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REPORT ON IDENTIFICATION AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF LOCAL USERS, STAKEHOLDERS, POTENTIAL PARTNERS

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Report on Identification and needs assessment of local users, stakeholders, potential partners

Deliverable 1.2

Project	Social Innovation Plus – Competence Centres (SI Plus)
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Research report on Activity 1	Activity 1: Defining and reaching shared understanding of the Competence Centre purpose
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Research carried out	01 September 2021 – 28 February 2022

1. Description on how the research was conducted

The research under activity 1 resulted in 2 separate reports, as follows:

- **Deliverable 1.1:** Report on research and analysis of existing approaches and experiences in Bulgaria and the EU.
- **Deliverable 1.2:** Report on Identification and needs assessment of local users, stakeholders, potential partners

Thus, **the description of the research activities is identical for both reports (Deliverable 1.1 and Deliverable 1.1)**. The research under activity 1 was conducted in three (3) phases.

The first phase was from the 1st of September to the 30th of September 2021. The first phase was dedicated to desk research on the existing approaches and experiences in the field of social innovations in Bulgaria and the EU:

- EU reports
- Academic papers on (evolution of) the definition of the term “social innovation”
- Bulgarian databases and statistical information: **(1)** Register of the social enterprises, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy; **(2)** Register of the specialized enterprises and cooperatives of the people with disabilities, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy; **(3)** National database of (self-declared) social enterprises, National Statistical Institute.

The second phase was from the 30th of September to the 3rd of November 2021. The second phase included verification of desk research findings through interviews (onsite/online) with key stakeholders, including with representatives of foreign institutions and organizations.

In addition, two (2) focus groups were organised with a variety of social innovators and stakeholders from NGOs, businesses, local and national authorities, academia.

The third phase was from the 4th of November 2021 to the 31st of January 2022. The third phase included additional desk research, participation in two international workshops related to the mapping of social innovations and scaling of social innovations, as well as two additional interviews.

A questionnaire was circulated among all municipalities in Bulgaria, in partnership with the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria. The questionnaire incorporated the key areas defined by *L&R Social Research and arbeit plus - Social Enterprises Austria in social innovation survey*. The following local governments responded, sharing their experiences so far: Dobrich, Devnya, Gabrovo (more than one responses), Parvomay, Burgas, Varna (more than one responses), Sofia (more than one responses), Shumen.

2. Key findings on current social needs in Bulgaria

Research task as defined in the project proposal: *Survey of current social needs, focusing also on those imposed by the COVID-19 crisis - to define the new societal challenges, identify new skill sets needed.*

2.1. What are the pressing social needs in Bulgaria according to the national and EU official reports? What is the Bulgarian progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations?

The social challenges that provoke the appearance of social innovations, are constantly changing with the changing environment and with the ever-growing expenses necessary to meet the social needs. Although there are certain common trends, the social demands and societal issues differ depending on the point of view.

2.1.1. Social entrepreneurship point of view

According to research made in 2021 by Hristina Popova (see Annex 1) there are 10 pressing social issues, which can be identified through analysis of EU official reports, as follows:

- a. People at risk of poverty or social exclusion or affected by (multidimensional) poverty.
- b. Obesity rate.
- c. Quality of education.
- d. High risk of death of avoidable diseases (e.g. tuberculosis, HIV, and hepatitis).
- e. Access to healthcare for groups of people with unmet health needs.
- f. Increasing access to affordable energy.
- g. Young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET).
- h. Citizenship gaps related to education, employment, and risk of poverty.
- i. Increasing quality of life in cities and communities by reducing air pollution.
- j. Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates.

