# Enabling Social Innovation in Slovakia

## Country Snapshot

Government Council for Social Innovation
Advancing Social Impact

**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 Slovakia'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

Slovakia does not yet have a legal definition of social innovation; however, an extended operational definition is used in practice, drawing on EU European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) Regulation 2021/1057 and expert consensus. It frames social innovation as an activity or process which, in terms of both its objectives and the means used, has a social or community character and involves the development and implementation of new processes, approaches, procedures, models, products and services that respond to relevant social and community problems and needs. Social innovation creates new relationships, systems, structures or forms of cooperation between individual sectors — public, civil society and private — that bring about positive systemic change in society, increase communities' capacity to act, and achieve fair and socially beneficial outcomes.developing and implementing new approaches, models, products or services to address social/community needs, create new cross-sector relationships, and enable systemic change and community capacity. [2]

### Government Body for Social Innovation ✓

While there is no dedicated ministry, the National Competence Centre for Social Innovations (NCCSI) under the Ministry of Labour serves as the main coordination point, working on awareness, definitions, funding mechanisms and capacity building. An Advisory Board for Social Innovations, composed of 16 members from government, academia, business, and NGOs, has also been established under the Ministry of Labour to support conceptual work, selection procedures, synergies, and impact assessment. [3]

### Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓

While no standalone national strategy exists, social innovation appears in:

- **Program Slovakia 2021–2027 (ESF+)**, which includes Social Innovations and Experiments as Priority 4P7.[4]
- **National Strategy for Research, Development and Innovation 2030**, which highlights the need for support systems for social innovation. [5]

### Policies, Laws & Regulations ✓ 🔗

While no social innovation-specific policies exist, broader frameworks support the social economy and social enterprises as drivers of social innovation, with key examples including:

- **Act 112/2018 on Social Economy and Social Enterprises**, which defines, establishes a national register, and provides support mechanisms for social enterprises. [6]
- The **NGO and foundations legal framework** (1990–2002), **public procurement** with social considerations, and **tax incentives** for employing disadvantaged groups.

### Official Statistics

While official statistics are not collected specifically on social innovation, Slovakia tracks the social economy and has more than 630 officially registered social enterprises. [7]

### Government Programs

- **ESF+ Priority 4P7** (with an EU allocation of ~€68M EU for 2021-2027) supports ecosystem development and tools for social innovation, as well as innovative projects in areas such as the labour market, inclusive education, and active inclusion. Social innovation attributes are key criteria in the calls for project ideas and proposal assessments. [3]
- **The Institute of Social Economy**, a national project under the Ministry of Labour, provides technical assistance for social enterprises. [8]
- Participation **in EU transnational projects** supports experimentation and capacity-building. For instance, SocInoLab develops innovation ecosystems and creates tools, while other calls focus on scaling proven tools in social inclusion and education. [9]

## ECOSYSTEM

### Stakeholders

Prominent actors directly supporting social innovation include:

**Public/hybrid:** The National Competence Centre for Social Innovations (NCCSI), the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, the Advisory Board for Social Innovations established under the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, and the Regional Centres for Social Economy.
**Civil society/philanthropy:** Pontis Foundation, which facilitates cross-sector collaboration on social innovation, responsible entrepreneurship, and philanthropy, and has created a map of Slovakian social innovators. In addition, the nine projects supported under the SocInoLab call should also be reflected, as they bring together approximately 50 entities that will contribute to building an interconnected support system for innovative solutions to social challenges across Slovakia.
**Regional innovation actors** include the Innovation Center of the Košice Region and INOVIA.
**Academic institutions:** Slovak universities and research institutions are also relevant ecosystem actors. Rather than mentioning only selected institutions, it may be useful to refer to the academic sector more broadly, as several universities are involved in innovation-related areas, including volunteering, economic innovation and circular economy. Examples include Matej Bel University, the University of Economics in Bratislava and the Slovak University of Agriculture.

Social economy sectoral networks that indirectly support social innovation include **the Alliance for the Social Economy** (ASES), which primarily focuses on social entrepreneurship, **and Coop Product Slovakia** (CPS), which represents cooperatives.

### Support Initiatives

Key types of broader support include **incubation/acceleration** (e.g. Pontis Impact Lab), **regional innovation labs, and advisory services** for social enterprises. However, support options are often not specific to social innovation and remain limited outside major cities. [3]

### Collaboration

Partnerships mainly occur through EU-funded initiatives such as cross-border programs and social innovation competence centre projects. For instance, Slovakia participates in the Social Innovation+ consortium with Austria, Hungary, Latvia, and Malta, which facilitates the exchange of good practices and ecosystem development. [10]

### Events & Awards

- **Impact Summit:** national cross-sector gathering hosted by Pontis Foundation.
- **Social Impact Award Slovakia:** student and youth social innovation competition.
- Smaller university and regional events on social entrepreneurship and social economy.

## FINANCE

### Financing Schemes

- **ESF+** provides the majority of dedicated social innovation funding, primarily through grants for testing and scaling innovations. Estimated annual funding for social innovation-specific measures is ~ **€10M/year** via Priority 4P7. [11]
- Additional funding channels with broader focus include philanthropic grants (typically €20K–€60K), social enterprise subsidies (e.g. wage support, incentives), and international project funding. [12]
- No significant impact investment instruments (e.g. social impact bonds) for social innovation currently exist, but have been identified as an important opportunity. [13]

### Financing Inclusivity

Funding prioritises marginalised groups including the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, Roma communities and disadvantaged regions. However, administrative complexity often limits access for small/rural organisations.

## SOCIETY

### Public Awareness of Social Innovation

Understanding of the term is often limited to a narrow focus on support for socially-excluded groups, and even implementers might not realize that their work can be described as social innovation. However, in recent years public awareness seems to be growing, with a notable increase in understanding that social innovation cuts across both issues and sectors.[13]

### Research

Research activity exists but is modest. Key contributors include universities (e.g. **Comenius University, Slovak Academy of Sciences**) working on social economy, social entrepreneurship, and public sector innovation.

### Education & Human Capital

While no degree programs dedicated to social innovation exist, related content appears in courses on social entrepreneurship, social economy and social policy. Slovakia participates in the **DIGISOC European Joint Master** on digital society, social innovation, and global citizenship through **UPJŠ Košice**. Informal training on social innovation exists through NGO incubators and youth innovation programs. Additional capacity-building links exist through cooperation with universities (e.g. the **Economic University in Bratislava**), including professionally-oriented programmes that touch on social innovation-related themes.

## Entrepreneurship

**3.7/10** scores

**Business environment:**

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor National Entrepreneurial Context Index 2024. [14]

**46th/139** countries

**Innovation performance:**

Global Innovation Index 2025 [15]

0 **38.7%** 100

**Prevalence of social entrepreneurship**

Early-stage entrepreneurs start a business to make a difference in the world (GEM 2024). [14]

## Social & Environmental Consciousness

**Solidarity** tends To be strongest at family/community level, while engagement with national or global issues is somewhat lower

World Values Survey

0 **6.11** 10

**Level of political participation**

EIU Democracy Index 2024. [16]

**11%** population

**Culture of volunteerism**

CAF World Giving Index 2025. [17]

**18th/180** countries

**Commitment to sustainability**

2024 Environmental Performance Index, and 47th on climate change performa

This snapshot was developed, with the use of AI, for the Government Council for Social Innovation by One Family Foundation, and was reviewed by representatives of the Slovakian government. Updated January 2026.
Learn more about the Global State of Social Innovation here: https://governmentcouncil.org/

## References


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