



BETTER ENTREPRENEURSHIP ONLINE TOOL

GUIDANCE NOTE: SKILLS & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

Introduction

Access to skills and business development support has been identified as a key policy lever in building a conducive ecosystem for social enterprises in Europe by the [OECD](#) and [the European Commission's Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship \(GECES\)](#). Just like traditional enterprises, social enterprises rarely have all the necessary expertise and capacities in-house to operate and develop in a sustainable way. Therefore, they must also benefit from training, mentoring, consulting, business development support throughout their lifecycle. Although support resources for social enterprises is increasing in some territories, it still needs to be further developed in order to help social enterprises to professionalise and scale their impact.

The support provided to social enterprises should be:

- **Accessible:** the appropriate variety of support services should be provided, covering both urban and rural territories.
- **Adapted:** because they seek to combine financial sustainability with maximising social impact, social enterprises require tailored support, addressing both (business) management skills and social enterprises' specific needs, such as innovative business modeling, social impact measurement, hybrid funding strategies.
- **Affordable:** social enterprises cannot necessarily afford to pay for these support services, requiring smart pricing mechanisms and third-party financing.

Dedicated support structures (such as hubs, accelerators, or incubators) providing training, coaching or consultancy, office space, networking opportunities are essential to ensure the sustainable development of social enterprises. Such structures should tailor their support to the specific needs and the development stage of the social enterprises. They shall also seek to be well-connected with their peers and the larger support ecosystem (academics and research institutes, funders, public organizations, commercial partners). This will not only serve the social enterprises they support, but also help to promote the concept of social entrepreneurship in other sectors and foster impactful cross-sector collaborations. Public and private actors have a crucial role to play in developing and funding such support programs.

Recommendations for policy actions

Policy Levers

- ✓ Map the existing support ecosystem for social enterprises in order to identify unmet needs.
- ✓ Co-create policies and support frameworks with stakeholders.
- ✓ Leverage public funding instruments to support the creation or sustainable development of targeted support structures and high-quality programmes.
- ✓ Promote the existence of support structures and programs and incentivise their use.
- ✓ Foster synergies and complementarities between support structures for social enterprises to avoid duplication and inefficiencies.
- ✓ Encourage cross-sector collaborations on social innovation and entrepreneurship (for example, partnerships between social enterprises and traditional enterprises).
- ✓ Design and implement strategies fostering entrepreneurship education, and seeking to develop students' ability to recognise and act upon opportunities to create social value.
- ✓ Ensure that the support is of high quality and delivers the expected results, through evidence-based research and impact assessment.

Pitfalls to avoid

- ☒ Do not provide support in a way that is unbalanced in terms of geographical coverage, for example by focusing only or predominantly on urban areas.
- ☒ Avoid providing fragmented or isolated support.
- ☒ Bear in mind that short-term project-based support may not be sustainable in the long run.

Guidance per Indicator

6.1. Dedicated training initiatives are available to social enterprises.

We invite you to consider whether in your territory there are training initiatives that contribute to the enhancement of the skills (both business-related and social-related) that are necessary for developing a social enterprise. We also ask you to examine whether the available training corresponds to the different development stages of a social enterprise from start-up to scale-up.

Why is it important?

Developing a social enterprise requires a very diverse set of skills, both ‘traditional’ business-related skills (such as business management, team management, financial management, business development, governance) and specific social-related skills (such as social problem analysis, social impact management, stakeholder management). While part of these skills are similar to traditional enterprises, some skills are more specific to social enterprises. It is therefore essential to provide appropriate training to help social enterprises (or future social entrepreneurs) build their capacity and competencies. Training can be provided online or offline, on an individual or collective basis, through a series of modules or an intensive training period (e.g. week). Public bodies should consider how to promote and (co-)finance appropriate training initiatives in their territories, taking into account the remaining needs and gaps.

Pointers to help tick the appropriate score

For scoring high, in your territory:

- Dedicated training is available about key issues, such as business skills, social impact measurement, social skills etc.
- The training is tailored to the stage of development and maturity of the social enterprises.

