

# Enabling Social Innovation in The Kingdom of Netherlands

## 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 the Netherlands' 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

 A formal operational definition is applied in the Netherlands' European Social Fund ESF+ context, aligned with EU framing. Social innovation is described as an activity with both social goals and social means, linked to developing and implementing new ideas (products, services, practices, models) that meet social needs and build new social relationships or collaborations across public, civil society, and private organisations. <sup>2</sup>

Adjacent terminology commonly used includes:

- "impact ondernemen" (impact entrepreneurship). <sup>3</sup>
- "sociale onderneming" (social enterprise), including voluntary governance/recognition via a code and register. <sup>4</sup>


### Government Body for Social Innovation

 While there is no single national ministry dedicated solely to social innovation, relevant responsibilities appear across portfolios, especially labour-market inclusion and equal opportunities within ESF+ implementation. <sup>2</sup>

Illustrative institutional roles include:

- Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment: ESF+ programme stewardship, including social innovation calls linked to equal opportunities. <sup>2</sup>
- Uitvoering van Beleid: referenced as the ESF+ programme delivery function in official programme documentation. <sup>2</sup>
- Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy: referenced in parliamentary documentation related to the planned "maatschappelijke BV (BVM)" approach to social enterprise recognition. <sup>5</sup>

### Government Strategy for Social Innovation

 While no standalone national strategy dedicated exclusively to social innovation was identified in the sources reviewed, relevant strategic elements appear in:

- ESF+ programme design and implementation rules, where social innovation is used to support labour-market outcomes and equal opportunities (including gender equality objectives). <sup>2 6</sup>
- City Deal collaboration models supporting impact entrepreneurship through public-private-knowledge partnerships and experimentation. <sup>3</sup>
- National research and innovation programming oriented towards societal challenges and impact (indirect enablers). <sup>7</sup>

## Policies, Laws & Regulations

The enabling environment is shaped by programme rules, adjacent legal frameworks, and developing recognition mechanisms.

Key elements include:

- ESF+ implementing regulation text that specifies eligible social innovation activity types (from idea development and experimentation to implementation and dissemination) and sets programme parameters through 2027. <sup>6</sup>
- Planned recognition improvements for social enterprises through a BvM status (policy intent and legislative preparation are reflected in government publications and parliamentary scrutiny). <sup>5 8</sup>
- Fiscal frameworks relevant to nonprofits and philanthropy, including ANBI (public benefit organisation) conditions and tax advantages. <sup>9</sup>
- Practical public procurement guidance supporting “socialer aanbesteden” (social procurement) for local contracting authorities. <sup>10</sup>



## Official Statistics

Public statistical infrastructure supports measurement of adjacent sectors (e.g., volunteering, nonprofit activity, and legal forms), though dedicated official statistics specifically labelled “social innovation” are limited.

Illustrative official statistics sources include:

- Volunteerism reporting (population 15+), including annual estimates and trends. <sup>11</sup>
- Open government-related data on ANBI organisations (administrative dataset). <sup>12</sup>

Public evidence was not identified of a national official statistical series that separately categorises “social enterprises” or “social innovation” as distinct economy-wide classes (beyond programme monitoring and voluntary registers). <sup>4</sup>



## Government Programs

Direct programme support includes:

- ESF+ social innovation (gender equality): a dedicated programme chapter with a budget of €5.5 million, supporting projects aimed at a more gender-balanced labour market and structured across multiple stages of the innovation cycle. <sup>2</sup>
- ESF+ labour-market integration of status holders: an officially published subsidy ceiling of €9.7 million for sustainable labour-market integration projects. <sup>13</sup>

Relevant indirect enablers include:

- R&D tax relief (WBSO) for eligible R&D activities, which may support innovation development where social innovation includes qualifying technological R&D. <sup>14</sup>
- City Deal collaboration frameworks that structure multi-actor experimentation and joint work across government levels and partners (including documented contribution arrangements). <sup>15</sup>



# ECOSYSTEM

## Stakeholders

The ecosystem combines national networks, philanthropy, municipal impact initiatives, and structured partnerships.

