and project incubation ¹⁸.

Collaboration

- Collaboration is institutionalised through national co-programming and co-design frameworks enabling partnerships between public administrations and Third Sector actors ⁷.
- The Social Innovation Fund requires partnership-based project design and evaluation, promoting replicability and scaling of solutions across regions ².

Events & Awards

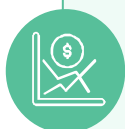


Italy hosts a growing number of ecosystem events and recognition platforms:

- Torino Social Impact events and annual gatherings bring together public institutions, investors, and social innovators to promote impact economy initiatives [18](#).
- Social Innovation Tournament (European Investment Bank, with Italian participation) supports early-stage social innovation projects through funding and visibility [19](#).
- Social Impact Award Italy promotes youth-led social entrepreneurship through incubation and national competitions [20](#).

FINANCE

Financing Schemes



- Public finance (direct): Fondo di innovazione sociale provides dedicated funding for social innovation interventions via three channels for feasibility, piloting and scaling social innovation projects (2018–2020), including structured interventions and calls with defined ceilings [2](#).
- Public finance (connected): Italia Economia Sociale offers blended finance (grants and subsidised loans) to social economy entities [14 15](#).
- Tax-designated giving: the “cinque per mille” mechanism allows taxpayers to allocate income tax shares to eligible Third Sector organisations [21](#).
- Impact and philanthropic finance: OECD identifies foundations, ethical banks, and impact investors as key funders of social economy organisations [16 17](#).

Financing Inclusivity



- Targeted inclusion tools appear in labour market and procurement-related measures: for example, the OECD country note highlights reduced wage-cost burdens for “Type B” social co-operatives employing disadvantaged workers and the use of reserved procurement contracts to create opportunities for social enterprises/co-operatives [6 17](#).
- For the Social Innovation Fund, public sources reviewed do not indicate consistent national-level quotas targeting specific demographic groups within core social innovation funding instruments [2](#).

SOCIETY

Public Awareness of Social Innovation



- While not uniformly used across legislation, “social innovation” has formal visibility through the Social Innovation Fund and ISTAT’s statistical framework, indicating growing recognition in policy and institutional discourse [2 13](#).

Research



- Italy has a strong research base linked to the social economy:
 - OECD analyses highlight the Third Sector as a key foundation for social innovation policy and research [16 17](#).
 - Research centres (e.g., TIRESIA, EURICSE) focus on impact evaluation, social entrepreneurship, and inclusive innovation [17](#).
- Research and policy analysis bodies (e.g., INAPP) also contribute to national debate on social economy and innovation-oriented policy (including reporting on the national action plan process) [30](#).

Education & Human Capital



- Higher education and professional development opportunities relevant to social innovation are commonly anchored in Third Sector governance, social entrepreneurship and impact evaluation/finance; however, no national estimate of graduates specialising in social innovation was identified.
- Social innovation is integrated into higher education and professional training:
 - Sapienza University of Rome offers programmes covering “processes of social innovation” and welfare governance [22](#).
 - Executive education and specialised training in impact finance and social innovation are provided by research centres such as TIRESIA - Politecnico di Milano [17](#).

Entrepreneurship



Business Environment

the World Bank discontinued “Doing Business” and has introduced Business Ready (B-READY); subnational B-READY materials for Italy highlight specific regulatory areas (e.g., Business Location and Dispute Resolution) with room for improvement ^{23 24}.



Innovation Capacity

Cameroon ranks 123/133, improving to 116/139 in 2025

Global Innovation Index (GII) 2025 (WIPO) ²⁵.



Entrepreneurial activity

GEM reports Total Early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) at 8.3% (2023), indicating moderate entrepreneurial dynamism ²⁶.

Social & Environmental Consciousness



Solidarity



Political participation

Official parliamentary election data shows national voter turnout reporting for the September 2022 Chamber of Deputies election cycle ²⁸.



Volunteerism and giving

Italy ranks 101st, with 19% reporting volunteering time (plus 35% donating money and 54% helping a stranger, per Gallup World Poll measures) ²⁷.

CAF World Giving Index 2024



Sustainability

Italy ranks 29th overall, and 30th on the Climate Change component ²⁹.

Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2024