



**+RESILIENT  
CLUSTERS WITH HIGH SOCIAL  
VOCATION AND RESPONSIVENESS  
FOR GROWTH AND JOBS.**

**WHITE PAPER on Social Innovation**  
**April 2022**



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# WHITE PAPER ON SOCIAL INNOVATION

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## Part I: What is the issue?

### Introduction: Definition of the issue.

## Background information

European societies face increasing risks such as food and water scarcity, climate change, financial crises, stratification of society, which require ever fresh solutions, but which existing structures and policies no longer succeed in creating. The participation of society at large as a generator of social innovation is therefore increasingly important.

If in the past innovation was in the domain of the business environment, which mainly pursued profits and the development of innovative technologies, innovation is increasingly moving into a new paradigm, where innovation is becoming an open and inclusive process aimed at pursuing social goals.

A cornerstone in setting a new policy agenda on the integration Environmental, social, and corporate Governance (ESG) considerations within ordinary business conduct was set by the Communication “A renewed EU strategy 2011-14 for Corporate Social Responsibility”<sup>1</sup>. The document stresses the need to go beyond a voluntaristic approach to CSR, pointing out the fact that enterprises should be responsible of their impacts on society and therefore aim at maximising the creation of shared value for their owners/shareholders and for their other stakeholders and society at large and identifying, preventing and mitigating their possible adverse impacts.

The European Union has been increasingly focused on the themes of social economy, social enterprise and social innovation in the past few years.

In 2014, the European Union adopted a Directive on non-financial reporting<sup>2</sup> that introduced new obligations for large companies in terms of public statements to be provided together with yearly balance sheets. Required additional information are related to, as a minimum, environmental, social and employee matters, respect for human rights, anti-corruption and bribery matters.

Three years later, in 2017, a further Directive was introduced concerning the on encouragement of long-term shareholder engagement<sup>3</sup>. The objective was to ensure that decisions are made for the long-term stability of a company and take into account environmental and social issues.

On May 2018, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a paper titled “Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct”. The document acknowledges that businesses can play a key role in contributing to economic,

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2011) 681 final

<sup>2</sup> Directive (EU) 2014/95 on non-financial reporting directive (NFRD)

<sup>3</sup> Directive (EU) 2017/828 on encouragement of long-term shareholder engagement



environmental and social progress, especially when they minimise the adverse impacts of their operations, supply chains and other business relationships and provides recommendations and ready-to-use advice to managers and business owners.

More recently, the European Commission<sup>4</sup> has stressed the interlinks between:

- Corporate Social Responsibility and Responsible Business Conduct;
- Business and Human Rights, and sustainability; and
- the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Again, the need for a renewed paradigm in business management is paired with the overall ambition of matching challenging goals for the people and the planet.

Finally, at the end of 2021, the EU adopted a new Plan for the Social Economy (COM/2021/778 final)<sup>5</sup>.

This plan proposes interventions in three key areas:

- i. creating the right conditions for the social economy to thrive (such as legal and policy frameworks);
- ii. opening opportunities for social economy organization to start up and scale up (through various support programmes and tools - including social innovation competence centres);
- iii. and making sure the social economy and its potential are recognized (through various awareness raising activities).

The social economy action plan stresses the importance of business support and capacity building of the social economy as well as of maximising the contribution of the social economy to the green and digital transitions.

Moreover, the staff working document (SWD 2021, 982 final)<sup>6</sup>, deepens the role of business networking and emphasises the need to "promote local business clusters with participation of social economy" within the European strategy.

Coherently with this political and legislative evolving framework, in 2018, a 4-helix partnership of seven MED countries (Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Slovenia, Croatia, Greece) has joined forces to tackle the need for innovation conducive to an increased socially-responsive competitiveness of local ecosystems. All to the aim of stimulating competences and find solutions to answer to unmet social needs, especially for companies operating in the social economy and test bottom-up approaches to social innovation.

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<sup>4</sup> SWD(2019) 143 Corporate Social Responsibility, Responsible Business Conduct, and Business & Human Rights

<sup>5</sup> The Communication from the European Commission, "Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy", December 2021

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=24984&langId=en>

<sup>6</sup>, "Scenarios towards co-creation of a transition pathway for a more resilient, sustainable and digital Proximity and Social Economy industrial ecosystem"

<https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/47854/attachments/1/translations/en/renditions/native>



+RESILIENT stands for Mediterranean Open Resources for Social Innovation of Socially Responsive Enterprises and its general aim were to kick-start a process of policy change at regional level in the involved areas resulting in the integration of successful elements of social innovation into Cohesion policy, and to create and test tools, methods and solutions that can be used by territorial actors to respond to growing diversified and unmet social needs.

The main cornerstone of the project has been the definition of local ecosystems that form "Clusters with High Social Vocation and Responsiveness" (SVRC). Such clusters are emerging networks that use technology, open data, participative models with social relevance and impact to reinforce socially-responsive value chains addressing emerging social needs linked to demographic change, new forms of exclusion, digitalization and other global dynamics that characterize the different involved areas.

After a 4-years long experimentation, the +Resilient project has confirmed the importance of building an ecosystem enabling social innovation and sustainable transition. This White Paper summarises the main findings and lesson learned from the project and provides an array of targeted recommendations for policy makers and experts involved in decision making processes at European, national and regional levels.





## Key definitions

Here are few key definitions to understand the contents provided in this document:

### Social innovation

The OECD defines social innovation as “the design and implementation of new solutions that imply conceptual, process, product, or organizational change, which ultimately aim to improve the welfare and wellbeing of individuals and communities.”

Therefore, Social Innovation might be understood as innovative ideas (products, services, processes, models) that at the same time respond effectively to the needs of society and create new social relationships and cooperation. They are innovations that, in addition to the overall benefits for society, also increase the capacity of society to act<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, social innovation not only represents a product, service, model, or process that effectively solves a perceived problem in society, but also contributes to increasing the capacity of society/people to act on their own through the collaborations created.

### Care Work

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines Care Work as: “Looking after the physical, psychological, emotional and developmental needs of one or more other people in the public and/or private sphere, both in the formal economy, the informal economy or unpaid form.”

### Social Enterprise

At a minimum, a social enterprise is an entity, irrespective of legal form, with a core social or environmental mission that is using some degree of commercial methods to raise incomes from the market that enforce its financial sustainability .

### Cluster

Usually, a business cluster is defined as a geographic concentration of interconnected businesses, suppliers and associated institutions in a particular field. Clusters are commonly considered to increase the productivity with which companies can compete, nationally and globally.

Nonetheless, the local ecosystems might be hypothetically subdivided into several groups responding to different affinity criteria. By instance, the Horizon Europe Programme refers to clusters as groups of organisations that address specific policy aims that the European Commission seeks to achieve by providing EU grants for research and innovation. Therefore, this concept provides an impact-driven key to understand clusters as coalitions of different organisations that operate with common goals. This kind of cluster cannot be described on a territorial or sectorial basis but is denoted by common or converging sensitivities, principles, languages, intentions.

