

Enabling Social Innovation in Switzerland

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 Switzerland'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 no single, consolidated "official definition" was identified across federal policy, a federal background paper hosted by the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment discusses "social innovations" and frames them as new ways of achieving societal goals (e.g., organisational forms, regulations, lifestyles) linked to quality of life, solidarity, and participation. ²

In the federal 2030 strategy, "innovation" is defined more broadly as a new development successfully applied in the economy or society (not specific to "social innovation"). ³

Government Body for Social Innovation ✓



Switzerland does not present a single dedicated federal body for "social innovation"; enabling functions appear across innovation policy, sustainable development implementation, and sectoral policy. ³

Key federal bodies with relevant mandates include:

- Innosuisse: promotes science-based innovation in the interest of the economy and society. ⁴
- Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE): runs a sustainable development encouragement programme supporting innovative and reproducible projects linked to Agenda 2030 implementation. ⁶
- Swiss Federal Office for the Environment: hosts analytical work on social innovation in transformation research and environmental policy contexts. ²

Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓



While there is no standalone national "social innovation strategy" identified in public evidence, relevant elements appear in two high-level frameworks:

- 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy (2030 SDS): the federal strategy for implementing the 2030 Agenda in Switzerland, accompanied by action plans and country reporting. ³
- Innosuisse multi-year programme 2025–2028: defines priorities and funding needs for national innovation promotion across economy and society. ⁵

Policies, Laws & Regulations

Switzerland's enabling environment relies primarily on general legal forms and cross-cutting public policy instruments (rather than a dedicated “social enterprise law” in the sources reviewed).

- Legal forms commonly used by social-purpose organisations:
 - Associations and foundations are governed under the Swiss Civil Code (e.g., legal personality provisions for associations; foundation creation and supervision). ⁷
 - Cooperatives are governed under the Swiss Code of Obligations, including the possibility of charitable purposes. ⁸
- Public procurement: the Federal Act on Public Procurement sets an objective of using public funds in an economically, ecologically, and socially sustainable manner, supporting space for “social” considerations in awarding. ⁹
- Tax framework for public benefit: the Swiss Federal Tax Administration provides guidance on tax exemption for legal entities pursuing public or charitable purposes (relevant to nonprofit and foundation-based social value creation). ¹⁰

Official Statistics

While official statistics specifically labelled “social innovation” were not identified in public evidence reviewed, Switzerland maintains official indicators relevant to an enabling environment (civic participation, social cohesion, sustainability).

- The Federal Statistical Office (FSO) maintains the MONET 2030 indicator system for sustainable development measurement. ¹¹
- MONET includes an official volunteering indicator (share of population aged 15+ engaged in volunteer work). ¹²
- The FSO publishes official political participation statistics (including election participation rates). ¹³

Government Programs

Public programmes supporting innovation, partnerships, and sustainable development implementation can indirectly enable social innovation when used for social/environmental mission-driven solutions.

- ARE Sustainable Development encouragement programme (2024–2025): supports 21 “innovative and reproducible” projects designed to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with a focus on partnerships and impact. ⁴
- Innosuisse innovation promotion: provides national instruments to support science-based innovation for the benefit of the economy and society; the 2025–2028 multi-year programme sets an overall financing need for this portfolio (see Finance). ^{4 5}

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders

Switzerland's ecosystem includes university-based centres, philanthropy infrastructure, and cross-sector convenings that explicitly address social innovation and the social economy.

- University of St. Gallen: hosts the Competence Center for Social Innovation (CLIS) focused on catalysing social innovation and systems change. ¹⁹
- University of Basel: hosts the Center for Philanthropy Studies (CEPS), an interdisciplinary institute specialised in philanthropy and the nonprofit sector. ²⁰
- SwissFoundations: appears as a sector convenor and as an initiator linked to Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS') establishment (as described by CEPS). ²⁰
- Swiss Social Economy Forum (SSEF): convening framed around social entrepreneurship and social economy actors across practice, science, politics, and civil society. ²³

Support Initiatives



Dedicated nationwide “social innovation incubator/accelerator” evidence was not identified within the sources reviewed; however, capacity-building and executive education options are visible in the higher education and philanthropy ecosystem.

