

European Competence Centre for Social Innovation:
ESF+ Community of Practice on Social Innovation and
National Competence Centres Working Group

Toolkit for Portfolio Resource Mobilisation

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Introduction

This manual supports National Competence Centres (NCCs) in developing a resource mobilisation strategy from a portfolio perspective. Unlike traditional funding strategies that focus on isolated social innovation initiatives, this approach centres on a set of interconnected initiatives.

Traditional approaches have major limitations as initiatives are designed and funded as single-point solutions. However, Europe's main social challenges, such as creating quality jobs, redesigning the care system, tackling inequality and responding to migration, are complex and cannot be addressed by isolated solutions. Also, most of the difficulties in addressing these societal challenges lie in the implementation phase. This requires surfacing and addressing complex, often contested issues, and collectively discussing how best to resolve them.

Adopting a portfolio perspective transforms the role of NCCs from simple fund distributors or advisors for isolated initiatives into strategic actors capable of orchestrating interconnected solutions. This approach enables NCCs to maximise systemic impact by aligning multiple funding sources, supporting diverse initiatives simultaneously and creating conditions for social innovation to thrive sustainably on a large scale. Ultimately, it strengthens their position as catalysts for change within their national social innovation ecosystems.

To implement this approach effectively, NCCs need a combination of strategic and operational competencies. These include the ability to map and analyse funding sources systematically, advise initiatives on funding options and portfolio strategies, connect diverse stakeholders across sectors and funding types, support the implementation of complex funding structures and evaluate both individual and collective outcomes. Skills in ecosystem mapping, analysing and prioritising complex social challenges in collaboration with policy makers, as well as facilitation, systems thinking, partnership building, and developmental evaluation, are essential to fulfil their role as advisors, connectors and enablers of systemic social change.

While this manual follows a sequential roadmap, its components are designed to be modular and adaptable, allowing for iterative use and flexible reordering based on specific needs.

Suggested roadmap

1	Mapping the available options and experiences
2	Advising on different sources
3	Connecting different sources at different stages
4	Testing. Portfolio approach
5	Evaluating, adapting and transferring knowledge

Step 1. Mapping

The first step in mobilising resources from a portfolio perspective is to identify all the existing funding sources for a specific complex social issue in each Member State, as well as at an international level (see Figure 1).

Example: Identifying all funding possibilities for initiatives that want to reduce the number of homeless people in Ireland.



Figure 1 Example of a visualisation of possible funding sources

Key ideas:

- Identify all potential sources of funding options related to a particular complex challenge.
- Start with the most accessible and better-known sources (Public grants, EU calls, Philanthropy).
- Explore different types of funding instruments (grants, loans, etc.).
- Include national and international options.
- Use partners' knowledge of funding sources and known funders to complete the mapping exercise (pool information and knowledge).

Suggested guide for step 1

The NCC should map the following categories:

- **European funds:** Financial instruments provided by the European Union to support projects and policies that promote economic, social and territorial cohesion among Member States.
- **State funds:** Funding allocated by national governments to support public services, programmes and strategic initiatives within their countries.
- **Regional and local funds:** Financial resources provided by regional and/or local authorities to support development projects and services within their specific territories.
- **Philanthropy:** Voluntary donations from individuals, foundations, or corporations to support charitable causes or public benefit initiatives without expecting financial returns.
- **Impact finance:** Investments made with the intention of generating a measurable social or environmental impact alongside a financial return.
- **Social Outcome Contracting (SOC):** Funding mechanisms where payments are made based on the achievement of predefined social outcomes, such as Social Impact Bonds (SIB).
- **Commercial finance:** Financial resources provided by banks or private investors seeking market-rate returns through loans, credit, or equity investments.
- **Crowdfunding:** The process of raising small amounts of money from a large number of people, typically via online platforms, to finance a project or initiative.
- **Others:** Any additional sources of funding not covered above, such as in-kind contributions, volunteer time, or barter-based resources.

Step 2. Analysis and advising

The second step is to assess the strengths and limitations of each identified funding source. This may result in a table summarising these elements, helping to determine the most suitable type of funding for each initiative, while recognising that all are required within the overall portfolio.

This process prevents over-specialisation in a single type of financing (e.g. SOC) and enables the NCC to act as an advisory and connecting body within the social innovation ecosystem of each Member State. In this role, the NCC can guide each initiative on the most appropriate funding options at different stages of its life cycle.

Example: Assessing which funding sources are best suited to supporting youth employment programmes in Portugal and analysing their strengths (e.g. stable state funding) and limitations (e.g. slow disbursement processes).