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<sup>7</sup> Robin Murray, Julie Caulier-Grice, Geoff Mulgan, The open Book of Social Innovation (2010)





## Social Vocation

To have a high social vocation means to intentionally pursue some positive social impact. Social impacts can be defined as the net effect of an activity on a community and the well-being of individuals and families. This includes the results that provide benefits for the planet as well.

Therefore, organisations that have high social vocations are aware of the intimate connections that govern our ecosystems and are embracing complexity as it is, without alienating simplifications and heuristics. It might be said that social vocation relies in the belief that our strategies as a society should focus on whole multifaceted human beings rather than abstract "economic men": idealised persons who acts rationally, with perfect knowledge and who seeks to maximise personal utility or satisfaction.

Even more than that, the social vocation implies the quest for a change of paradigm, moving from an ego-centric unsustainable perspective to an eco-centric more resilient one.

## Responsiveness

We all must deal with many responsibilities. To be responsible means being morally accountable for one's actions and social responsibility is here to underline that our decisions and behaviours do produce impacts on the environment and the communities. This acknowledgment is pivotal for triggering social vocation in predisposed subjects. But being accountable is not enough. Social needs call for action and require a proactive approach to be tackled.

So, we need responsive organisations that stand up and face challenges. Responsiveness is more than an ethical decision. It requires capabilities, efforts, concrete actions. You must be capable of innovation if you want to be responsive: you must measure your ability to provide timely responses and deliver massive transformations or, at least, valuable changes.

Therefore, the **Clusters with High Social Vocation and Responsiveness (SVRC)** are defined as:

*Groupings of independent undertakings [...] operating in a particular sector and region and designed to stimulate innovative activity by promoting intensive interactions [...] networking and information dissemination among the undertakings in the cluster. These groups may be recognized in a formal way or operate as informal networks as long as they constitute a stable ecosystem.*

*Loosely connected and diverse companies, private/public, profit/no-profit working for a positive social impact- e.g. social enterprises dealing with social cohesion, ageing, migrations and sustainability, they include the social-related aspects & impacts of regions' RIS3 addressing synergies to be valorised in the effort to consolidate SVRC to achieve a critical mass & become a fully-fledged "clusters" with a social vocation, streamlined into cohesion policy and funds.*



## Part II: Why is this important?

### Analysis of the problem.

Social innovation in the +RESILIENT project is considered in its larger dimension as a means to promote welfare and social, economic, environmental, and cultural development. The approach is based on the principles of solidarity, social cohesion and social justice.

Social innovation is the process of developing and implementing effective solutions for resolving social and environmental challenges, in support of social progress.

Social innovation can be developed in a local, regional, national, or global context. There are different approaches to social innovation.

- It could start from a social need that has not been addressed or not sufficiently met by public institutions or markets. These innovations are mostly related to fighting against exclusion, poverty, and unequal access to services such as education, culture or health .
- The second approach is related to development of innovations aimed at creating positive social, economic and/or environmental changes.
- The third approach results in systematic changes and induce social impact.

In four years of joint work, partners have developed and tested different tools/methods to promote Social innovation in three scenarios:

1. Delivery of public innovative services for new societal needs;
2. Support to Social Vocation & Responsive SME's;
3. Capacity building of social enterprises and social innovation.

Project partners and stakeholders have recognised as the main challenge - which restrains the development of social innovation and social entrepreneurship at the local, regional and national level - the conceptual confusion and misunderstandings regarding the concepts of social economy, social innovation and social entrepreneurship .

Fragmentation of the institutional and legal framework for social enterprises and limited coherence of the support frameworks create inconsistent operating environments for social enterprises. Their capacity to thrive is also restrained by bureaucratic barriers, limited access to finance as well as to public and private markets, while impact measurement has not yet become customary practice despite preliminary public and private efforts.

The innovation of public administration is crucial for triggering social innovation. This is especially true at the local and urban levels, where public administrations are facing several challenges such as financial crisis, pandemic outbreak, digital transition, climate change and, more recently, the effects of the international crisis.



On the other hand, the crucial role of Local and Urban Authorities in identifying innovative solutions in times of transition is at the centre of an intense debate that emerged in the last decades. In 2016, the Urban Agenda for the EU was adopted in Amsterdam with the approval of all the EU Member States. Afterwards, the “New Leipzig Charter- The transformative power of cities for the common good” was adopted on 30 November 2020 under the German Presidency of the European Union. The New Leipzig Charter sets the stage for the involvement of Urban Authorities in the programming and implementation of development policies at European level.

Such ecosystems involve multiple stakeholders - including public institutions, research institutes, citizens, the social economy, and the business community – and it is committed in designing participative processes to engage them and benefit from strong public support. Developing adequate skills, both hard and soft skills, using participative and user-centric methods and digital tools to consolidate quality open data are essential vehicles to support the entire process.

In fact, when we talk about social innovation, we talk about cooperation or participation, and its formation always involves end users, experts and social environments that enable cooperation. Social innovation is open to everyone, ideas are revealed, everyone’s responses are desirable.

The integration of people into the economy and society is encouraged, and the participation of the economic, non-profit, public sector and knowledge bearers is crucial, in order to best create the necessary creative action leading to the desired solutions.

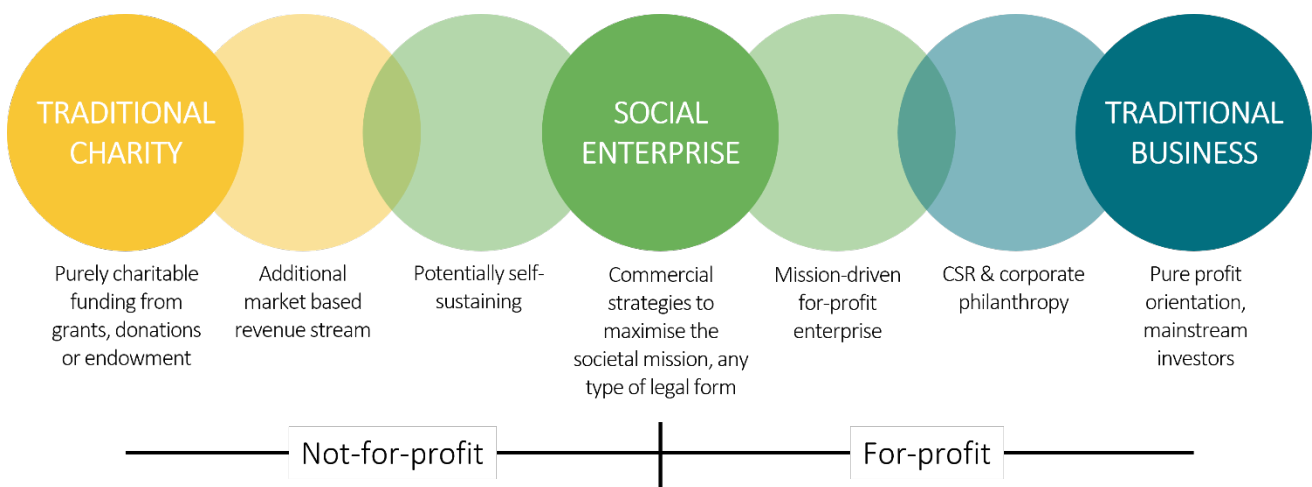
Social innovations are usually more sustainable, efficient, and effective solutions to social problems than existing solutions, but also address human and social needs to which we do not yet have answers. Social innovations are new things, concepts and strategies that not only aim at providing new services, products, and models, but also develop new social relationships and collaborations. They represent a new solution to the social problem while strengthening society’s capacity to act.