Illustrative actors include:

- Social Enterprise NL: national ecosystem network and host of the Code Sociale Ondernemingen information (including the social enterprise register mechanism). <sup>4</sup>
- Stichting DOEN: philanthropic support for social entrepreneurship and inclusion. <sup>16</sup>
- Oranje Fonds: supports social cohesion and participation initiatives and administers national awards for social initiatives. <sup>17</sup>
- Municipal and regional impact ecosystems, including programmes linked to Amsterdam and The Hague. <sup>18 19</sup>
- Platform31: provides toolkits for local governments on enabling conditions for impact entrepreneurship. <sup>20</sup>



### Support Initiatives ✓

Support infrastructure spans venture development, ecosystem building, and capacity building:

- Accelerator and programme offerings (example: Impact Hub Amsterdam). [21](#)
- City and regional programmes for impact startups and scale-ups (example: municipal “impact” platforms and city programmes). [18](#) [19](#)
- Practical toolkits for municipalities and provinces (including procurement and finance modules). [20](#)
- City Deal structures facilitating testing and learning across partners. [3](#)

### Collaboration ✓

Collaboration is a visible feature, combining structured partnerships and national recognition mechanisms:

- City Deal Impact Ondernemen is presented as a multi-party partnership with a broad partner base supporting barrier reduction for impact entrepreneurship. [22](#)
- Appeltjes van Oranje: three initiatives receive €25,000 each under theme-based annual calls. [17](#)

## FINANCE

### Financing Schemes ✓

Finance for social innovation includes EU social funding mechanisms, national transition finance, tax incentives, and philanthropy.

Illustrative mechanisms include:

- ESF+ social innovation (gender equality): €5.5 million programme chapter for social innovation projects. [2](#)
- ESF+ labour-market integration of status holders: €9.7 million subsidy ceiling. [13](#)
- Invest-NL: positions its work around major societal transitions (e.g., circular economy, climate neutrality, healthcare accessibility), with EU documentation referring to its establishment with a capital base of €1.7 billion. [23](#) [24](#)
- WBSO R&D tax credit supporting eligible R&D. [14](#)
- Philanthropic funding and prizes, including €25,000 awards and foundation grantmaking. [16](#) [17](#)

### Financing Inclusivity

Targeted inclusivity channels are visible through thematic public funding:

- ESF+ social innovation includes a dedicated gender equality focus. [2](#) [6](#)
- ESF+ calls include targeted labour-market integration objectives for status holders. [13](#)
- OECD analysis notes that, despite increasing acknowledgement of inclusive entrepreneurship needs, there is relatively limited support specifically aimed at under-represented groups. [25](#)

## SOCIETY

### Public Awareness of Social Innovation

Public awareness is reflected in formal policy discussions and ecosystem structuring, including:

- Government and parliamentary attention to improving recognition of social enterprises via BVm. [5](#) [8](#)
- OECD policy analysis describing an established landscape for social enterprise development alongside definitional plurality and institutional complexity. [26](#)

## Research

Research infrastructure supports social innovation through societal challenge-driven programming and dedicated centres:

- Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research programmes emphasise societal impact and challenge-driven research (e.g., NWA).<sup>1</sup>
- University of Twente DesignLab provides collaboration environments linking researchers, students and societal partners.<sup>27</sup>
- DRIFT (Erasmus University Rotterdam) is a transitions research institute (founded 2004) relevant to societal change and innovation.<sup>28</sup>
- Academic activity on “transformative social innovation” is evidenced by EU-funded project work (e.g., TRANSIT project information pages).<sup>29</sup>

## Education & Human Capital

Higher education and applied research settings contribute to human capital development through practice-oriented collaboration:

- Living lab and citizen-engagement models that integrate student learning with societal partner needs.<sup>27</sup>

Public evidence of a single national “social innovation curriculum” or qualification framework was not identified in the sources reviewed; however, impact-oriented research and education approaches appear across multiple institutions.<sup>1</sup>

## Entrepreneurship



### Business Environment

Doing Business 2020 ranked the Netherlands 42nd (legacy series).<sup>31</sup>



### Innovation Capacity

Global Innovation Index 2025



### Social entrepreneurship prevalence

OECD analysis (drawing on GEM tabulations) reports:

- Total early-stage entrepreneurial activity (TEA) of 13% (2019–2023).
- 19% expecting to start a business within the next three years (2019–2023).<sup>25</sup>

## Social & Environmental Consciousness

Indicators suggest enabling societal conditions for collective action and sustainability:



### Climate indicator:

emissions excluding LULUCF reported as “just under 143 Mt CO<sub>2</sub>-eq” in 2023 in a country indicator page.<sup>34</sup>



### Political participation

turnout of 78.3% in the national elections for the House of Representatives (29 Oct 2025), as reported in the official election results database.<sup>32</sup>



### Volunteering

50% of people aged 15+ volunteered at least once in the previous 12 months (2024).<sup>11</sup>



### Sustainability

ranked 13th (score 66.9).<sup>33</sup>

Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2024