



# EUROPEAN COMPETENCE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION

## “ESF SOCIAL INNOVATION+”

This initiative is implemented under the EaSI strand of the ESF+

### WORK PROGRAMME

CoP	Social Inclusion
Programme year	2023
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#### **Background**

Social Innovation and transnational cooperation are an imperative.

ESF Social Innovation+ 2022–2027 aims at facilitating transnational cooperation to boost the transfer and scaling up of innovative solutions aimed at reducing inequalities across the EU, especially in the policy areas of employment, skills and social inclusion.

Transnational cooperation activities, including mutual learning and capacity building, will be organised in the framework of the following Communities of Practice (CoPs): (1) Employment, Education and Skills, (2) Social Inclusion, (3) Social Innovation, and, at a later stage, (4) Migrant integration and (5) Material deprivation (Ex FEAD community). Mutual learning activities will also be organised and supported within the EU-Roma network and the network supporting the implementation of the ALMA initiative in the Member States.

The ambitious objectives of the ESF Social Innovation+ action must be placed in the very challenging societal context of 2022. The European economy was slowly recovering from the Corona pandemic resulting in an overheated labour market and new work patterns. The social and interpersonal consequences of the lockdowns and stress caused by the pandemic are not yet completely understood. The recovery process stopped abruptly in February 2022, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Millions left the country looking for a safe haven, budgets for military equipment boomed, and policy agendas shifted dramatically across the globe. An unprecedented energy crisis, high inflation, rising poverty and interruptions in the industrial supply chains challenge the EU societies and our way of living.

An additional layer of complexity has come on top of the challenges pre-dating this crisis. These already included: lack of personal assistance schemes and supported decision-making, or affordable and subsidised housing; limited family support and services for people with disabilities or otherwise excluded from society, including long-term care and community services; shortage of staff in social services, including caretakers supporting independent living; limited access to the labour market for people with disabilities, often due to the lack of suitable physical infrastructure; and prevalence of mental health issues and resulting care needs. Social budgets are under pressure, and inclusion is rarely on top of the social policy agenda. While there is evidence that social protection schemes and social services play an important role in mitigating the effects of the crisis, many societal actors and institutions, despite being on the frontline, are geared down to survival mode.

The pre-crisis policies of the EU provide a solid framework to address the social innovation and social inclusion challenges ahead. The work of the CoPs will connect the ESF+ regulation and funding to the wider policy context and assist in refocusing when needed.

These policy frameworks especially relevant for the Social Inclusion CoP are:

- European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and related Action Plan
- ESF+ regulation and Common Provisions Regulation
- EU Semester
- Child Guarantee
- EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- The Care Strategy
- European Platform on Combatting Homelessness

Although the post-corona era, the war, and the rising poverty risks bring extraordinary challenges, they also create the needed sense of urgency regarding social renewal and innovation. 'Business as usual' will no longer work. Rethinking local development and having everybody on board and at work, equipped with the skills of tomorrow, is a necessity. The participatory approach should be the instrument for achieving that.

Social Innovation, transnational cooperation, and EU funding are part of the answer in such difficult times, and they will help ESF+ Managing Authorities (MAs) to better address societal challenges in their national and regional programmes.

By bringing together experts, practitioners, researchers, decision- and policy-makers, innovators and entrepreneurs, who share common concerns or interests, the CoP activities will allow actors to identify proven solutions that can be upscaled and transferred across Europe. The best initiatives in the fields of employment, education, skills, and social inclusion could thus be spread across more regions so that more people could benefit from them.

The work done by the CoPs should contribute to the best possible use of the ESF+ budget.

## RATIONALE

**Social inclusion is at the core of the ESF+ regulation, which, inter alia, is reflected in:**

- The requirement for all MS to allocate at least 25% of their ESF+ resources to social inclusion ('thematic concentration' requirement).
- The implementation of the Child Guarantee and a requirement to address this issue by allocating at least 5% of their ESF+ resources in MS with high rates of child poverty and 'an appropriate amount' in other MS.

**In 2023, the Social Inclusion CoP will cover the thematic areas of homelessness, community living and child poverty, and those have been or will be addressed by the ESF/ESF+. The CoP will work partly in subgroups representing the different thematic areas, providing a positive continuation of the previous CoP. The CoP will address other relevant topics later (possibly in conjunction with the work of other CoPs) e.g.: access to services, long-term care, integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market, 'soft outcomes' measurement and indicators, etc.**

The ESF+ can and will support meaningful participation and contribution to society, employment in rewarding jobs and enjoyment of the community, especially for those living at the so-called edges of society. Without the protective shell and launching platform that a home in the community provides people cannot and will not become active citizens. Without access to affordable high quality long-term care services, care receivers are not always able to live in dignity, and caregivers have less opportunities to help. Without an acceptable living

standard, families will not be able to raise and empower their children so they can dream and build the society of tomorrow.