While traditionally profit-focused businesses are discovering the huge transformative potential of social innovation and are increasingly engaged in collective impacts, living labs, ventures for social and environmental impacts, traditional not-for-profit organisations and charities are changing too, searching for new ways of combining their social mission with the requirements of financial sustainability.

In fact, care work has not historically been seen as a sector of economic activity in terms of generating employment or contributing to a country's GDP, as for decades, families have undertaken it, and more specifically women. However, care work has gradually emerged as a proper economic sector with enormous potential for growth and for jobs creation in the next few years.

As a consequence of these shifts along the for-profit vs not-for-profit spectrum of an increasing number of enterprises, the concept of hybrid organisation has emerged. Hybrid organisations can be considered as organisations that combine multiple

institutional logics, such as, in the case of social enterprises, social and market logics. According to the EU Commission, despite their diversity and their various legal forms, social enterprises are organisations in the social economy whose main objective is to achieve societal goals with an entrepreneurial spirit. Their priority is not to make profit for their owners but to have a social impact. It also implies a democratic or participative governance, involving multiple stakeholders in the decision process and, when profits are generated, their reinvestment into the social mission.



## Summary of our findings.

In all project regions, partners identified Clusters with High Social Vocation and Responsiveness (SVRCs), although there is a large diversity in terms of structure, activity area and mission of the detected clusters.

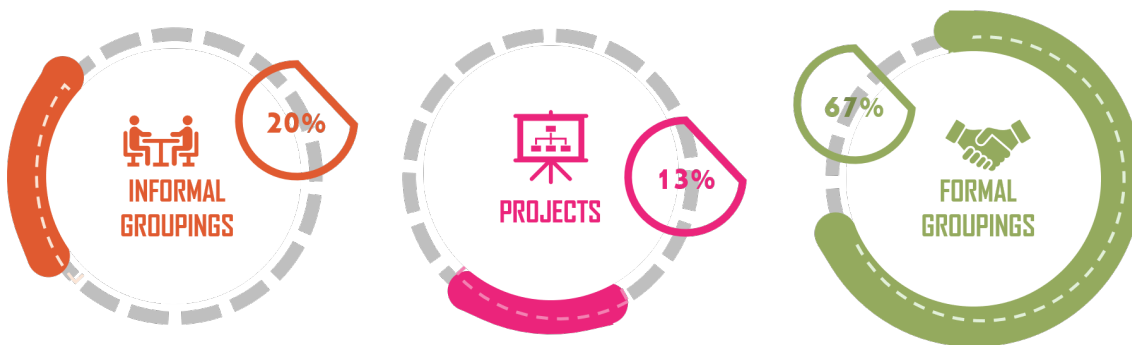
Despite these differences, some common factors for social innovation are identified also during the benchmarking workshops, in particular:

- All the clusters analysed have some relationship with social innovation, but with a large variety of action areas and forms;
- The 4-helix model is proven essential for social innovation, as the internal and external interactions of the clusters show;
- The importance of public involvement as well as citizens' involvement, both in co-production and in funding;
- The potential and, at the same time, the challenge that the use of Open Data represents;
- The need for training and for institutional support in the promotion of social innovation.
- Measuring the social impact of the cluster is not a regular practice, with exceptions, although the importance of doing so is widely recognised.
- All identified clusters were created and operate in a specific political and legal context. Public policies, mainly at regional level are the drivers of SVRC.

However, it was widely recognised that needs, priorities, and solutions are very dependent on the specific circumstances that occur in each region and transferring requires careful adaptation.

## SVRCs Structure

Not all are formally established with a common objective, but they all group several organisations, show some degree of internal interaction and they all operate in the social sector.

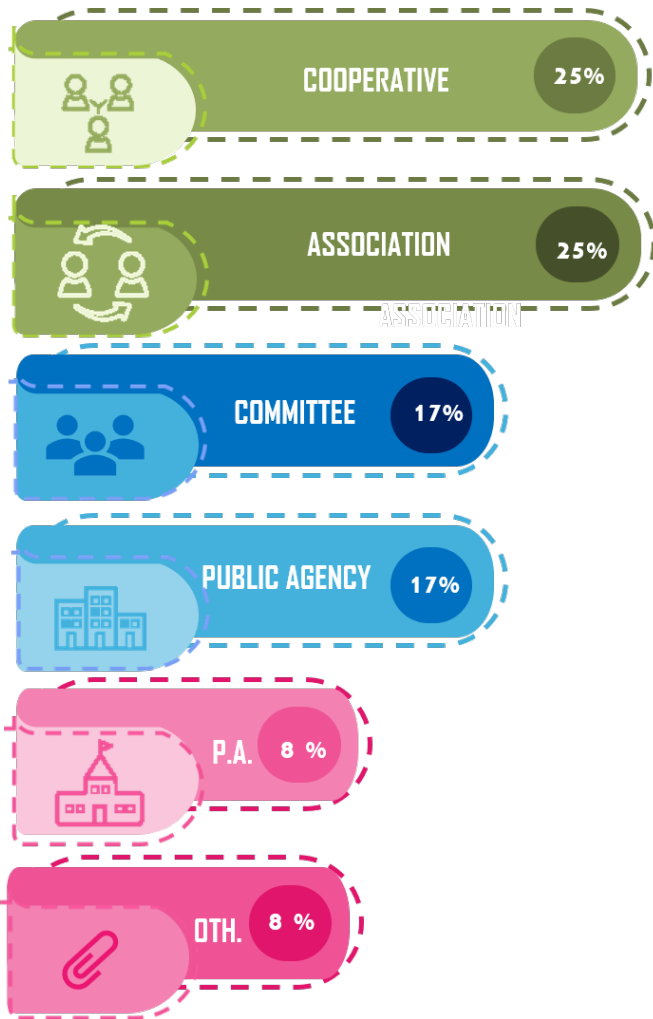


There are various levels of “formality” and in some cases the cluster was materialised because it is led by a cooperative that requires a formal structure. Informal clusters that result from the implementation of projects might be as relevant for social innovation as the institutional and formally established ones.

