

COMPARATIVE GAP ANALYSIS REPORT



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This report results from a comparative analysis based on a literature review, focus groups and national gap reports conducted by each project partner in the WELFARE project.





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Summary

This comparative report presents the gap and need analysis carried out as part of the Erasmus+ project “Designing future WELFARE systems” (1 March 2022 – 1 March 2024). Its main goal is to **surface the current gaps in training, and the needs** of researchers, educators, students and professionals of European universities and university colleges, **with regard to innovative and entrepreneurial skills and competences**. The report serves as a starting point for developing an inclusive and integrated learning environment for social innovation and entrepreneurship in the welfare sector, open educational resources, and a WELFARE training and communication platform. The analysis is based on thorough comparison of national literature reviews and focus groups carried out in all four participating countries (Belgium, Greece, Iceland and Lithuania).

The **main findings** of this report can be summarized as follows:

- Social innovation, social entrepreneurship and social enterprise are distinct though closely connected concepts. Despite EU efforts in aligning definitions and creating more clarity, approaches and development strongly differ across and within EU countries, and comparative, reliable data remains lacking. In addition, the landscape is continuously and rapidly changing.
- The gaps in social innovation and social entrepreneurship vary across Belgium, Greece, Iceland and Lithuania, but there is strong overlap between the identified opportunities and barriers, and the skills and competences needed to become (more) innovative and entrepreneurial. This underlines the relevance of an international approach that transcends country borders.
- Finances, network, and legal framework and policy are considered the main factors that create opportunities or barriers to come to social innovation/entrepreneurship.
- The most commonly cited skills and competences to be(come) social innovative and entrepreneurial across the four countries are creativity, critical thinking/open attitude, entrepreneurial personality (e.g., confidence, determination, decisiveness, leadership, resilience), soft skills (e.g., active listening, collaboration, conflict resolution, empathy, working in a team), developing ideas/thinking out-of-the-box/prototyping, and networking/lobbying.





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- Stakeholders involved in the development of the WELFARE project should represent the quadruple helix model of innovation, i.e., academia, industry, community, and government.





1. Introduction

This comparative report presents the gap and need analysis carried out as part of the **Erasmus+ project “Designing future WELFARE systems”** (1 March 2022 – 1 March 2024). The main objective of the WELFARE project is to create a melting pot for social innovation within universities and university colleges, as a gateway for researchers, educators, students and professionals to develop skills and competences as social entrepreneurs. The specific objectives are:

- To create an inclusive and integrated learning environment focusing on social innovation and entrepreneurship in the welfare sector
- To create online training and support materials, open educational resources (OERs), for social entrepreneurs tailored to their needs as well as welfare sector needs
- To develop the WELFARE training platform for social entrepreneurs, introducing the concept of social innovation and entrepreneurship
- To create a communication platform for social innovators and entrepreneurs, both university students and practitioners, sharing knowledge and experiences

The **gap and need analysis** aims to surface the needs of researchers, educators, students and professionals of European universities and university colleges, with regard to innovative and entrepreneurial skills and competences. As such, it will serve as the baseline to develop the WELFARE curriculum and the OERs. The analysis consists of two parts: (1) a national gap and need analysis for each participating country (Belgium, Greece, Iceland and Lithuania¹), based on a literature review and focus groups carried out in each country, and (2) a comparative gap and need analysis that compiles and summarizes the national reports.

First, we give an overview of the central concepts, and we sketch the European landscape with regard to social innovation, social entrepreneurship and social enterprise. Next, the focus group results are discussed. These shed an interesting light on the gaps, barriers and opportunities to

¹ The national gap and need analyses are published on the project website www.projectwelfare.eu. Also all details on the focus group methodology and demographics can be consulted in these reports.





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social innovation/entrepreneurship in the welfare sector in the participating countries. Also the relevant skills and competences that enable welfare professionals to be (more) innovative and entrepreneurial are presented. We conclude with the identified stakeholders that may endorse the development of the WELFARE curriculum, OERs, pilot trainings and platform.