For people receiving and providing care, and especially for vulnerable persons, including persons with disabilities, homeless people, and children living in poverty, full social inclusion is key. Equity, rather than equality, will prove to be an important lever when aiming at an inclusive society. This CoP will explore innovative approaches and practices that can make a difference, using the ESF+ and beyond.

In times of a deep and overwhelming crisis, it is of paramount importance to focus on these interventions that can have a game-changing effect. Accessibility is a precondition for persons with disabilities to be able to participate in economy and society on equal basis with others. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of having robust formal care services. The Corona crisis has put a magnifying glass on the need to improve the resilience of our care systems. Amongst other policy frameworks, the European Care Strategy addresses this need.

Post-Corona high inflation and soaring energy costs, and the war in Ukraine push our social protection systems and social services to the limits. The world, the EU and local communities have changed over the last year... and this is the point where exchange and cooperation should start. The first questions to be answered are: what has changed? And what is the impact of these changes on the lives of the people concerned?

A clear understanding of the changes will trigger innovative thinking and will call for new interventions and approaches. The work programme 2023 intends to set the scene for the coming period of the ESF+ 2022 – 2028 CoP cooperation. It should allow relevant actors to co-design a set of strategic actions and interventions aiming at successful innovation, mutual learning, and cross-sectorial exchange. By applying an integrated approach across the different thematic areas, the CoP not only aims at tackling the current situation but also wants to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and social exclusion.

## OBJECTIVES

To help funds fulfil their objectives and contribute to structural interventions, it is important to assess the current situation regarding social innovation and social inclusion in the EU before advising or reaffirming the changes and innovations needed.

For each theme, we will follow the 'Hop-Skip-Jump' methodology and its three steps: data collection, reflection, and activation. During 2023 and for each theme, the CoP Social Inclusion will aim at:

1. Mapping **(Hop)** and illustrating the recent changes and challenges in terms of community living, homelessness, child poverty, and long-term care. This includes reaffirming the challenges that existed pre-crisis and collection of data on people providing and receiving care. Among other aspects, affordability of quality services, energy poverty, accessibility for persons with disabilities, and access to essential services will be part of this exercise.
2. Building consensus on what innovation might mean in these difficult times. **(Skip)** Different EU policies provide building blocks for up-to-date innovation and interventions; civil society organisations and the people concerned do a day-to-day 'reality check', and authorities fund support schemes and interventions. Is all this leading to the innovation we aim at? What hinders innovation? Not all change is innovative, and not all innovation promotes real social inclusion. By exploring and debating, we want to redefine how social innovation should look in the focus areas.
3. Identifying 'game changing', innovative interventions that might have a snowball effect on the social inclusion of the people concerned. **(Jump)**

Changing social protection schemes and systems requires long-term commitment and structural interventions. Rerouting subventions and other money flows in the system or rewriting legal

frameworks is not only complex, but also entails the risk of derailing and stopping halfway. Therefore, it is key to identify mechanisms and interventions that have a snowball or amplifying effect and can be funded under the ESF+..., rather than limited interventions that have a minor effect on the system itself in the long run.

The 2023 programme will provide the needed insight and know-how allowing the CoP to design an effective multiannual work programme for the period 2024 – 2028 and beyond. The multiannual work plan will provide the needed space for other interlinked topics, such as minimum income, access to essential services, investment in integrated services, and others, based in particular on the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.

## COP PARTICIPANTS: KEY TARGET GROUPS

As stated previously, the full involvement of all stakeholders is paramount. Co-production should involve the principles of partnership and collective learning. This means that we want on board, depending on the topic, organisations involved in managing, planning, implementing and evaluating the ESF/ESF+ for the social inclusion of vulnerable groups. These will include relevant managing authorities, intermediary bodies, NGOs, and social partners. Depending on possible themes explored, relevant civil society organisations should be involved.

## PROPOSED APPROACH TO ENSURING MEMBERS' INVOLVEMENT

Aiming for shared ownership, we intend, for each meeting and in line with the bottom-up and empowerment principle, to:

- Invite stakeholders, with MAs in the lead, to contribute to the work programme and its activities (content, timing, objectives). For each topic, preparatory outreach work will be carried out to select the relevant people (for example, professionals working on homelessness and housing within a Managing Authority)
- Actively consult the stakeholders during the mapping phase. (Hop)
- Co-produce key elements of 'Innovation' in these difficult times (Skip)
- Jointly discuss and review game changing interventions. (Jump)

Stakeholder engagement includes involving representatives from the target groups whenever possible. Resources for meaningful involvement will be provided, the needed time allocated, and post-event feedback provided. European and National representative organisations will help to provide contacts, know-how and methodologies. Well-structured cooperation between Managing Authorities, experts and civil society organisations is a success factor, so the work programme will remain open for further development throughout the work process.