### Leading organisations

Overall, the diversity of the identified clusters and the scope of interest largely depends on the regional/national economic but also cultural and social approach to innovation.

Most of the clusters have a well-defined governance structure, particularly if they are formally established. On the other hand, not all the identified clusters follow the 4-helix model. An interesting point, however, is that there are usually clear connections with the type of members that are missing in the cluster governance structure (for instance, researchers or academia). This stresses the importance of the 4-helix model in SVRC.



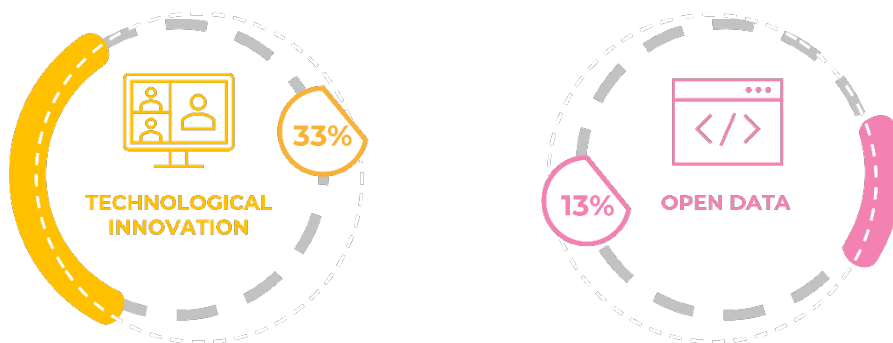


## Open Data and Information and Communication Technologies

Stakeholders underscore that all the organisations along the value chain of the SVRCs, as well as end users, might potentially benefit from Open Data driven services.

Notwithstanding, the technological level of the clusters analysed is generally low. Digital tools are used for communication (internal and external) and also for dissemination activities but there is low technological innovation.

In the same way, the relationship with Open Data is almost non-existent. In general, Open Data technology is almost unknown, including its potential benefits, or return on investment.



In fact, several constraints to the use of Open Data are identified, in particular:

- lack of knowledge and awareness about Open Data;
- lack of skills/competences to exploit Open Data;
- availability and Reliability/Quality of Open Data (need for additional and better quality Open Data addressing the SVRCs);
- poor accessibility to Open Data (interfaces of open-source institutional portals/websites not user-friendly);
- other difficulties (e.g., lack of financial resources, resistance to change).

To enhance accessibility and the quality of data currently usable, the creation of a more intuitive open-source database/platform that integrates and interacts with the institutional tools already available to overcome the problems identified is suggested as a possible solution.

In particular, open data might usefully respond to:

- Low level of interaction among SE organisations operating in the same territory.
- Lack of communication between citizens and the public administration.

Open Data could promote better communication and support the sharing of reliable information about the public and private resources and assets, therefore enhancing the possibilities of re-use and promoting overall efficiency.





To overcome the need for additional Open Data and to have more complete and regularly updated datasets, increased collaboration between the public administration and the social economy organisations is required, to achieve high quality data about the sector. It was also stressed that if more complete datasets about the social economy are available, it would be possible:

- To better understand specific sub-sectors and problems faced in the social economy (and consequently improve the social innovation processes).
- To create more Open Data based services, to tackle the problems detected.

Social digital innovation would require the development of general skills such as interpersonal skills, creativity, and openness to change, as well as some specific skills (e.g., digital data analysis, sector specific competences).

Therefore, awareness raising and training activities to support the use of Open Data are required and should be addressed both to public and private organisations, involved in SVRCs.

## Measurement of Social Impacts

Most identified clusters equal their social objectives to their mission and role, strengthening their identification as clusters with social responsibility. Few of them name a common social challenge, and in others social challenges are addressed by means of public-funded projects, with a very well-defined goal and planning. Social impact is easier to assess in the last two situations. However, in general, assessing social impact is not a regular practice.

## Enabling skills that triggers social innovation

Project partners assessed SVCR skills and capabilities in 10 Mediterranean Regions. The assessment was based on 17 focus groups, 32 semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, covering 366 persons from organisations on a 4-helix approach: social economy organisations, enterprises from the private sector, public administrations, research institutions and civil society.



The following skills and capabilities were identified.

### Soft skills

- Interpersonal skills: empathy, management of social relations and conflicts, teamwork and communications skills.
- Collaboration capacity: internal, external (networking, cooperation).
- Adaptability/flexibility: capacity to step back, self-criticism, work with people with other views and approaches.
- Creativity and the capacity to design new solutions.
- Social awareness and commitment: awareness of social context and diversity of human needs.
- Responsibility and ethic consciousness.
- Analytical capabilities: identify and understand social needs.
- Self-management skills: autonomy, time management, resilience and motivation.
- Openness to change, curiosity and novelty acceptance.
- Leadership skills: decision-making and team motivation.
- Self-confidence.
- Technology friendliness.

### Hard skills

- Digital skills and digital data analysis.
- Socio-analytical skills: capability to collect, manage/analyse information, understand the social context, and identify social needs.
- Communication/dissemination skills.
- Project Management: management of change, management of internal resources and in-depth knowledge of the organization.
- Team Management: team building, promotion of cooperation, group facilitating.
- Sector specific knowledge.
- Interdisciplinary skills: combining skills from different sectors (socio-humanistic and technological).
- Knowledge of Legal and Public Policies.
- Business Management: financial skills, enterprise management.

The study phase has highlighted some common features that indicate the focus of actions to be tested in the pilot actions.

- Innovation of public services is connected to the main demographic trends, notably ageing in the case of the care service, but also to other social global challenges;
- Training and upskilling of human resources to meet emerging social needs is considered pivotal;
- Managing the complexity of multi-stakeholder relationships is difficult but essential;
- Co-creation tools and involvement of beneficiaries in the design but also in the evaluation of innovative services is paramount.

## SVRCs in the pilot actions

Following the analysis of the SVRCs, pilot actions aiming at selecting, implementing at a small scale and assessing their potential in the identified scenarios have been carried out. The + RESILIENT platform, created for networking and as a knowledge hub has been launched.

The piloting phase has been the essential step to gain insight on actual implementation of identified innovative measures and - through evidence collected from their evaluation - to verify the effectiveness of +RESILIENT SVR clusters and approach in regional contexts. This also included organisational , process and service innovation and immediate impact on direct and indirect target groups.