Key ideas:

- Analyse strengths and weaknesses (limitations) of the identified funding sources.
- Advise on different funding sources and tools (funders, beneficiaries and regulators).
- Analyse dependency against financial management complexity. Combining different sources of funding is good but difficult to manage for small structures (it is skills- and resource-intensive).

	Public grants - national	Public grants - regional	Impact finance	SOC	SIB	Commercial finance	EU grants	Philanthropy
In what context								
Pros								
Cons								

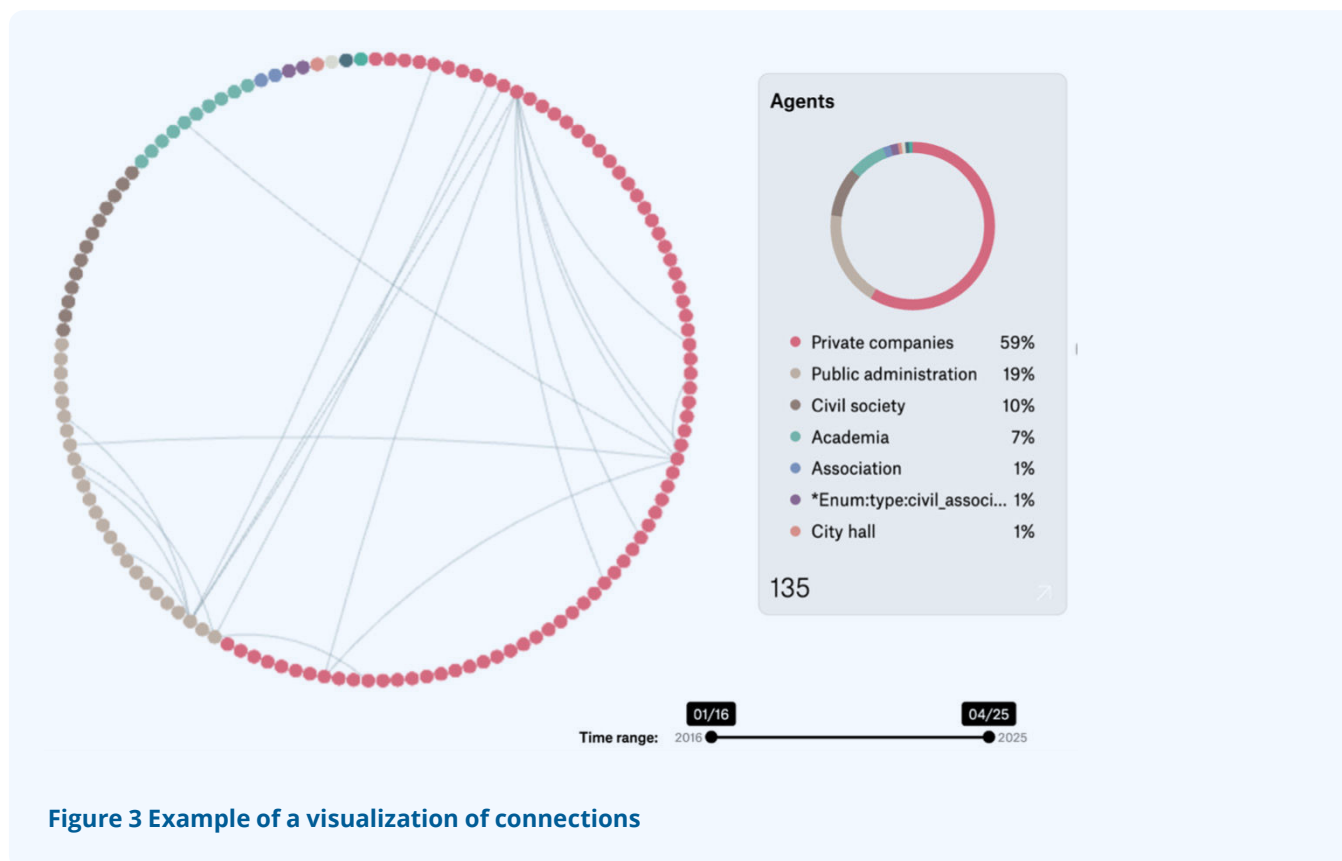
Figure 2 A suggested tool for analysing funding sources and providing advice

Step 3. Connecting

Once the mapping and analysis of strengths and limitations are complete, the NCC should propose new connections between existing funding sources and social innovation entities, as well as potential connections between the entities themselves.