The identification of these pressing social issues came on the base of analysis of:

- UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and EU Monitoring reports on progress toward reaching SDGs in EU.
- The specific data about Bulgaria's progress towards SDGs according to the EUROSTAT SDG indicators section.
- Additional specification and reduction based on the concept of “SDG Wedding cake” developed by the Stockholm Resilience Centre at Stockholm University. The SDG Wedding cake stratifies the SDGs into three layers in order to separate the economic, social and ecological aspects of the SDGs. Here the analysis is focused on the “social” aspects of the SDGs, i.e. mostly on SDG 1 No poverty, SDG 2 Zero hunger, SDG 3 ‘Good health and well-being’, SDG 4 ‘Quality education’, SDG 7 ‘Affordable and clean energy’, SDG 8 ‘Decent work and economic growth’, SDG 10 ‘Reduced inequalities’, SDG 11 ‘Sustainable cities and communities’, SDG 16 ‘Peace, justice and strong institutions’.

This list of pressing social issues is well-developed and is based on the EU and Bulgarian official statistics.

That the proposed selection of pressing social issues is made from the point of view of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem, i.e. there is a focus on pressing issues where the social entrepreneurs can achieve impact (e.g. leave out indicators related to policy measures). Since the notion of “social innovation” is broader than “social entrepreneurship” and since the local authorities, for example, also could be drivers of social innovations, the proposed pressing social issues have to be considered only as an example.

2.1.2. Policy makers point of view

Social enterprises are mainly concentrated in specific niches – particularly in local contexts – and are not evenly spread within and across Bulgaria. The different levels of understanding and maturity of the social innovation ecosystem have a direct impact on the level of support and engagement of policy-makers.

The representatives of municipalities that took part in the survey, identified the following challenges that could be addressed through social innovations (ranked by priority):

- a. Poverty;
- b. Access to the labour market;
- c. Quality and accessible education;
- d. Health care;
- e. Quality of life of the elderly;

- f. Social inclusion;
- g. Climate change;
- h. Demographic issues;
- i. Civic rights and liberties;
- j. International and cross-border cooperation.

Additional issues that are not mentioned above but are volunteered by local authorities, are: labour migration to Bulgaria; entrepreneurship for access to culture; young people internet and social media dependency; urban regeneration; early behavior and literacy interventions for pre-school children.

These issues are selected and prioritized based on their desired social impact. However, some of these needs are relevant to the local context and are relationship-based, while others are general and are broadly valid in different locations or contexts.

2.1.3. Social innovation breakthroughs with opportunities for exponential growth in the near future

The DG Research and Innovation edition “100 Radical Innovation Breakthroughs for the Future”¹ sheds light on social innovation priorities based on a very specific methodology - a massive automated survey of recent scientific and technical literature filtered through panels of experts, combined with reviews of important recent foresight projects worldwide. The results then were screened for their potential impact on future global value creation, and assessed in terms of current maturity, long-term diffusion potential and relative strength of the EU in research and innovation.

The research outlines thirteen social innovation breakthroughs - emerging societal practices that have been recorded in the literature as social innovations likely to be widely adopted in the near future (in alphabetical order):

- Access economy (also called sharing economy or platform capitalism, new forms of organizing access to goods and services);
- Alternative currencies (alternative digital or non-digital currencies and exchange systems where the unit of value is the person-hour or other time unit);
- Basic income (guaranteed minimum income as a system of social welfare provision that guarantees sufficient income to live on);

¹ Warnke, P. and others, 100 Radical Innovation Breakthroughs for the Future (2019), DG Research and Innovation, ISBN 978-92-76-13045-1,
https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research_and_innovation/knowledge_publications_tools_and_data/documents/ec_rtd_radical-innovation-breakthrough_052019.pdf

- Body 2.0 and the quantified self (better understanding oneself by collecting data on every aspect of daily life, also called lifelogging);
- Car-free city (cities with reduced petroleum dependency, air and noise pollution, gas emissions and traffic);
- Collaborative innovation spaces (new forms of associations for passing on knowledge and innovating, hubs of skilled people);
- Gamification (game-design elements and principles in non-game contexts to improve processes, satisfaction, data collection and more);
- Life caching (collecting, storing and displaying one's life for personal use or peruse with the main purpose of keeping the memory);
- Local food circles (consumption of safe, regionally grown food that would encourage sustainable agriculture);
- New journalism networks (journalists working together on specific targets to reveal news and find evidence for global stories);
- Owning and sharing health data (large databases of personal health data);
- Read/write culture (diversifying information gatekeepers through social media, active audiences that not only share but also generate, manipulate and transform digital content);
- Reinventing education (diversification of education during the whole life).