All pilot actions correspond to at least one macro-scenario, but they were oftentimes implemented as cross-scenarios experimentations. It is possible to group them around five topics (thematic cases):

- Social innovation hub/accelerator
- Social innovation
- Digital platforms/catalogues
- Training and upgrading skills
- Innovative public services



## Conclusions

The policy assessment conducted by the partners at the local level in the different involved regions allows to globally conclude that policy and decisions makers express interest in the concept of Clusters with High Social Vocation and Responsiveness (SVRCs) and consider the objective of fostering the development of SVRCs consistent with regional priorities and strategies concerning social economy, innovation and open data. Partners and stakeholders have recognised differences among countries regarding the conceptual and legislative framework, cultural, political and historical background. They confirmed the need for:

- capacity building on social innovation targeting public institutions, companies, educational institutions and civil society organisations;
- facilitating the access to finance and markets including the digital single market;
- fostering cooperation and cross-border activities;
- improving cooperation and networking.



## Part III: What are the key objectives?

### Scope and Purpose of the White Paper.

This White Paper on Social Innovation has been developed through consultations at local and a transnational level.

It is a political tool aimed at advocating and capitalising the Interreg MED +Resilient project.

In particular, it should encourage high policy dialogue in the definition of Clusters with High Social Vocation and Responsiveness (SVRCs) and their contribution in the effective implementation of the European Union's Cohesion Policy.

Therefore, the White Paper is intended for fostering the adoption and dissemination of operational instruments that enhance social innovation among territorial ecosystems, including Small and Medium Enterprises of different sectors, and support the establishment and development of multi-stakeholder clusters pursuing specific social, just and sustainable impacts.

### Intended audiences.

Within the Interreg MED Programme 2014-2020, a 4<sup>th</sup> cross-sector axis specifically supporting the capacity of programme national and regional authorities to concretely contribute to the governance processes in the Mediterranean Region was included: the Axis 4 – Enhancing Mediterranean Governance. The +Resilient intends also to contribute to this axis. Thirteen Countries, including ten EU Member States, participate in the MED Programme, committed to adopt an evidence-based approach to support informed policy and decision-making processes.

This White Paper addresses the National and Regional policy makers involved in the steering of the Programme, with attention to decision makers dealing with social innovation, social economy and sustainable local development.

The European level also represents a precious policy interlocutor, but in terms of policymaking institutions and of stakeholders representing the interests of the diverse 4 helix actors that operate in the fields tackled by + RESILIENT. These range from the European Commission to the Committee of the Regions and the Social and Economic Committee, just to mention the most significant ones, including the representations of the Local authorities.

The Directorate General Regio of the European Commission is considered a primary target. Actually, since 2019, the European Commission has set a strategic priority for fostering “An economy that works for people”. Under this policy framework the European Union is committed to strengthening social economy, enhancing social investment, supporting social economy actors and social enterprises to start-up, scale-up, innovate and create jobs.



The DG Regio is also responsible for the implementation of the Cohesion Policy that support economic development across all EU countries and regions.

In 2021-2027 EU Cohesion Policy has set a menu of 5 policy objectives:

1. a more competitive and smarter Europe;
2. a greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy;
3. a more connected Europe by enhancing mobility;
4. a more social and inclusive Europe;
5. Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories.

The Regulation on the European Regional Development Fund<sup>8</sup> specifies that, In order to promote social innovation and inclusive access to high quality employment, the enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation; should support 'social economy' entities such as cooperatives, mutual societies, non-profit associations and social enterprises. Moreover, the Regulation postulates that a dedicated specific objective should be provided for supporting the regional economies strongly dependent on the tourism and cultural sectors. This would allow to exploit the full potential of culture and sustainable tourism for an economic recovery, social inclusion and social innovation, without prejudice to the possibilities to provide support from the ERDF to those sectors under other specific objectives.

On the other end, the Regulation establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)<sup>9</sup> provides ample space and resources for social innovation as it incorporates the former European Programme Employment and Social Innovation.

The Regulation offers a definition of social innovation:

Social Innovation means an activity, which is social both as to its ends and its means and in particular an activity which relates to the development and implementation of new ideas concerning products, services, practices and models, that simultaneously meets social needs and creates new social relationships or collaborations between public, civil society or private organisations, thereby benefiting society and boosting its capacity to act.

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<sup>8</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund

<sup>9</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013



The Regulation acknowledges that “with a view to rendering policies more responsive to social change as well as to encouraging and supporting innovative solutions, support for social innovation is crucial. In particular, testing and evaluating innovative solutions before scaling them up is instrumental in improving the efficiency of the policies and thus specific support from the ESF+ is justified.” Moreover, it continues stating that “Social economy enterprises could play a key role in delivering on social innovation and contributing to economic and social resilience.”

A specific Article (12) is dedicated to Social innovative actions. Member States are asked to support actions of social innovation and social experimentation, including actions with a socio-cultural component or strengthening bottom-up approaches based on partnerships involving public authorities, the social partners, social enterprises, the private sector and civil society.

The Commission is committed to facilitate capacity building for social innovation, in particular through supporting mutual learning, establishing networks, and disseminating and promoting good practices and methodologies.

For all these reasons, the contents of this White Paper are intended to all the decision makers, policy actors and programme managers that operates in the design and implementation of the Regional and National Programmes under the European Cohesion Policy.

## Project Vision for the Policy Purpose.

The + RESILIENT project has been co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund under the Interreg MED programme 2014-2020. Led by the Veneto Region (Italy), it was launched in 2018 and ended in April 2022. Partners represent territories of eight different Countries: Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Albania (later withdrawn from the project) and Spain.

+RESILIENT gathered a 4-helix partnership committed to tackle the need for the innovations that might lead to an increased socially-responsive competitiveness of SMEs and stimulate the creation of new jobs, especially within companies operating in the social economy.

Therefore, the project aimed at kickstarting a process of policy change at regional level in the involved areas resulting in the integration of successful elements into the new Cohesion policy 2021-2027. It was an integrated project that establishes a structural approach to policy & practice improvement of emerging dynamics in social innovation through an overarching process based on the intertwined use of open data & the creation of a transnational socially-responsive value chain.





Throughout the project, the partnership explored many different facets and areas of social innovation. Nonetheless, a clear common ground in terms of interests, assumptions and mindsets defined the specific scope of the project.

Therefore, the partnership believed in the importance and committed to enhancing:

- New common knowledge, practices and capacity building on social economy, social innovation and social digital innovation;
- Solidarity, social cohesion and social justice;
- Perceptive approach - collaboration, partnership and networking of multiple stakeholders in the territories as enablers for the consideration of social challenges from different perspectives, facilitating the recognition of social innovation, and contributing to sustainability of actions;
- 4-helix cooperation - collaboration between public authorities (local/regional/national/EU), private sector, educational sector (universities and research) and the civil society to boost social innovation practices;
- Networking in clusters with high social vocation and responsiveness – SVRC;
- Transnational networking - co-creation of common tools/methods and solutions to tackle common social challenges through social innovation and social entrepreneurship;
- Social impact assessment - monitoring and evaluation of impacts of social innovation;
- Digital innovation in social innovation processes and vice versa.