Good practice example

Social Enterprise Academy (Scotland)

Co-founded in 2004 by the Scottish Government, [Social Enterprise Academy](#) is a social enterprise and charity offering a broad range of learning and development programs for individuals and organizations enabling social change. Their tutor network is spread across Scotland enabling them to deliver programmes in communities everywhere. The majority of Academy programmes are developed in partnership with networks, community organisations and other support bodies, allowing to tailor programmes to specific local needs. Over 10.000 learners have benefited from their programmes, 92% of learners have changed their behavior based on their learnings, and 99% of learners would recommend the program to a friend. The model is currently being replicated globally through a network of Social Enterprise Academy Hubs,

managed by local partners embedded in their community and support ecosystem.

6.2. Social enterprises have access to coaching and mentoring programmes.

We invite you to assess the affordability of tailored coaching and mentoring programmes, which can be online or off-line, short-term or long-term, and provided in groups or one-to one. In addition, we ask you to examine whether there is a mechanism in place that can ensure a “good fit” between coaches and mentors, who can be experienced social enterprise leaders, professionals from the commercial sector or subject-matter experts, and social entrepreneurs.

Why is it important?

Access to tailored coaching and mentoring programmes can help social enterprises in many ways: build their internal capacity and skills, benefit from an external perspective on their personal and enterprise’s development, and access new networks and contacts. Coaches or mentors can be experienced social enterprise leaders, professionals from the commercial sector or subject-matter experts. Often what is needed is someone to ask the right challenging questions as much as someone to provide answers. Such programmes can take various forms: online or offline, one-to-one or group sessions, short-term or longer-term support programmes. While group sessions allow for peer sharing and learning, one-to-one programmes are often more resource-intensive but can provide more personalised and in-depth support.

Pointers to help tick the appropriate score

In order to score high, one-to-one and/or coaching and mentoring programmes in your territory should:

- The coaching and mentoring programmes are affordable.
- Coaches and mentors receive training in providing support to social entrepreneurs.
- There is a matching mechanism to ensure that there is a “good fit” between the social entrepreneur and their coach and/or mentor.

Good practice example

Alter’Incub (France)

[Alter’Incub](#) is the first regional incubator dedicated to social enterprises in France. The scheme was launched in 2007 by the Regional Union of Co-operative Companies of Languedoc-Roussillon (URScop-LR), in partnership with the Regional Council of Languedoc-Roussillon. Alter’Incub supports entrepreneurial teams in developing innovative and economically viable answers that will result in the creation of social enterprises by the end of the incubation period. The overall Alter’Incub process lasts 15 months.

The Alter'Incub incubation package includes:

- Individual support: helping entrepreneurs with networking, market studies, financial and business planning, choice of legal status and management
- Collective support: collective training sessions leading to positive group dynamics; better communication between project initiators; acquisition of strategic, marketing and management skills; and understanding of what being an entrepreneur means
- External support: mobilising partnerships with local experts to meet the needs of innovative projects in particular, when entrepreneurs need specific resources (e.g. specific legal advice, detailed market studies) that would not be available otherwise.

For more information, [click here](#)

6.3. Business development support structures are available to social enterprises.

We invite you to assess the degree to which there is appropriate business development support to social enterprises in your territory. Development support structures dedicated to social enterprises or to traditional SMEs can provide co-working space, training, coaching, consulting, networking, and funding. In addition, you can examine whether the existence of dedicated incubators or hubs is promoted in your territory and whether the degree of the provided support is sufficient to cover the needs of social enterprises.

Why is it important?

Dedicated support structures usually provide a range of services to help establish or grow social enterprises, such as co-working space, training, coaching, consulting, networking, funding. These various services are often combined with specific programmes offered to social enterprises. Most support structures focus on young social enterprises ('starters'), a few target social enterprises willing to grow their organization and/or their impact ('scalers'). Such support structures ought to establish strong links with other stakeholders, such as private companies and public bodies, as a means not only to help social enterprises scale their impact, but also to enable multi-stakeholder collaborations for social change.