As social innovations are local by nature and are reported and monitored much less systematically than science and technology developments, the ones with the potential to disrupt global value creation patterns will be few and are mostly already far advanced. They show several clusters of developments in the area of local autonomy and resilience, health, self-development, information and communications.

2.2. How COVID-19 crisis affected the list of pressing social issues in Bulgaria in 2020 and 2021?

There is no reliable statistical data on how the COVID-19 crises affected the social innovation in Bulgaria. The information below is based on interviews, surveys and focus groups with social innovators and other stakeholders, including representatives of municipalities and state institutions.

COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact and a two-fold effect the social innovations arena:

a. Negative:

On one hand, the respondents were unanimous that the COVID-19 crisis increased the levels of social inequalities in Bulgaria. There was a common understanding that the people at risk of poverty or social exclusion were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. It is especially valid for children and

young people at risk of poverty or social exclusion whose access to education was limited, including because of the lack of access to electronic devices and internet connections.

Some social service providers and NGOs experienced significant difficulties, scaled down activities, lost staff and clients, and suffered economic losses.

b. Positive:

On the other hand, the social innovators reported some unexpected positive effects from the COVID-19 crises. Examples include digitalizing services and creation of new communication channels with beneficiaries, as well as focus on new target groups, greater societal interest in social innovation work and impact, new business models, including digital ones, and even more time for strategic planning.

Some areas of social innovations saw rapid development – particularly in the area of health care, well-being and caring support, interconnectedness, multisectoral collaborations.

A lot of these developments, trends and achievements will be employed to build solutions for the post-pandemic world.

2.3. How did the war and refugee wave from Ukraine affected societal needs and social demands in Bulgaria in 2021?

Towards the completion of this report a new acute challenge with the potential to affect and shape social innovations and ecosystem in the immediate future appeared – the war in Ukraine and the influx of refugees. This is Europe's biggest refugee crisis in decades will require waves of solidarity and although the specific social innovation approached are yet to be seen, it is an educated guess that they will appear and they shall be assisted with expedient and proper policies, regulatory frameworks and funding.

3. Key findings on the identification of key stakeholders and potential partners

Research task as defined in the project proposal: The identification of key stakeholders and potential partners in areas like social economy; policy making; VC/RC, banks and other bodies providing financing; academia and research institutes; civil society organizations.