The overall appraisal of inputs available from the Policy Assessment reports indicates that:

The enhancement and empowerment of Clusters with High Social Vocation and Responsiveness is consistent with the regional strategies referring to social innovation and is also in line with initiatives promoted by Regional Governments and Municipalities to benefit more vulnerable groups or to create social innovation processes based on Urban and Local Development.



In particular, the following two objectives are fully consistent with European Territorial Cooperation Policy:

1.

*To provide territorial 4-helix stakeholders of SVRCs with tools and platforms to increase their capacity of design and implement socially-responsive economic activities and support services to respond to emerging social needs, and contribute to sustainable development, jobs creation and social rights protection.*

2.

*To foster a transnational SVRC network that shares capacity building, knowledge transfer and co-creation of innovative solutions addressing common needs while promoting scalability, transferability, mobility and policy improvement throughout Europe.*

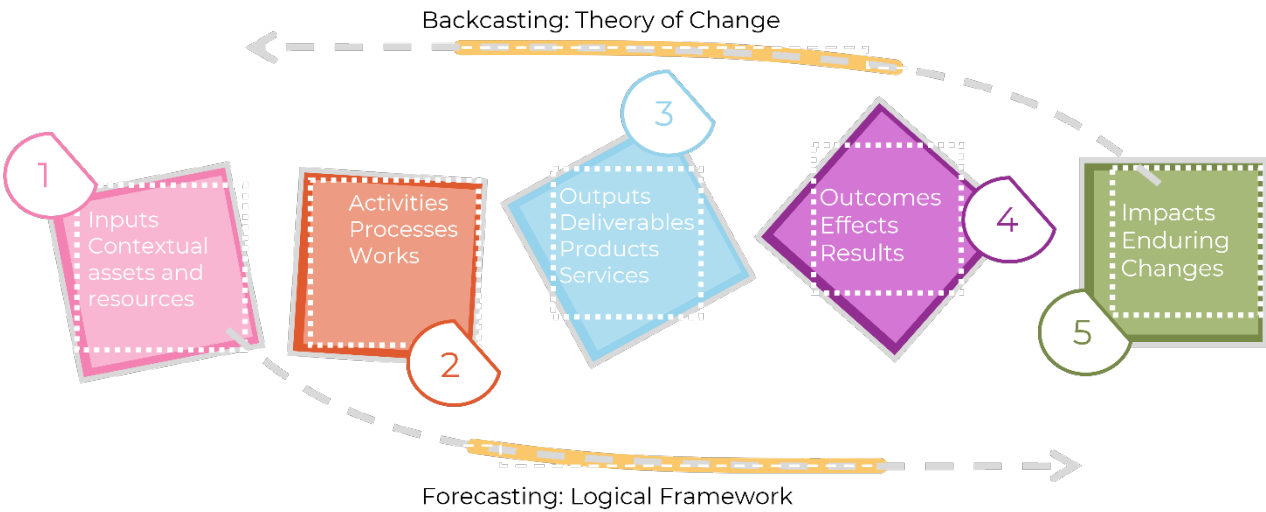
## Criteria for evaluation

Evaluation is the process by which you make a judgement about the worth of something. Evaluation involves observing, documenting and measuring. It compares what happened with what you expected to happen. It involves looking at the conducted initiatives and judging whether you are doing what you said you would do, whether it is going well, how you could improve it, and whether it resulted in any unexpected, even unintentional, developments or consequences.

Therefore, evaluating, or assessing the value or worth of something, is an activity that involves making judgments. “Value” is not absolute – people have different views about what is of value. This will influence what information is important to collect and how to combine them into a meaningful and effective learning process for continuous improvement.

Therefore, it is important to set some specific guidelines and criteria that might help in the future contribute to develop a more robust storytelling and consistent measuring for supporting the mainstreaming of the policy recommendation provided in this White Paper.

The evaluation process needs to be carried out at various times and include processual dimensions concerning how pilots have been implemented but also results and impact assessment.



### Ex-ante Evaluation Report (Context and Log Frame)

- Context of the pilot action
- Pilot action executive plan

### Ex-post Evaluation Report (Theory of Change)

- Implementation Analysis
- Results and Impact Assessment
- Activities/results to be capitalised and transferred



To evaluate the outcomes and the impacts of implemented actions, partners have used the following Social Innovation Grid<sup>10</sup>.

The Grid considers seven criteria:

7.

### Answer to unmet social needs:

This criterion first requires identifying the needs which are prior to be answered by the pilot action and to identify what will be the solutions provided by the pilot action. The following question is raised to evaluate this dimension: Does the pilot action provide an original answer to an unmet social need?

### Participative Process:

2.

This criterion needs first to identify which are the stakeholders to be involved and who are indeed taking part in the pilot action. Then it is necessary to identify how these stakeholders were involved, with different methods or tools. The question of the governance of the pilot action is central here too. The following question is raised to evaluate this dimension: Does the pilot action involve a diversity of stakeholders? And how?

3.

### Territorial relationships – Ecosystem:

This criterion concerns the territory on which the pilot action is developed. It questions the resources needed and mobilised at the territorial level to implement the pilot action. It also includes the interactions that may have been created through the pilot action within the territory. The following question is raised to evaluate this dimension: Does the pilot action consider territorial issues, realities and specificities?

### Economic sustainability:

4.

This criterion is useful to know the economic model of the pilot action, to estimate how the actions will be viable and sustainable over time. It is necessary to identify all types of resources that are mobilised for the pilot action and see how they will allow for the economic, social and ecological sustainability of the pilot action. The following question is raised to evaluate this dimension: Does the pilot action aim at a viable, sustainable economic model?

<sup>10</sup> The Social Innovation Grid was developed jointly by the Lest-Cnrs and the CRESS PACA in 2015 and adopted for the purposes of the +Resilient Project.



5.

### Sharing of the value created:

This criterion requires an evaluation of the value that will be or has been created by the pilot action, in line with the assessment of results and impacts, for which stakeholders (internal and/or external, directly or indirectly involved, private or public) and how the value created will be shared among them. The following question is raised to evaluate this dimension: What is the value created by the pilot action and does the pilot action question the sharing of the value created?

### Open Data:

The use or production of open data is at the core of the +Resilient project, based on the hypothesis that open data can support social innovation processes. This criterion therefore questions the existence, access or the production of open data to support the pilot action. The following question is raised to evaluate this dimension: Does the pilot action require and/or give support to open data production and development?

6.

7.

### Skill Development:

Skill development is another prominent issue for the +Resilient project as social innovation processes may need new or transformed skills to support them. This dimension is aimed at estimating what are the skills required to develop the pilot action but also how the pilot action supports skill development. The following question is raised to evaluate this dimension: Does the pilot action require and/or give support to skill development?



## What can be done to improve matters?

### Actionable Recommendations.

#### Territorial dimension

- Urban regeneration, renewal, and development
- Place-based, path-dependent, context-specific local development
- Spatial dimension of social services
- Sustainable tourism, valorisation of common goods, heritages, and assets

7.