- Continuing education: CAS “Leading the Sustainability Transformation” (linked to social innovation expertise at St. Gallen). ²²
- Higher education pathways: CEPS describes educational opportunities related to management of nonprofits and foundations. ²¹

Collaboration



Cross-sector collaboration is positioned as a core approach in Switzerland’s sustainability and ecosystem convenings.

- The 2030 SDS frames implementation through coordinated action across thematic areas, supported by action plans and reporting. ³
- The ARE 2024–2025 programme explicitly focuses on partnership-driven projects to increase impact toward Agenda 2030 goals. ⁶
- SSEF provides a structured space for exchange between social economy actors and stakeholders. ²³

FINANCE

Financing Schemes



Switzerland’s financing picture includes large-scale national innovation promotion and targeted sustainable development project support, which can be applied to “social innovation-like” solutions where objectives align.

- Innosuisse multi-year programme 2025–2028 reports a financial requirement of CHF 1,651 million for the period, reflecting the scale of public innovation promotion available in Switzerland. ⁵
- The ARE Sustainable Development encouragement programme supports a portfolio of projects (2024–2025) aimed at accelerating Agenda 2030 implementation (grant support described on programme page; project-level amounts not specified in the public summary reviewed). ⁶

Financing Inclusivity



Public evidence of dedicated social-innovation funding windows targeting specific under-represented groups (women, youth, rural areas, minority communities) was not identified within the sources reviewed.

- National entrepreneurship monitoring highlights inclusion-relevant gaps, noting that support and resources for women entrepreneurs remain areas for improvement (useful context for inclusive ecosystem and funding design). ¹⁵

SOCIETY

Public Awareness of Social Innovation



Public-sector discourse on “social innovation” is visible through analytical work and programme framing, even if not consolidated as a single national policy label.

- A federal FOEN background paper explicitly discusses social innovations and their relevance to transformation pathways. ²
- SSEF provides additional evidence of an active “social economy” discourse linking multiple sectors. ²³

Research



Switzerland hosts dedicated academic capability focused on social innovation and on the institutions that often finance or deliver social value (philanthropy, nonprofits).

- CLIS (University of St. Gallen): explicitly oriented to social innovation and systems change. ¹⁹
- CEPS (University of Basel): research and expertise on philanthropy and the nonprofit sector, established in 2008 (as described by CEPS). ²⁰

Education & Human Capital



Training options linked to sustainability transformation, nonprofit management, and philanthropy contribute to leadership and operational capacity for socially oriented innovation.

- CAS “Leading the Sustainability Transformation” (St. Gallen) supports skills relevant to mission-driven transformation. ²²
- CEPS describes study opportunities connected to management of nonprofits and foundations. ²¹

Entrepreneurship

Switzerland’s broader innovation and entrepreneurship performance provides a strong baseline environment that social innovators can potentially leverage.



EIU Business Environment Ranking

World Bank “Business Ready” (B-READY): Switzerland is included in the economies covered by the B-READY framework (useful as an “ease of doing business” successor-style reference point). ¹⁶



Innovation Capacity

Global Innovation Index: Switzerland ranks 1st (GII 2025). ¹⁴



Social entrepreneurship prevalence

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Switzerland 2023/2024 reports Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) of 10.3%, and ranks Switzerland 9th on the National Entrepreneurship Context Index (NECI) among 49 economies included in that assessment. ¹⁵

Social & Environmental Consciousness

Switzerland maintains official indicators relevant to civic engagement and environmental performance, which can support social innovation measurement and accountability.



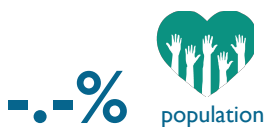
EU Climate Action Progress

Climate measurement: Switzerland’s National Inventory Document reports 2023 total greenhouse gas emissions of 39.3 million t CO₂ eq (and 4.6 t CO₂ eq per capita). ¹⁸



Political participation

FSO publishes official political participation statistics (including election participation rates), which amounted to 48.4% in 2024. ¹³



Volunteering

MONET 2030 includes an official volunteering indicator; in 2024, 39,2% of the permanent resident population aged 15 years and older reported having done voluntary work (formal and / or informal) in the previous four weeks, which corresponds to 2,9 million people. They provided an average of 3,9 hours of volunteering per week. ¹²



Sustainability

Switzerland ranks 9th in EPI 2024. ¹⁷

Environmental Performance Index