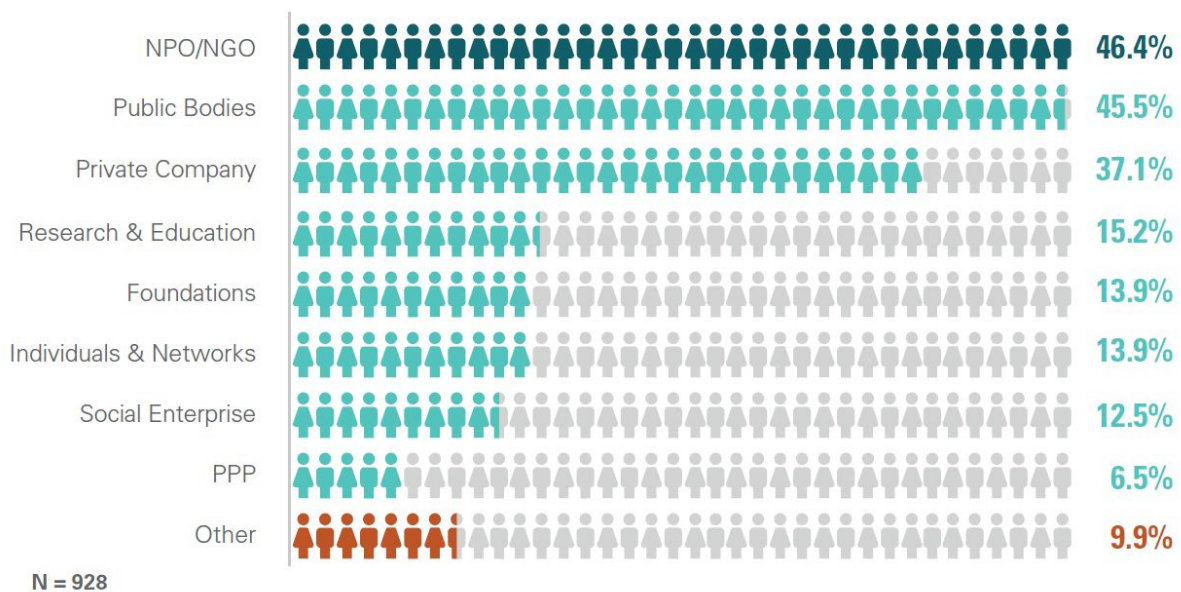
3.1. Who are the main groups of stakeholders in the field of “social innovation” in Bulgaria? How the “social innovation ecosystem” looks like?

Social innovations are initiated in and provided by all parts of society, including public sector bodies and companies, NGOs and other actors of civil society. The research confirmed that the main groups of stakeholders in the field of social innovation in Bulgaria are numerous and diverse, though they are active at different stages of innovation development. They are as follows:

1. Social entrepreneurs – both NGOs and for-profit companies, which main aim is to achieve positive social impact;
2. Policymakers at a national and local level;
3. Academia and research institutions;
4. Banks and other bodies providing financing, including investment funds, business angels and social investors;
5. Incubators and accelerators;
6. Development agencies;
7. A wider range of civil society organizations, which are involved in the identification of social issues, but also in the scaling of the social innovations once they become self-sustainable and viable;
8. Private companies.

The role of the media is a special case – both traditional press and broadcasting, as well as the new social/digital media could be crucial for the initial support and then scaling up of social innovations, but the exact mechanisms in this respect should be further explored.

For the sake of comparison how the Bulgarian ecosystem relates to the Europe-wide one, we can use the analysis of EU-funded SI-DRIVE project ². A central task of SI-DRIVE was to map and analyse more than 1000 social innovation initiatives [3]. With a share of 46 % and 45 % of the mapped initiatives, NPOs/NGOs and public bodies respectively are core actors involved, followed by private companies (37%). Being involved in only about 15 % of the mapped social innovation initiatives, research institutes tend to play a subordinated role.



Actors engaged in Social Innovation Initiatives (multiple responses; % of cases)

In both Bulgaria and EU-wide cases the driving force or inner core of social innovation initiatives can be labelled as a “trio” of NGOs/NPOs, public bodies and private companies. Schematized specializations are problem identification based on socially relevant knowledge (individuals, NGO, social enterprises), the set-up of pilots and projects as well as the provision of resources to coordinate the social innovation processes (public body), as well as infrastructure provision (private companies). The inner core takes over tasks related to the crucial development of a social innovation initiative. A wide spectrum of actors can take over the role of promoters. Being temporarily involved, they provide specialized competences and resources to address challenges and/or problems arising in due course of the innovation process.

² “Social Innovation – Driving Force of Social Change” (SI-DRIVE), funded by EU’s 7th Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstrations under grant agreement N612870.

3.2. What are the main interests of each stakeholders group toward the topic of “social innovation”?

Social innovations are characterized by a wide range of actors involved, who may have various roles which fluctuate across different innovations and the development process of a single innovation. Social innovation emerges and develops within a complex and dynamic ecosystem. This ecosystem is comprised of both supporting and constraining factors and social innovation actors both enact existing practices and attempt to enact any new or modified ones.