2. Social entrepreneurship and social innovation in the EU context

“Social entrepreneurship” and “social innovation” are the two key concepts on which the Erasmus+ project “Designing future WELFARE systems” is built. The European Commission defines these as follows:

- **“Social entrepreneurship** is used to describe the behaviors and attitudes of individuals involved in creating new ventures for social purposes, including the willingness to take risks and find creative ways of using underused assets.” (European Commission, 2013, p. 17)
- **“Social innovation** can be defined as the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services and models) to meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations. It represents new responses to pressing social demands, which affect the process of social interactions. It is aimed at improving human well-being. Social innovations are innovations that are social in both their ends and their means. They are innovations that are not only good for society but also enhance individuals’ capacity to act.” (European Commission, 2013, p. 7)

Given that **social enterprises** are considered a main – though not the only – venture to translate social entrepreneurship and social innovation into practice (European Commission, 2013), these are used as our starting point to get a good grip on necessary background information and context as to how to interpret the results from the literature review and focus groups. The frameworks and statistics used in this report are all retrieved from the study “Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe”, that provides an excellent overview of the social enterprise landscape in each country separately and in Europe overall.





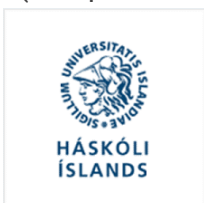
2.1 Defining and measuring social enterprises (literature review)

The EU study departs from the SBI definition of social enterprise in which it refers to three dimensions: an entrepreneurial dimension, a social dimension and a dimension relative to governance structure (European Commission, 2020a). More specifically, it states: “a social business/social enterprise is an undertaking: whose primary objective is to achieve social impact rather than generating profit for owners and shareholders; which uses its surpluses mainly to achieve these social goals; which is managed in an accountable, transparent and innovative way, in particular by involving workers, customers and shareholders affected by its business activity” (Social Business Initiative, 2015, p. 4).

Despite the efforts to formulate an EU operational definition, debate on the concept continues, both across and within European countries. This results in rather inconsistent approaches between Belgium, Greece, Iceland and Lithuania towards social enterprises and has important consequences in terms of data collection and quality.

Only Lithuania and Greece have a policy framework specifically targeting social enterprises (European Commission, 2020a). **Lithuanian** social enterprises are politically and legally accepted, and can use all non- and for-profit legal forms (European Commission, 2018). However, EU measurements only include work integration social enterprises (WISEs), and public enterprises, associations and foundations generating market income not recognized as WISEs, given that only these meet the EU social enterprise operational definition. This results in a rather narrow understanding and leads to weak self-recognition in social enterprises. Of all four countries, **Greek** law approaches social enterprises most similar to the EU definition (European Commission, 2019b). The country completely restructured the social enterprise sector over the last decade which led to rapid development, although the ecosystem is still in its infancy compared with other European countries. EU measurements follow the way in which social enterprises are defined by Greek law.

Iceland and Belgium have no policy addressing social enterprises, neither directly nor indirectly (European Commission, 2020a). In **Iceland**, the term “social enterprise” is new and rarely used (European Commission, 2019a). There is no legal framework, which leads these entities to take





various, fragmented organizational forms (e.g., cooperatives, public good associations). There is no official data as it is not possible to register companies as “social enterprises”. In **Belgium**, there is a set of laws, decrees and public provisions related to social economy and social entrepreneurship (European Commission, 2020b). Consensus as to what a social enterprise is and specific legislation fully embracing the scope is however lacking, and legislation and policy varies across the different regions. Depending on the measurement approach, statistics on social enterprises diverge largely, but we follow the approach proposed in the EU Belgian country report.

Table 1 compares the number of and workers in social enterprises, and the growth rate per country. Interestingly, both Belgium (1,530) and Lithuania (1,237) are at the top of Europe as concerns the number of social enterprises per million inhabitants, together with Italy (1,694), Hungary (1,621), Luxembourg (1,546) and France (1,414) (European Commission, 2020a). Greece stands out for the sector’s unique growth rate: the number of active social enterprises and employees, and the growth rate multiplied after the formal institutionalization of social economy in 2011, and yearly steadily increases since then (European Commission, 2019b).