## PROPOSED ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS (RESULTS)

In 2023, the Social Inclusion CoP will organise 5 online and 2 onsite thematic meetings. One onsite event will bring all the CoPs together aiming at exploring possible synergies. The other one will consist of study visits and fact-finding missions (see below – jump).

### HOP (data collection and mapping phase)

Thematic meetings of the different subgroups (Thematic focus principle):

1. Online meeting with a focus on **child poverty**. Exchange and data collection regarding the recent changes in society.

This includes exploring the implementation of the thematic concentration requirement to address child poverty and implement the Child Guarantee as stated in ESF+ article 7. This meeting should, through

desk research, stakeholder reports, and feedback from MAs, highlight the role of ESF+ as well as programming arrangements and progress in addressing child poverty. Among other topics, the impact of rising energy prices and inflation on child poverty could be assessed.

Result: report including concrete illustrations.  
(To be further elaborated by stakeholders)

2. Online meeting on **homelessness**. Exchange and data collection regarding the recent changes in society. This includes discussion on the effectiveness of ESF+ programming and project funding for homelessness.

This meeting should, through desk research, stakeholder reports, and feedback from MAs, (e. g. Homelessness and Housing Exclusion overview FEANTSA) highlight the impact of the actual crisis on homelessness and (re)state the pre-crisis challenges. As far as other topics are concerned, the impact of rising energy prices and (rent) inflation on access to affordable housing could be assessed, in the context of policies to prevent homelessness. During the meeting, we will explore, the Social Housing toolkit (in the making) that will be presented and discussed. The meeting should also explore to which extent ESF+ supported innovation can contribute to the resolution of this problem. This work will be linked to the EU Platform on Homelessness.

Result: report including concrete illustrations and EU/ESF+ projects.  
(To be further elaborated by stakeholders).

3. Online meeting with a focus on **community living and empowering social services**. Exchange and data collection regarding the recent changes in society and ESF+ programming.

This meeting should, through desk research, stakeholder reports and feedback from MAs, focus on the practical use of the ESF+ to allow people to live independently in the community, notably in the light of the recent challenges and current energy and economic crisis.

Close cooperation with the EEG (European Expert Group on deinstitutionalisation) will be built in. Amongst others, the EU Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the European Care Strategy are important points of reference. The work would also support the development of a European Commission's guidance to Member States regarding the improvement of independent living and inclusion in the community, a flagship of the Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to be delivered in 2023. The work will include the role of accessibility for independent living of persons with disabilities and participation in society and economy. This mapping exercise could be expanded to cover active inclusion generally.

Result: report including concrete illustrations from ESF+ programming, as well as ESF+ calls (if applicable) and projects (2021-2027 if applicable, 2014-2020 if not) The starting point could be the Toolkit for Independent Living that was started but could not be published on time.

*Outcome:* Reports per target group on challenges due to recent changes in society and how they can be addressed through ESF+ innovation. The report should include both data and "real-life stories", video clips and statements provided by representatives of the people concerned.

*The material should feed the **Social Innovation Match (SIM)** | European Social Fund Plus (Europa.eu) and will be delivered in an accessible format. An executive summary will be produced in an accessible format in a video clip. The Social Innovation Match will be managed by the Lithuanian European social fund agency (ESFA).*

#### **SKIP (reflection and assessment phase)**

4. On-site event: All three sub-groups of this Social Inclusion CoP will be invited to validate the '**What is**' (state of play) reports elaborated based on the 3 thematic online events, desktop research and available data, and to discuss what type of innovation is needed to successfully cope with the changed societal

context. Representatives of the people concerned, civil society organisations and relevant authorities will contribute.

Additionally, the role of ESF+ funding as a lever for positive change will be explored.

(To be further elaborated by stakeholders)

*Outcome:* Agreed set of building blocks for innovation. The future role of ESF+ calls will be clarified.

**The 'Building blocks for innovation' could be transformed into a checklist.**

5. On-site event with the 3 sub-groups. Study visits and fact-finding missions. Could enrich the reports validated during event 4. The existing barriers (legal, financial, professional, structural, and societal) will be identified in order to describe the needed innovation.

*Outcome:* Detailed **description of barriers** that inhibit or hinder innovation, based on a reality check through field visits and direct contact with the people concerned. The future role of ESF+ calls will be clarified.

The 'Barriers for Innovation' could be transformed into a 'barrier finding tool' and a checklist.