As described in “Report on research and analysis of existing approaches and experiences in Bulgaria and EU” (Deliverable 1.1) the notion of “social innovation” in Bulgaria is still quite vague and ambivalent, and the ecosystem is not yet mature enough. Some actors are only sporadically involved and therefore have subordinate roles at present. For example, distinct from technological innovation, social innovations often originate from grass roots of civil society, and users respectively beneficiaries might replace research institutes as knowledge providers.

- The social entrepreneurs and NGOs have the role of a central developer. Oftentimes they also provide infrastructure and other support activities. Some NGOs (foundations) provide funding for social initiatives and idea development. NGOs have taken up the function of lobbying, which so far exceeds their other activities. Another prominent function of theirs is knowledge provider. Social entrepreneurs and enterprises predominantly focus on idea development and funding. Those relying heavily on grant funding/social investment, may use this term “social innovation” in a pragmatic way – as an additional way to fundraise money for their social activities, especially concerning EU funds.
- Public bodies at a national and local level have a broad portfolio of functions although the term social innovation and the respective regulations and policies are not consistent, and there are very significant differences between the 265 municipalities in Bulgaria. Local authorities have the function of social innovation developers, initiators and operators – over 70 municipalities have municipally owned social enterprises. Public bodies are the main funding provider so far, with some municipalities and Sofia in particular developing special funding instruments for that purpose. They also provide infrastructure, create conditions for user involvement and cover the lack of knowledge providers and sharing. Finally, some local governments take the lead as promoters of social innovations. There are some attempts for policy and structural change as well.
- Academia and research institutions are less active and less influential in the domain of social innovation. The research found very limited number of academic/research projects and initiatives in the field of social innovations, mainly in the area of evaluation and knowledge generation.

- Banks and other bodies providing financing, including investment funds and business angels are also largely not engaged with social innovations. Since there are no specific social investment funds, social innovations are not of specific interest for the financial institutions in Bulgaria. One of the few exceptions is the Social Impact Banking initiative of UniCredit Bulbank. There is anecdotal evidence of business angels investing in social innovation, too.
- Private companies also play different and diverse roles, varying from funding and infrastructure providers to initiators and operators. So far, the predominant discourse is that this is part of their corporate social responsibility. Social innovations are therefore yet to take a more prominent position in the mainstream business community priorities.

Cross-sector collaborations emerge as a common pattern in initiatives that are developed in alliances, while actors fulfil specialized functions that allow for taking advantage of complementarities and synergies. In this respect, it is important to note that boundaries between the roles and functions can be blurred.

3.3. What are the needs of the Bulgarian “social innovators” and how a potential Bulgarian National Competence Centre for Social Innovations could respond to these needs?

The desk research, interviews and focus groups showed that one important distinction should be made first: between the “newcomers”/very early-stage social innovators, and the more mature/more experienced social innovators.

Both groups share common interests and needs in:

- Networking and exchange of information peer-to-peer, including a database of colleagues and potential partners;
- Access to information for opportunities in the field of funding, trainings, international partnership.

However, the two groups also have diverse needs concerning their different development stage, as follows:

The early-stage social innovators are mostly interested in:

- Access to basic knowledge and information, and especially so-called “Starter Pack”, i.e. how to start their innovative activities in cooperation and according to the rules of authorities, funders, partners, clients, etc.;
- Access to external expertise through trainers and consultants, including on specific topics like accounting, legal issues, marketing and others;
- Public recognition and visibility, both as moral support and as an opportunity for market penetration.