#### Lessons Learned and Recommendations:

- Local and regional strategy plans shall aim at the transmission and enhancement of local and traditional knowledge; the intangible cultural heritage assets connected with the territory are of added value for the enhancement of the tourist sector and its sustainable approach.
- The importance of investing in human capital through training shall be recognised. Regional and local policies and actions plans need to increase the attitude to enhance competence and skills on the “core” sectors of the territorial economy. Particularly, it is important to develop necessary training courses aiming at social inclusion and increasing the social responsibility by operators, employees and entrepreneurs.
- There is a need to improve systems for listening to the territory in order to identify needs and resources, promoting knowledge about context-specific problems and resources and a shared view of the problems, resources and strategies of the territory.
- Fostering forms of collaboration among local players; networking actions need to be improved and supported. Additionally, the relationship between local and regional dimension of policies, action plans and financial instruments is to be encouraged and supported.
- In order to develop innovative and sustainable positioning strategies, the new European Regional Development Fund (ERDF 2021-2027) Regional Plans should be an opportunity to identify relevant cooperation sectors, were local and regional authorities can dialogue to enhance the social dimension of regional economies, encourage the start-ups of new entrepreneurial socially responsible initiatives and support the enforcement of the social attitude of the overall territorial ecosystem.

## Public Authorities as enablers

- Validate and disseminate enabling platforms
- Onboard stakeholders and activate collaborative processes
- Monitor performance and impacts
- Discover emerging needs

### Lessons Learned and Recommendations:

- Promotion of a sense of positivity towards the concrete possibility of acting individually and collectively in/on the context.
- Taking advantage of unused or underused public and/or private assets.
- Building a more symmetrical and trusting relationship between the Municipality and the local social organizations.
- Establishing administrative paths that entail participation and co-design involving different actors (both for the realisation of projects and for the production of goods and services).
- Improving the capacity of Urban Governments in thinking and planning the local development of the territory.
- Introduction of targeted funding: the best role that government can play with respect to funding is to manage and encourage blended finance solutions which help crowd in other funders, including commercial funders, into investments that might otherwise be too high risk.
- Recognition of legal status (but not a special legal form): we recommend that a simplified definition of a social enterprise be adopted until such time as there is a more concrete status from a national policy level.
- Financial incentives for organisations meeting the criteria for a social enterprise status, Public Authorities should make certain incentives available to them in order to help lessen some of the increased costs and challenges of running a social enterprise.
- Public tenders: existing public tenders in the region should be reviewed to determine where social enterprises could be suitable service providers and special effort made to ensure that tender opportunities reach them.
- Other market access: apart from public markets, the County should encourage other local businesses, organisations and individuals to buy from social enterprises in the region.

2.





## Multistakeholder collaboration

- Open innovation and knowledge transfer
- Networking, cooperation, shared management
- Co-design, co-decision, collaborative negotiation, and consensus building
- Collective impacts and public-private-people partnerships

### 3.

#### Lessons Learned and Recommendations:

- Preservation and consolidation of the cooperation ecosystem and inter-institutional relationships built throughout projects or formalised collective impacts of mission-driven networks.
- Strengthening of network cooperation for social innovation and definition of solutions to enable the transfer of learnings, practices, tools and standards.
- Building multi-sector supply chains; intermediary organization and business support organisation need to cooperate with public and private actors to better organize local supply chain, to support their attitude to inclusion and to enhance their capacity to implement social responsibility and sustainable activities, considering the provision of services addressed to different targets of reference



## Citizens' engagement

- Public Participation and consultations
- Activation of the 4th helix, involvement of civil society organisations
- Crowdsourcing, Citizen science, Living Labs
- Human centred design, user experience and end users' validation of innovations

### Lessons Learned and Recommendations:

- To boost social innovation and increase participation of the citizens and other stakeholders and to improve cooperation between municipality administration and communities.
- Set up interdisciplinary working groups for the development of the Sustainable Urban Strategies that also involves social innovation and social economy experts and practitioners.
- Underpin social innovations development and citizens participation by using digital platforms and participatory budgeting.
- Involve a significant and heterogeneous number of people and organizations in the processes (trying to avoid the exclusion of social groups with low social and cultural capital).

4.



## Skills and Capacities

- Digital alphabetisation, embracing digital transition in every field
- Soft-skills, Relationship, and bonding capacities
- Professionalisation, high quality services
- Entrepreneurship, Self-employment, innovation-oriented mindsets

### 5.

#### Lessons Learned and Recommendations:

- Soft skills represent an essential dimension to ensure the quality social digital innovation.
- Digital Skills for all are a prerequisite for a resilient and innovative organisation.
- Socio-Analytical Skills are needed to ensure effective social digital innovation.
- Gender & Intersectional Competences assure inclusive social digital innovation.
- Hybrid profiles and interdisciplinary teams boost sustainable social digital innovation.
- Organizational Measures ensure the mobilisations of key skills for resilient organizations.
- Constant review of professional profiles and skills regarding the provision of social services.



## eGovernance Solutions

- Design and deliver innovative public services
- Foster reusable, interoperable innovative services
- Generate open-source solutions
- Stream open data for feeding up new entrepreneurial discoveries and applications

### Lessons Learned and Recommendations:

- Increase agility and innovation in government.
- Modernize digital infrastructure, and hence become more efficient and user-friendly.
- Enable new businesses and create a more dynamic market for public digital services.
- Open data and digital tools need to be designed as means or vehicles for social innovation in line with the priorities identified at the local level, not as an end of the project. They need to be related to the strategies of the project and co-created with the involvement of a diversity of stakeholders. It implies implementing a participatory process involving, at an early stage, users (and preferably all relevant stakeholders) in the design, the implementation and the evaluation of digital tools to secure motivation in the long run and adequacy to the needs.
- Participatory and user-centric processes are crucial and need to be supported, even more in the pandemic context we had to face. Local and regional stakeholders have shown an impressive capacity of adaptation and resilience that was supported through participatory methods and tools. Indeed, online participation of citizens needs to be tutored and accompanied to fight against digital divide and ensure large participation.
- Specific skills need to be acquired to develop social innovation with the help of open data and digital tools, not only hard or technical skills which are essential, but also soft skills such as educational and animating ones, design thinking methodologies to overcome the low level of digital literacy and nourish a participative dynamic overtime. In many cases, adequate training schemes must be created.
- Open data is not always available, neither of good quality. Producing and using open data is therefore a challenge and needs to be conceived in relation with the objective of the project and monitored. Facilitating access to data and developing data management systems are also priority actions. The development of digital tools raises similar challenges in terms of quality, feed of new data, maintenance and use overtime.

6.



- Platforms that have been implemented to encourage local players to participate in building databases need to be supported and maintained.
- It is crucial to make local actors competent in open data analysis. Training courses, local activities and thematic workshop shall encourage the exploitation of open data to design new services, much more customer oriented and taking care of the emerging social and environmental responsibility.