This is the stage where the integrated portfolio perspective comes into play. As an initial action, it is recommended to propose 10 possible connections between funding sources and entities, along with connections between the entities themselves (see Figure 3).

Example: Proposing connections between a regional fund that supports green energy projects and a local cooperative in France that works on solar panel installation, while also connecting them with an EU climate innovation programme.



Key ideas:

- Connect funders and social innovation initiatives.
- Orchestrate different types of possible funding at each stage.
- Apply a co-creation approach if needed.

Connection examples:

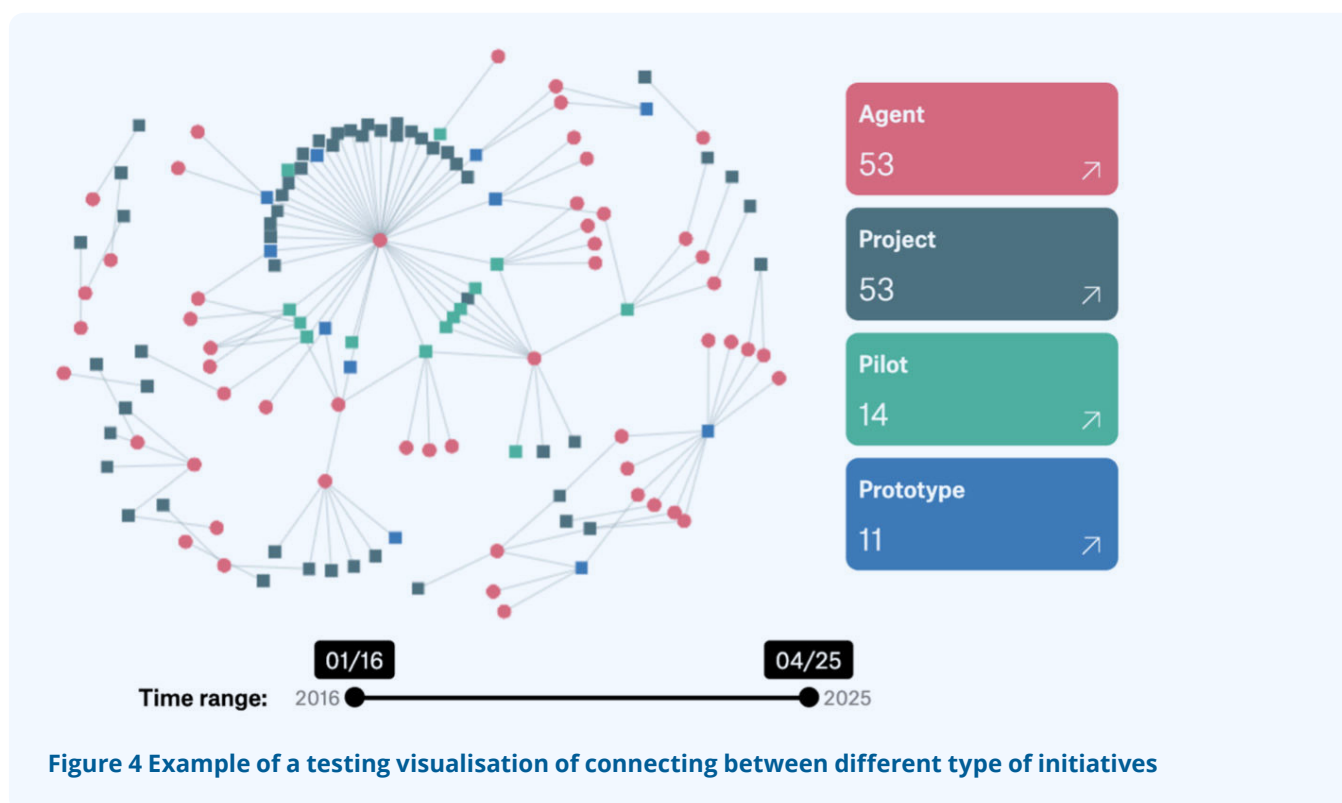
- **Relational connections:** Connections based on existing relationships, networks, or trust between funders and social innovation entities.
- **Collaborations or projects in common:** Connections where entities are working on similar projects, sharing goals, or jointly implementing initiatives.
- **Geographical connections:** Connections between funding sources and entities operating in the same region, city, or local area.

Step 4. Testing

The NCC will not only suggest funding connections, but also accompany the co-creation and implementation of initiatives.