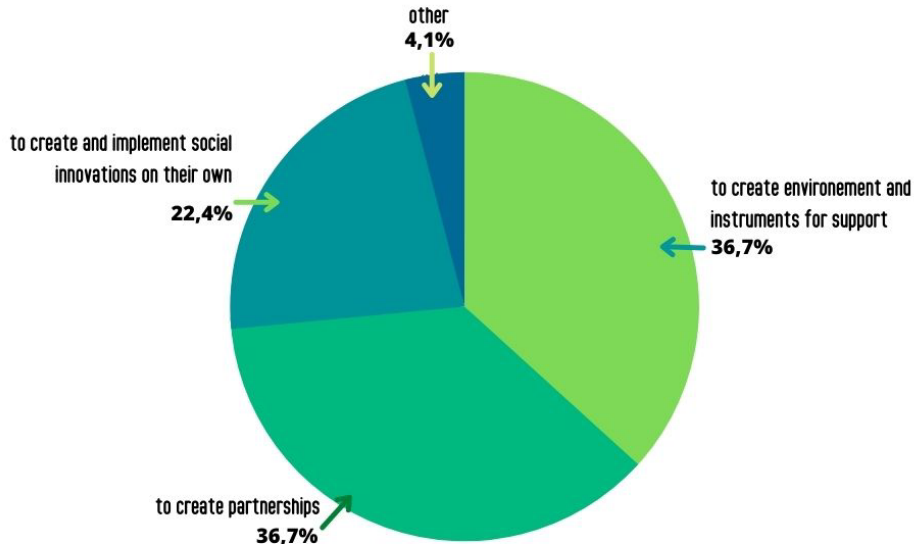
The experienced social innovators are more interested in:

- Access to specific information and expertise, as for example, expertise in social impact measurement;
- Dialogue with policy-makers, as an instrument for scaling and expanding;
- Access and knowledge on how to attract and retain quality personnel;
- External evaluation of their activities.

Bulgarian local governments define three main needs that would help them foster social innovations locally:

- To establish instruments, including financial ones, to support the development and application in practice of social innovations;
- To foster collaboration between NGOs, private companies, academia and other actors to initiate and promote social innovations;
- To establish internal culture to develop and integrate social innovations in institutional policies, practices and services.

What could be the role of local authorities in the process of social innovations design and implementation?