**JUMP (identification of successful interventions phase)**

6. First online event exploring '**game changing interventions**' addressing community living, combating homelessness, and fighting child poverty. These interventions should cover the actual crisis but also go beyond. ESF+ MAs will contribute by presenting validated solutions implemented in their respective countries and/or regions. EaSI, Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, ERDF and EAFRD programmes and projects will be scanned in search for innovative approaches at a macro level (structural level). This might lead to synergies or combined funding.

(To be further elaborated by stakeholders)

7. Second online event exploring '**game changing interventions**' aimed at community living, combating homelessness, and fighting child poverty. With a similar agenda as the first one (activity 6), this event will focus more on 'integrated services' under the active inclusion approach as an overarching theme.

(To be further elaborated by stakeholders)

*Outcome:* catalogue of interventions that might have, or might have had, a game changing effect and innovative methods or actions that can kick-start this change.

8. On-site event to validate the findings of the other previous events and exploring available innovative approaches. EaSI, Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, ERDF and EAFRD projects/programmes will be scrutinised in search of innovations. During this event, recommendations regarding future ESF+ calls, needed changes in legal and financial frameworks, and co-production will be formulated. Based on the results of the work done in 2023, the outline of the work programme 2024 – 2028 will be presented and debated amongst MAs and other stakeholders. This should lead to a co-produced work programme.

(To be further elaborated by stakeholders)

*Outcome:* Recommendations for future (ESF+) calls, advice to Member states regarding legislation and structures hindering innovation, and shared ownership of the future work programme by all actors.

*A checklist regarding the call design and lifting the barriers to innovation could facilitate the use of the findings. A training in the design [organisation] of calls could be offered.*

9. General meeting of the CoPs: presentation of the results of year 1 and exploration of future synergies and cooperation.

Possible thematic topics:

- The impact of the housing situation on employability.



- The role of local communities regarding employment and community living of persons with disabilities.
- Innovative local community building involving people at risk of exclusion.
- Supporting parents and foster carers in breaking the cycle of disadvantage.
- Methodologies for user-led service provision and funding.
- Barriers experienced by persons with disabilities in exercising their rights, including the right to independent living, employment and accessibility for participation in society and economy.

Possible overlapping topics with other CoPs:

- Barriers for effective innovation.
- The use of ESF+ to reach social inclusion objectives as stated in EU policies, frameworks and ESF+ regulation.
- Recommendations regarding the structure of future calls.
- Mutual learning initiatives in the coming years.  
(To be further elaborated by stakeholders of the other CoPs)

*Outcome:* cross-CoP validation of the gained insights and materials developed. Common vision regarding key characteristics of social innovation in times of crisis. Synergy regarding future work programmes and effective steering of call design.

## DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS

Instruments:

- The European Competence Centre for Social Innovation.
- Helpdesk project (EU funded Social Services project aiming at closing the gap between EC policy objectives & funding and the social services sector).
- ESF+ bodies, and other relevant stakeholders in EU Member States.
- Zero project. The Zero project aims at zero barriers for PWDs. The project collected and validated numerous innovative models.
- Newsletters and websites of stakeholders.
- Information bulletins of research institutions.
- CoP newsflash.

Accessibility of dissemination tools and products to persons with disabilities shall be ensured.

## TEAMWORK ORGANISATION AND LOGISTICS

Management of the sub-groups:

- We'll establish a small stakeholders task force for each sub-group composed of the coordinating expert, thematic expert, representative of an ESF managing authority (chair or co-chair), and representative of the people concerned. This should be correctly resourced.
- Such task force will oversee the implementation of the work plan and provide advice (co-production). These groups will meet indicatively 3 times during 2023, for 1.5 hours, online.
- ESFA will provide secretarial and organisational support.
- Before the on-site events, the 3 sub-group task forces will have a joint meeting.
- Accessibility to persons with disabilities shall be ensured.

## TEAMWORK ORGANISATION AND LOGISTICS

TIME	ACTIVITIES/ MEETINGS	OUTPUT
February - March	Online 1 – 3	Data collection/reports
June	On-site 4	Report <i>Crosscutting topics</i>
September	On-site 5	Report on barriers
September <b>(to be confirmed)</b>	Online event (6) on Long Term Care. As long-term care is an essential part of tackling child poverty, family resilience, community living, and homelessness, this event will explore EFS+ interventions that focus on the long-term care elements of effective social inclusion. Amongst other elements, the event will study affordability, availability, and quality of inclusive long-term care. Digitalisation and professionalisation will also be covered.	-
October	Online 7 – 8	Report <i>Game changing</i>
November -December	On-site 9	Report <i>Recommendations</i>
December	General CoPs meeting	Synergy & validation