

# Enabling Social Innovation in Vatican City

## 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 Vatican City’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



Vatican City does not currently use a standalone legal definition of social innovation in state law. At the same time, the concept appears in official Vatican discourse. A 2017 Synod preparatory document described social innovation as a way for younger generations to become “**agents of change**,” and a 2024 papal address referred to marginal areas as “**laboratories of social innovation**”.<sup>2,3</sup> This gives the term visibility, even if it is not codified in legislation.

### Government Body for Social Innovation



While there is no dedicated ministry or agency for social innovation, relevant responsibilities are distributed across several institutions.

- **The Governorate of Vatican City State:** Manages state administration and public services.<sup>4</sup>
- **The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development:** Established in 2016 and operational from 2017, it is the closest institutional anchor for related themes such as justice, peace, care for creation, and human development.<sup>5</sup>
- **Wider Ecosystem:** Supported by pontifical academies and ethics-focused bodies.

### Government Strategy for Social Innovation



While there is no standalone strategy for social innovation, related priorities appear in several official Vatican frameworks.

- **Laudato Si’ Action Platform:** Provides a structured pathway for ecological conversion and practical action.<sup>6</sup>
- **The Economy of Francesco:** Promotes a more just and fraternal economy through youth engagement, entrepreneurship, and dialogue.<sup>7</sup>
- **AI Governance:** Recent frameworks on artificial intelligence signal interest in human-centred innovation oriented to the common good.<sup>8</sup>

### Policies, Laws & Regulations



Vatican City has a modernising regulatory environment that supports ethical and responsible innovation, even without a dedicated social innovation law. The current governance framework is rooted in the state’s institutional laws and executive structure.<sup>4</sup> Recent measures include the **General Regulation on the Protection of Personal Data** and the **Guidelines on Artificial Intelligence**, which emphasise responsibility, transparency, and the primacy of the human person.<sup>8,9</sup> Public evidence of a dedicated social enterprise law, social economy law, or specific social procurement framework was not identified.

### Official Statistics

Public evidence of official statistics specifically covering social innovation, social enterprises, social and solidarity economy, or nonprofits was not identified. Available official data are mainly administrative in nature. These include state information and registers linked to juridical persons, volunteer organisations, and non-government bodies rather than a dedicated social innovation dataset. <sup>10</sup>

### Government Programs

Public support appears to be channelled mainly through platforms, commissions, and convening initiatives rather than through a domestic social innovation grant programme.

Key Examples:

- **Laudato Si' Action Platform** for sustainability action <sup>6</sup>
- **The Economy of Francesco** for young economists and entrepreneurs <sup>7</sup>
- **Vatican COVID-19 Commission**, linking health, social justice, and recovery planning <sup>11</sup>
- **AI governance initiatives**, including an ethics-based implementation approach <sup>8</sup>

*Public budget amounts for these initiatives were not clearly identified in the reviewed sources.*

## ECOSYSTEM

### Stakeholders

The ecosystem is compact but institutionally visible. Key actors include:

- The **Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development** <sup>5</sup>
- The **Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences**, active on social, economic, legal, and policy issues <sup>14</sup>
- The **Pontifical Academy for Life**, especially on AI ethics and human dignity <sup>13</sup>
- Vatican-linked finance and philanthropy actors such as the **Institute for the Works of Religion** and **Peter's Pence** <sup>15 16</sup>

Together, these actors create an ecosystem centred on ethics, solidarity, youth leadership, and sustainability.

### Support Initiatives

Support initiatives are more often framed as formation, dialogue, and global mobilisation than as formal incubators or accelerators.

- **Vatican Youth Symposium**: Promotes youth empowerment, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development. <sup>12</sup>
- **Laudato Si' Action Platform**: Offers tools and guidance for institutions and communities. <sup>6</sup>
- **The Economy of Francesco**: Acts as a global community for young changemakers working on inclusive economic models. <sup>7</sup>

### Collaboration

Collaboration is one of Vatican City's clearest strengths.

The **Rome Call for AI Ethics** is a prominent example, bringing together religious institutions, international organisations, and technology actors around shared ethical principles. <sup>13</sup> Vatican-backed convenings such as The Economy of Francesco also connect researchers, entrepreneurs, and social leaders across countries and sectors. <sup>7</sup>

# FINANCE

## Financing Schemes



Financing for socially oriented action is shaped less by a domestic impact investment market and more by solidarity mechanisms, mission finance, and philanthropy.

- **Peter’s Pence:** Reported €58 million in income in 2024 and €74.5 million in contributions granted, including €13.3 million for direct assistance projects.<sup>[15](#)</sup> The same report notes support for 239 projects in 66 countries.<sup>[15](#)</sup>
- **Institute for the Works of Religion:** Reported €32.8 million net profit in 2024 and noted roughly €1 million in direct charitable support.<sup>[16](#)</sup>

## Financing Inclusivity



Inclusive financing is visible mainly through global outreach rather than domestic targeting inside Vatican City.

Official disclosures show support reaching vulnerable groups such as girls, people with disabilities, and families in crisis through international charitable projects.<sup>[15](#)</sup> Youth are also a clear target group through initiatives such as The Economy of Francesco and the Vatican Youth Symposium.<sup>[7](#) [12](#)</sup>

# SOCIETY

## Public Awareness of Social Innovation



Public awareness is strongest in official discourse rather than in a large domestic sector.

The term “**social innovation**” is used in synodal and papal language, particularly in relation to youth, local development, and social inclusion.<sup>[2](#)<sup>3</sup></sup> This gives the concept symbolic visibility and positions it within wider debates on care, change, and the common good.

## Research



Research capacity is one of Vatican City’s strongest enabling assets.

The **Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences** and the **Pontifical Academy for Life** provide sustained work on social development, participation, ethics, AI, health, and human dignity.<sup>[13](#) [14](#)</sup> This creates a strong intellectual base for policy reflection and values-based innovation.

## Education & Human Capital



While public evidence of a dedicated degree programme in social innovation was not identified, Vatican-linked institutions support human capital through formation and convening. Youth-focused initiatives, especially the **Vatican Youth Symposium**, provide space for leadership development, entrepreneurship, and sustainable solutions.<sup>[12](#)</sup> More broadly, the Vatican ecosystem promotes values-based learning around ecology, justice, and ethical technology.<sup>[6](#) [13](#)</sup>

## Entrepreneurship



International entrepreneurship benchmarking is limited for Vatican City.

The territory does not appear in current **Global Innovation Index**, **Global Entrepreneurship Monitor**, or **World Bank Business Ready** coverage <sup>[17](#)[18](#) [19](#)</sup>.

Standard comparative indicators are therefore not publicly available, making qualitative institutional evidence more informative than rankings.

## Social & Environmental Consciousness

Social and environmental consciousness is highly visible in Vatican commitments and discourse.



Climate action is anchored in official submissions under the UN climate framework. Vatican City State committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by **28% from 2011 levels by 2035**, alongside broader goals linked to integral ecology and renewable energy <sup>20</sup>



Political participation



Volunteering

Even though official international indicators like the Environmental Performance Index <sup>21</sup> do not include the Holy See, official climate commitments and solidarity mechanisms point to a strong culture of care for people and planet <sup>15 20</sup>.



Sustainability