## Social Economy

- Hybrid companies and profit-no-profit partnerships
- Self-sustaining social enterprises, profitable mission-driven ventures
- Corporate Social Responsibility, Creating Shared Value
- Better working conditions, corporate governance, and fair industrial relationships

### Lessons Learned and Recommendations:

- Greater recognition and visibility of all the associative entities that make up the social economy should be achieved, as well as promoting their development, defining the concept of social economy and the guiding principles of its entities.
- The entities that form part of the social economy should be identified, with the creation and regulation of a catalogue of social economy entities in European regions.
- The social economy, its principles and values should be promoted, encouraged and disseminated, establishing the foundations for the fostering of the social economy through public policies in other relevant areas (education and University system, rural environment and employment, etc.).
- The promotion and development of innovative projects or projects with international projection should be encouraged, ensuring equal opportunities and avoiding discrimination, as well as supporting training in the social economy sector and promoting formulas for public-private collaboration and partnerships.
- The foundations for the rationalisation of regulations and the simplification of administrative procedures for the creation of social economy enterprises should be established.
- The creation of a Social Economy Platform or its integration into existing platforms on entrepreneurship should be promoted, to bring together in a network all the information that might be useful to social economy entities.
- Public and economic measures to support social economy enterprises and organisations should be included, in order to encourage the development of new social economy initiatives and access to financial instruments for organisations.
- The creation of a Social Economy Council should be encouraged at Regional Levels as a body to coordinate and advise on activities related to the social economy, as well as to promote and disseminate the social economy.
- A regulatory disposition to promote transparency and information on the social economy should be incorporated in order to raise awareness of the sector.
- More legal and financial measures to encourage families to legally hire professional care workers to provide care at home are needed.

7.



- The idea of "professional career" must be recovered by recognising the many years of experience of a considerable number of professionals in this sector and their specialist knowledge, creating distinct professional categories.
- Fostering entrepreneurial skills, entrepreneurship, and intrapreneurship among care workers, and social businesses.



Concluding, the following is the proposed Action Plan for boosting the contribution of the Clusters with High Social Vocation and Responsiveness (SVRC) in generating a resilient and sustainable regional development in the European Union:



**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE**

To provide territorial 4-helix stakeholders of SVRCs with tools and platforms to increase their capacity.

SCENARIOS	SPECIFIC RESULTS	TYPES OF ACTIVITIES
Delivery of innovative public services.	Stakeholders are involved in co-creation and implementation of new/renewed services with positive and sustainable social impact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tools for improving or creating innovative services</li> <li>• Methods for improving or creating innovative services</li> <li>• Awareness-raising, network building or communication</li> </ul>
Support to SMEs with social vocation and responsiveness.	The number of SMEs operating with social responsiveness increase in the territory, increasing jobs and positive social cohesion and impact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tools for increasing social responsiveness in SMEs</li> <li>• Methods for increasing social responsiveness in SMEs</li> <li>• Awareness-raising, network building or communication</li> </ul>
Capacity building of social enterprises.	The number of social enterprises catering vulnerable clients increase on a sustainable manner also thanks to improved skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tools for improving or creating new social enterprises</li> <li>• Methods/tools for improving skills or capabilities</li> <li>• Awareness-raising, network building or communication</li> </ul>

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE**

To foster a transnational SVRC network that shares capacity building, knowledge transfer and co-creation of innovative solutions.

SCENARIOS	SPECIFIC RESULTS	TYPES OF ACTIVITIES
Delivery of innovative public services.	Stakeholders are able to share and transfer novel approaches and services to other areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribution to transnational pilot action (living lab in Marseilles) and transfer activities (workshops and webinars)</li> </ul>
Support to SMEs with social vocation and responsiveness.	Transnational activities of SMEs that become part of SVRC increase.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribution to transnational pilot action (living lab in Marseilles) and transfer activities (workshops and webinars)</li> </ul>



<p>Capacity building of social enterprises.</p>	<p>Transnational activities and cooperation among social enterprises increase.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Contribution to transnational pilot action (living lab in Marseilles) and transfer activities (workshops and webinars)</li></ul>
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## What is next?

### The way forward.

The +Resilient project partners have signed a Charter of Socially Innovative 4-helix Network in the Mediterranean Area. This document provides an open platform that goes beyond the project boundaries. All interested organisations are welcome and encouraged to join.

Under the framework of the Charter,

### Public authorities (local/regional/national/EU) are committed to:

- Capitalizing and Integrating the +Resilient project results (tools, knowledge, findings and methodologies) in the public policy agendas, documents, programmes and practices;
- Developing public supporting mechanisms for social enterprises on local/regional and national level;
- Creating and implementing innovative public services for new societal needs;
- Providing the infrastructure that could enable networks and connections among territorial actors involved in social innovation;
- Supporting the Social Vocation & Responsive SMEs;
- Being the role models and sharing good practices on social innovation at national and transnational level;
- Facilitating the participation of relevant stakeholders on spreading social innovation practices;
- Promoting the +RESILIENT platform in order to foster the knowledge exchange and cooperation on MED level.

### Private companies are committed to:

- Promoting the +Resilient project results, raising awareness and sharing knowledge on social innovation;
- Being socially responsible investors that support capitalisation of the +Resilient project results;
- Using the training materials developed during the lifetime of the project available on +RESILIENT OpenSocialCluster.eu web platform to develop their own capacities;
- Supporting and investing in social innovation projects;
- Incorporating the values and principles of SVRCs into their business practice;
- Developing transnational cooperation through the platform;
- Starting social entrepreneurial ventures as part of their business.



## Educational sector, i.e., universities and research institutions are committed to:

- Including the skills needed for social innovation detected during the +RESILIENT study phase in education and training programmes;
- Collecting, analysing and publishing qualitative and quantitative data about the activities and results of the +Resilient project. Scientific publications about the project results could be of significant help to give legitimacy and visibility to +Resilient;
- Including the new and innovative knowledge of the +Resilient project in their educational and research activities;
- Putting greater emphasis on social economy and social innovation in their teaching and research activities;
- Networking between universities in the MED area on social economy, innovation and entrepreneurship;
- Up-skilling, re-skilling and promoting new professional profiles related to social innovation;
- Developing new formal, informal and non-formal learning on social innovation for different stakeholders.

## Civil society organisations (NGOs) are committed to:

- Promoting +Resilient project results in order to raise awareness, share knowledge and good practices;
- Advocating for greater support for social innovation from the public and private sectors;
- Cooperating and creating synergies within the civil society and with other 4-helix stakeholders;
- Supporting and collaborating with social enterprises;
- Starting social entrepreneurial ventures as part of their activities;
- Continuously strengthening the capacity of their organizations to keep pace with social changes.



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## Project partners

Lead Partner



U.C.C.I.A.L.