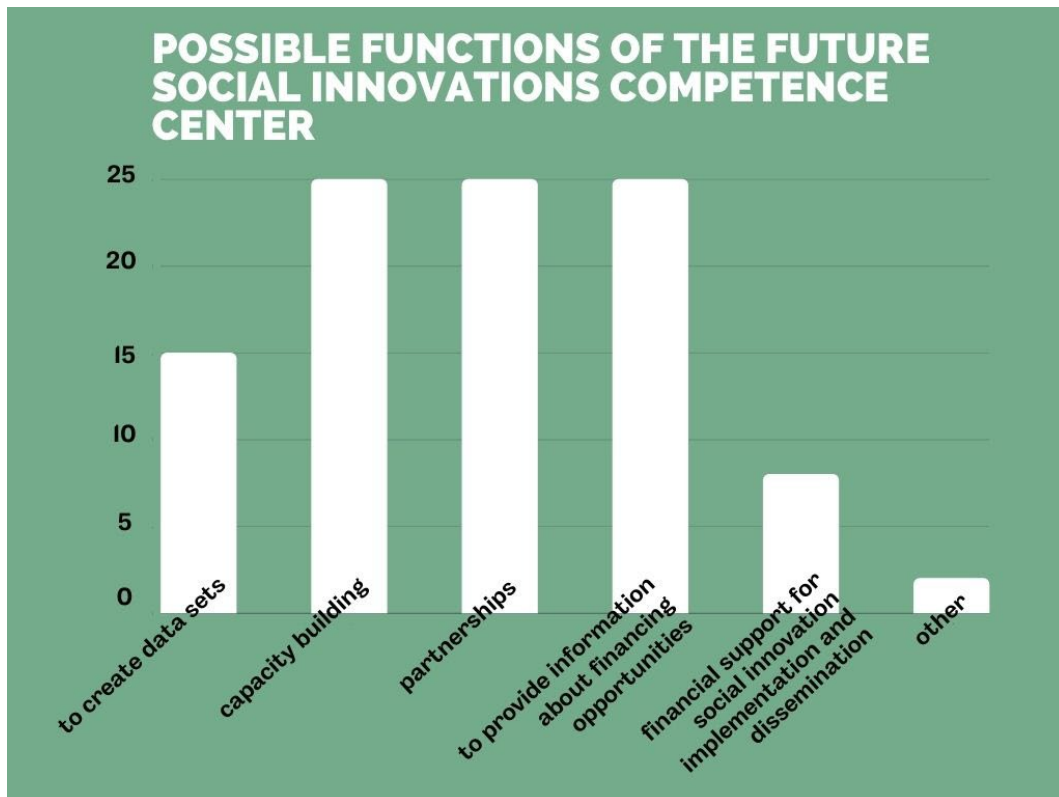


3.4. How a potential Bulgarian National Competence Centre for Social Innovations could respond to these needs?

In this respect the respondents of interviews and focus groups – defined the following potential functions and activities of the future Bulgarian National Competence Centre for Social Innovations:

1. Creation of database open for social innovators from different fields of activities and different parts of Bulgaria, as well as for potential partners, as an instrument for facilitating cooperation and common actions.
2. Access to specialised, and verified, expertise – especially in the field of legal issues and accounting/finance.
3. Capacity-building activities, including training and consultancy.
4. Research activities and sharing of information based on data and data analysis.
5. Communication campaigns and communication activities for social awareness and recognition of the social innovations and social innovators.
6. Facilitation of international contacts and international transfer of knowledge and expertise
7. Certification of social innovations / social innovators – although this suggestion was not fully supported by all of the respondents.

The local authorities representatives defined the following possible functions:



3.5. How do the different stakeholders imagine the structure and the position of the future Bulgarian National Competence Centre for Social Innovations and to what extent they are willing to cooperate for its establishment?

There is no common/unanimous understanding among all stakeholders of what the structure of the future Bulgarian National Competence Centre for Social Innovations (BNCCSI) should be.

Some of the respondents imagine the future BNCCSI only as a network and virtual office, i.e. kind of a digital platform with information purposes. Others see it as a powerful grant-making body, which, in addition, has a key role to promote social innovations and educating both social entrepreneurs, administrators and politicians, as well as the society as a whole.

The institutional position of BNCCSI is also a question that did not find a common answer among the different stakeholders. Some of them see it as an independent body that receives funding from the state budget but also has the freedom and obligation to fundraise additional money from EU sources, the business and the society. Others see this Center as an interdisciplinary public body which has an inter-institutional character.

Bulgarian municipalities and some stakeholders outside of Sofia pay special attention to the need to

guarantee that all Bulgarian citizens and localities have access to BNCCSI and its services. However, they envision different ways to achieve that – varying from a founding legal act with respective functions and responsibilities; to working in networks and in partnership with the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, Regional Association of Municipalities and others; to transparency, open data, open access, opportunities for local initiatives, national tours in its work.

4. Conclusions

4.1. Conclusions on current social needs in Bulgaria

The current challenges that could be met by means of social innovations are dynamic, changing fast due to external development and internal ones (cost, capacity, opportunities, etc.) They are also local by nature and are therefore difficult to pin down.

The challenges and needs in Bulgaria are not significantly different from those in Europe as a whole. They therefore could contribute toward the UN Sustainable Development Goals, EU's Next Generation Europe and relevant strategic agendas.

Social innovation could develop not only based on needs but also on opportunities. Therefore the 13 social innovations radical breakthrough areas are likely to see scale up and follow up social innovations.

The COVID-19 impact on the social challenges and needs in Bulgaria is twofold. On one hand, the pandemic led to even greater inequalities. On the other hand, it stimulated social innovations.