This guidance and support will facilitate the discovery of whether the funding is well structured, and whether modifications to management and evaluation processes, as well as the incorporation of new tools identified in steps 1 and 2 (see Figure 4), need to be made.

Example: Testing whether the blended funding structure for migrant integration initiatives in Spain (combining philanthropy and SOC) is effective, and adjusting management or evaluation processes as necessary.



Key ideas:

- Visualise the entire investment.
- Offer a risk identification and management strategy.
- Differentiate between risk levels and suggest risk mitigation measures.
- Acupuncture mindset.

Figure 5 presents a suggested tool for step 4.

Initiative	Funding source(s) (Step 1 Mapping)	Strengths & limitations (Step 2 Analysis)	Proposed connections (Step 2)	Is funding well structured? (Yes/No)	Management adjustments needed?	Evaluation adjustments needed?	New tools or funding options to incorporate (Steps 1 & 2)	Risks identified	Notes/ Next actions

Figure 5 A suggested tool for testing

Step 5. Evaluating, adapting and transferring knowledge

The NCC can bring together all the relevant actors to evaluate the impact of the portfolio. Rather than assessing each initiative in isolation, the evaluation indicators must include both individual measures (for each initiative) and collective measures (for the entire portfolio). Combining these two types of indicators is crucial for understanding the overall impact. Some initiatives may have limited impact individually but are essential for the success of the portfolio as a whole (see Figure 6).

Example: Training or community-building projects may not generate immediate results and can even operate at a loss initially, but they are necessary to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of other initiatives within the portfolio.



Figure 6 Example of a visualisation of a portfolio impact assessment where all stakeholders can see how many initiatives (and what type) are responding to the different perceptions of the same challenge.

Key ideas:

- Incorporate collaborative management support.
- Use real-time visualisation.
- Include new funding incentives.
- Incorporate developmental communication.
- Set new KPIs and indicators.
- Identify new incentives.
- Perform developmental evaluation.

Examples of collective portfolio indicators that can be used include:

- the number of new connections created between initiatives;
- the quality of those connections, as rated by stakeholders;
- the number of stakeholders involved in co-creation processes;
- the percentage of initiatives using specific finance models;
- the diversity of funding sources mobilised;
- the total amount of funding mobilised;
- the number of systemic changes influenced, such as new policies or institutional practices;
- the number of emerging outcomes identified through developmental evaluation;
- increase in community resilience;
- evidence of narrative change achieved;
- the number of initiatives replicated or scaled up in other regions;
- the percentage of initiatives with adaptive evaluation systems in place.

Glossary

- **Acupuncture approach:** A strategy that targets key leverage points to create systemic change with limited resources.
- **Blended funding:** Combining multiple types of funding (public, private and philanthropic) to finance an initiative.
- **Co-creation:** A collaborative process involving multiple stakeholders in the design and implementation of solutions and ensuring shared ownership and relevance.
- **Connecting funds:** The process of linking funding sources to initiatives and facilitating relationships between them to maximise impact.
- **Developmental evaluation:** An evaluation approach that supports real-time learning and adaptation in complex systems.
- **ESF+:** The European Social Fund Plus, which supports employment, social inclusion and skills development across the EU.
- **Impact finance:** Investments that aim for a measurable social or environmental impact alongside a financial return.
- **Mapping:** A systematic process of identifying and organising existing resources, actors, or funding sources related to a specific social issue.
- **NCC (National Competence Centre):** A national-level body that supports the development and scaling of social innovation.
- **Portfolio perspective:** An approach focusing on a set of interconnected initiatives rather than isolated projects.
- **Protected experimentation:** Safe spaces or frameworks that allow new solutions to be tested with managed risks.
- **Social innovation:** New solutions that address social needs more effectively than existing approaches.
- **Social Outcome Contracting:** A funding model where payments are tied to the achievement of predefined social results.

Additional Resources

- **EU Funding Programmes:**
 1. European Commission – [Funding & Tenders Portal](#)
 2. [Social Innovation MATCH](#)
- **Portfolio approaches in social innovation:**
[Nesta. Funding innovation guide](#)
- **Impact finance frameworks:**
[OECD \(2019\). Social Impact Investment 2019](#)
- **Developmental Evaluation:**
 1. [Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation & use](#)
 2. [A practitioner's guide to developmental evaluation](#)
 3. [A developmental evaluation primer](#)
- **Social Outcome Contracting practical examples:**
Government Outcomes Lab, University of Oxford – [GO Lab Resources](#)
- **Blended finance examples and tools:**
Convergence – [Blended Finance Primer](#)

