

Enabling Social Innovation in Bahrain



Country Snapshot

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

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from Bahrain’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 ⌘

Bahrain continues to develop its official understanding of social innovation within the framework of broader national innovation and development agendas. Public policy discourse more often frames innovation through broader national innovation and development agendas, and social progress through welfare, community development, and SDG-aligned efforts, rather than through a distinct “social innovation” definition.



Government Body for Social Innovation ✓

Bahrain is working to coordinate social innovation efforts through several key institutions that promote social development and community innovation, including:

- **Ministry of Social Development (MOSD):** Core role in NGO oversight and social development initiatives.
- **Labour Fund (Tamkeen):** National workforce and enterprise development fund; supports entrepreneurship broadly and has featured social entrepreneurship and inclusive growth themes through partnerships and programming.
- **Youth/SDG-linked public initiatives:** Government-led volunteering and youth innovation initiatives provide indirect support to social innovation activity.



Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓

Bahrain does not have a standalone “social innovation strategy,” but recent national planning embeds social inclusion within broader innovation frameworks. A key recent development is Bahrain’s **National Innovation Strategy (2025–2035)**, which includes an “inclusive innovation” pillar and frames innovation as a cross-society effort. Bahrain’s broader development narrative also emphasises inclusive development and community cohesion.



Policies, Laws & Regulations ✓ ⌘

Directly related / enabling legal structures:

- **Non-Profit Company legal form (Commercial Companies Law amendment, 2020):** Provides a corporate structure aligned to non-profit objectives (no profit distribution; reinvestment of surplus), which can enable mission-driven and social-purpose entities.

Broader enabling frameworks:

- **Law on Associations (1989):** Establishes the general legal framework for associations/NGOs.
- **Institutionalised charitable financing channels:** Social support and welfare funding mechanisms, including organised charitable systems aligned with Islamic giving, play an indirect enabling role in resourcing social initiatives.



Official Statistics

Bahrain does not appear to publish dedicated “social innovation statistics.” However, it maintains statistics and registries for civil society organisations. Reported figures indicate a substantial growth in registered NGOs over time and continued expansion into the 2020s. MOSD maintains an NGO directory and related records.



Government Programs

Bahrain supports social welfare and civil society through programmatic mechanisms that can enable social innovation indirectly:

- **NGO project funding/grant mechanisms and support structures** within MOSD that fund and strengthen social initiatives proposed by NGOs.
- **Volunteering mobilisation programs, including digital platforms** to match volunteers with opportunities (originally developed as an innovation initiative and used to coordinate national volunteering).
- **Entrepreneurship and SME support schemes** (e.g., via Tamkeen), which can also support social enterprises where business models are viable, though not ring-fenced for social innovation.

ECOSYSTEM



Stakeholders

Bahrain’s ecosystem features a mix of NGOs, CSR actors, and emerging social impact organisations:

- **Bahrain CSR Society:** A platform promoting CSR and community initiatives, connecting businesses and social actors.
- **Bahrain Voluntary Work Society:** A prominent volunteer organisation contributing to volunteering culture and social initiatives.
- **Bahrain Trust Foundation:** Civil society actor supporting community development and education-oriented initiatives.
- **3BL Associates:** A Bahrain-founded social impact/sustainability consultancy (“think-do tank”) supporting impact-oriented initiatives and ecosystem development.

Overall, Bahrain’s NGO sector remains a key backbone for social innovation-like activity, though it is often framed as social development, volunteering, charity, or CSR rather than “social innovation”.



Support Initiatives

Bahrain’s broader entrepreneurship ecosystem provides general infrastructure that social ventures can use, alongside some targeted initiatives:

- **International accelerator partnership (women social entrepreneurs):** A Bahrain-focused intensive program supported through international partnership and cloud services support, aimed at women-led social entrepreneurship/impact ventures.
- **Youth and SDG-linked programs:** Youth-centered initiatives aligned with sustainable development objectives build awareness and skills relevant to social innovation.



Collaboration

Cross-sector collaboration exists but is mostly project-based rather than institutionalised through mechanisms such as social impact bonds or dedicated government commissioning. Examples include multi-stakeholder coordination around NGO funding and public volunteering mobilisation systems.



Events & Awards

Bahrain hosts entrepreneurship and youth innovation events that sometimes include social impact or community-focused categories (e.g., social entrepreneurship discussions during entrepreneurship weeks and youth innovation/volunteering awards), though Bahrain does not appear to host a single flagship “national social innovation summit” equivalent to some larger ecosystems.

FINANCE

Financing Schemes

Bahrain does not provide a consolidated national estimate of “social innovation financing.” Funding relevant to social innovation typically comes from:

- **Public and quasi-public grants/support** (MOSD NGO support mechanisms; general entrepreneurship support via Tamkeen).
- **Philanthropy and charitable giving**, which is a significant resource in Bahrain and central to funding social causes.
- **Microfinance and inclusion-oriented finance**: Bahrain’s microfinance institutions have been positioned as tools for socio-economic development and entrepreneurship for lower-income groups.

Financing Inclusivity

Financing is generally oriented toward social inclusion through welfare and charity channels, with common target groups including low-income families, women, youth, and people with disabilities. Microfinance and NGO-led projects often focus on inclusion and livelihood creation.

SOCIETY

Public Awareness of Social Innovation

Public discourse more commonly references volunteering, charity, CSR, youth initiatives, and entrepreneurship than the term “social innovation.” Bahrain’s culture of giving and community cohesion is frequently highlighted as a societal strength, and national volunteering initiatives have increased visibility of civic engagement.

Research

Bahrain’s social innovation research field appears emergent, with relevant work often housed under entrepreneurship, women’s empowerment, sustainability, and civil society. A notable recent example includes GEM-related research and national reporting on women’s entrepreneurship and impact orientation

Education & Human Capital

Evidence of social innovation-specific degree programs is limited, but universities and youth initiatives increasingly integrate SDG-linked and entrepreneurship content, including modules or activities relevant to social entrepreneurship and impact.

Entrepreneurship



Business Environment

Bahrain has a mid-tier global position in business environment rankings (EIU), reflecting a generally supportive environment for enterprise formation



Innovation Capacity

Bahrain’s GII positioning indicates developing innovation capabilities, with strengths often linked to infrastructure and enabling conditions rather than outputs



Social entrepreneurship prevalence

Bahrain-specific “social entrepreneurship prevalence” estimates are not consistently published in a single official statistic; relevant evidence is often drawn from GEM-related reporting and thematic studies (including those focused on women entrepreneurs)

Social & Environmental Consciousness



Solidarity

Bahrain was not included in the final editions of the CAFWorld Giving Index. Bahrain last appeared in the index in 2021, ranking 12th.



Political participation

Bahrain scores low on political participation metrics in democracy indices



45%

population

Volunteering/giving

Bahrain ranks strongly on charitable giving metrics, with a strong culture of donation and helping behaviors



157th

180 countries

Sustainability

Bahrain’s performance in environmental indices indicates significant sustainability challenges, including climate-related dimensions