Pointers to help tick the appropriate score

In order to score high, your territory should have dedicated support structures with the following characteristics:

- Business development support structures provide integrated support to social enterprises.
- Dedicated incubators and hubs are available to help social enterprises to be established and grow.
- Dedicated incubators and hubs are promoted through various channels.
- The scale of support meets the demand of social enterprises.

Good practice examples

Oksigen Ecosystem (Belgium)

[Oksigen](#) is a Belgian-based support ecosystem for social entrepreneurship, comprising different organizations covering the spectrum of stakeholders needed to support social enterprises and trigger social change. Oksigen Lab provides tailored coaching and advisory services to social enterprises and leads research projects on social entrepreneurship with like-minded international organisations. As part of this ecosystem, **SI2 Fund**- an impact investment fund- provides finance to social enterprises in order to grow their business model and impact. Another actor is **i-propeller**, which advises corporates and public actors on creating sustainable social impact, often in collaboration with social enterprises. The co-existence of these various activities and services under one roof creates strong synergies for social enterprises looking for skills and business development support and/or funding. Servicing social enterprises, investors, public and private actors, also allows Oksigen to stimulate collaborations between these actors to collectively address social challenges.

Impact Hub Network (multiple countries)

[Impact Hubs](#) are located in over 80 cities supporting over 15000 members, with a shared focus on creating positive impact. Members benefit from office space, and a diverse and global community that provides guidance, resources, and opportunities shared between all Impact Hubs.

Each Impact Hub provides three distinct elements:

- A vibrant community of passionate and entrepreneurial people sharing an underlying intention to bring about positive change and act as peers, cross-fertilising and developing their ventures.
- A source of inspiration providing meaningful content through thought-provoking events, innovation labs, learning spaces, incubation programs, and facilitated conversations.
- A physical space that offers a flexible and highly functional infrastructure to work, meet, learn, and connect.

6.4. Networks support the development of social enterprises.

We ask you to consider the degree to which networks contribute to the development and growth of social enterprises. Are there any initiatives in your territory that support the creation of networks to start with? If yes, we ask you to assess the degree to which these networks are dynamic and provide the platform to social enterprises to meet in person or online with their peers. Lastly, you can examine whether these networks spur knowledge sharing and connect social enterprises within and outside your territory and your country.

Why is it important?

Developing a successful social enterprise is not an easy task. Networks for social enterprises can fulfill various functions leading to increased sustainability of social enterprises: share fears and learnings with peers, forge synergies and new opportunities for collaborations, mutualise or share resources, improve visibility and advocacy efforts, access new markets, and influence policy-making.

Pointers to help tick the appropriate score:

In order to score high on this indicator, your territory could have initiatives that support the creation and development of networks for social enterprises, with following characteristics:

- There are initiatives that support the creation and development of networks.
- Networks provide a range of options to social enterprises to grow their own networks, including online platforms and face-to-face events.
- Networks help social enterprises to develop transnationally and connect with peers in other countries.
- Networks stimulate knowledge sharing.

Good practice examples

Social Enterprise NL (The Netherlands)

As a national membership body, [Social Enterprise NL](#) represents, connects and supports the growing community of social enterprises in the Netherlands. Since 2012, they support the social enterprise movement by:

1. Providing support to its 300 members: undertake business support programs, BOOST programs for start-ups, network events.
2. Facilitating a favourable business environment: influence government, public bodies, corporations and investors to break down barriers for success of social enterprises. For example, Their “Buy Social” campaign promotes sustainable procurement by large corporations and governments.
3. Inspiring social and entrepreneurial action: encourage education on and research about social entrepreneurship, spread the word about social entrepreneurs and their enterprises.

Estonian Social Enterprise Network (Estonia)

Founded in 2012, the [Estonian Social Enterprise Network](#) is a civil society partner for the Ministry of Interior, helping to achieve the objectives of National Strategy for Civil Society 2015-2020. Their mission is to increase the number, capacity and societal impact of social enterprises in Estonia through advocacy, training, sales support, visibility. One of their programs, the “Changemakers Academy” brings together Estonian and Russian speaking youth to tackle the marketing challenges of social enterprises in their communities.