The effect of the war in Ukraine and the refugee wave is yet to be determined. However, it requires stakeholders to quickly adapt and prepare.

4.2. Conclusions on the key stakeholders and potential partners

The social innovation ecosystem is not mature and well defined (as described in Deliverable 1.1 too). Some potential actors are inactive or hesitant to actively get involved currently.

Only few of initially defined key stakeholders have some vision on how the social innovations in Bulgaria could be facilitated, supported and scaled.

On the other hand, the active stakeholders have very specific ideas and expectations of the future Competence Center for Social Innovations, which requires efficient expectation management in the process of its establishment.

The expected from the key stakeholders functions and activities of the future Competence Center for Social Innovations are very close both the Call framework and to the existing similar bodies in other EU countries (See Deliverable 1.1)

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Annex 1: Defining what “pressing social issues for Bulgaria” is

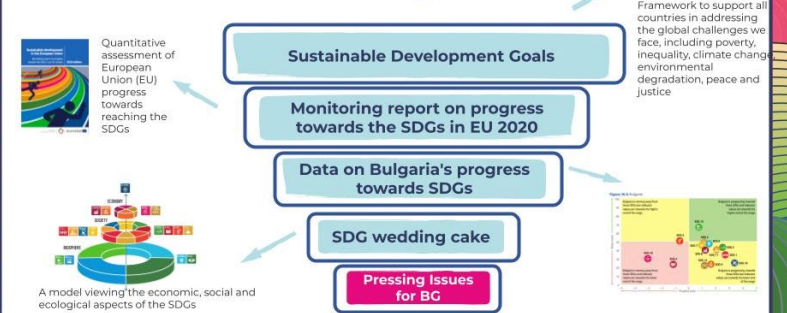
Presentation prepared by Ms. Hristina Popova (Global Program Manager of Reach for Change Foundation)

Suggested definition for the social focus:

Social enterprises that are aiming to create a measurable positive impact on pressing societal issues that fall within the scope of the European level indicators for progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.*

*The aim for creating a measurable social impact should be clearly articulated in the organization's vision and mission.

Defining the Pressing Social Issues in Bulgaria



Bulgaria's Progress towards the SDGs



Where is the data coming from?

EU level indicators to assess progress towards SDGs

Indicators related to EU policies and measures are used to measure progress against SDGs as a way to ensure EU policies are effective in driving towards goals.

Country status is assessed based on annual progress against targets

The status for each SDG is assessed based on the progress compared to last year's status and compared to EU-27 median level.

Data-sets for each indicator are available in Eurostat

[Eurostat SDG indicators section](#) provides an overview of each MS progress through the years and comparison between countries

Narrowing Down the Scope

- Focus on pressing problems for **society**
- Focus on pressing **issues where SEs can achieve impact** (e.g. leave out indicators related to policy measures)
- Make sure that focus is on **SEs who are excluded from existing finance market.**



credit: Azote Images for Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University

Suggested definition for pressing social issue:

Pressing social issues are the ones where Bulgaria is at the lower end of the range in terms of indicator values that fall within the Society-related SDGs.

High-level list of pressing issues*

- People at risk of poverty or social exclusion or affected by (multidimensional) poverty
- Obesity rate
- Quality of education
- High risk of death of avoidable diseases (e.g. tuberculosis, HIV, and hepatitis)
- Access to healthcare for groups of people with unmet health needs
- Increasing access to affordable energy
- Young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET)*
- Citizenship gaps related to education, employment, and risk of poverty*
- Increasing quality of life in cities and communities by reducing air pollution
- Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates

*To be used for communication purposes, based on the list of SDG indicators. You can see the full list of indicators [here](#)

Issues marked in *italic* fall within SDGs 8 and 10 which are more related to economic development than society, but given that these indicators are related to specific vulnerable groups, they are left on the list