Table 1. Estimated number of SEs, workers in SEs and growth per country² (European Commission, 2020)

	Belgium (2017)	Greece (2019)	Iceland (2017)	Lithuania (2016-2017)
Estimated number of SEs	18,004	1,148	258	3,476
Number of SEs per million inhabitants	1,530	107	740	1,237
Estimated number of workers in SEs	572,914	N.A.	1,488	N.A.
Growth rate in number of SEs	stable since 2011	28% between 2015-2016	N.A.	N.A.

The country specific approaches towards social enterprises and the statistics listed above are also reflected in **table 2**. The table summarizes the context in which social enterprises exist, based on

² According to the authors of the study referred to, the numbers reflect the greatest possible homogeneity among data sources.





EU as well as country specific literature. Mainly in Belgium and Iceland, efforts are needed to strengthen and establish legal frameworks for social enterprises. The relatively high number of social enterprises in Belgium and Lithuania (cf. table 1) go hand in hand with established publicly funded measures, training and education and existence of social enterprise networks in these countries. On the other hand, despite the rapid development, Greece is still in development concerning these elements and in infancy compared to other European countries. Training and education is well established in Iceland, although public funding remains fragmented and social enterprise networks are developing.

Table 2. SE context per country

	Established	Fragmented	In development	Non existent
Legal framework for SEs	Greece Lithuania	Belgium	Iceland	
Publicly funded measures for SEs	Belgium Lithuania	Iceland	Greece	
Training and education	Belgium Iceland Lithuania		Greece	
Existence of SE networks	Belgium Lithuania		Greece Iceland	

2.2 Social entrepreneurship and social innovation as defined in the focus groups

Also the focus group respondents from all four countries (N=30) shed their light on what social entrepreneurship and social innovation stands for, according to their experience and expertise. It is interesting to note that two out of three dimensions outlined in the SBI definition above (European Commission, 2020a), were clearly reflected in the discussions. The social dimension – “social enterprises pursue the explicit social aim of serving the community or a specific group of people” (European Commission, 2020a, p. 30) – is referred to most often in terms of the need for focus on social value and on solving societal problems. The inclusive ownership-governance dimension was approached as citizens’ engagement, active participation, and collaboration





between different stakeholders. Only in the Belgian focus group, however, some of the respondents specifically pointed towards the importance of the entrepreneurial/economic dimension (i.e., social enterprises engage in market exchanges (European Commission, 2020a)) by emphasizing the need and search for new business models that take into account the diverse approach of social versus traditional enterprises. An interesting addition to the SBI definition that was mentioned in multiple focus groups, was the link between social entrepreneurship/innovation and future-oriented and sustainable changes.

Not surprisingly, the lack of clarity across and within EU countries on where to place the borders around the concept of social enterprises – and, more broadly, around the concepts of social entrepreneurship and social innovation – was also reflected in the focus group discussions. Moreover, none of the respondents elaborated on the difference between social entrepreneurship and social innovation.





3. Social innovation and social entrepreneurship in the welfare sector

3.1 Gaps

The most important gaps regarding social innovation and social entrepreneurship in the welfare domain are identified for each partner country. These are summarized in **table 3** along three specific sectors that play a central role in embedding social innovation/entrepreneurship in society:

- The **non-profit and social-profit sector** represent the main share of welfare practitioners working on identification of and solutions for social challenges.
- The **public sector** and government are key to facilitating and leveraging social innovation/entrepreneurship.
- The **educational sector** is the gateway for students, welfare professionals, educators and researchers to develop skills and competences as social innovators and/or social entrepreneurs.

Drawing conclusions based on these results, lead us to note a lot of variation in the gaps and needs in the welfare domain across the different countries. In the non/social-profit sector, they range from a lack of transversal vision (BE) to a lack of welfare focus (GR), and from a lack of funding (IS) to a need for stronger teams (LT). The public sector is characterized by a lack of awareness and knowledge on social innovation/entrepreneurship (GR, IS, LT), and fear for privatization of general interest (BE). Educational programs are lacking specific focus on *social* impact, innovation and entrepreneurship (BE, GR, IS, LT), interdisciplinary training (IS) and open data (GR).

Interestingly, despite this variation, there is much overlap in the country specific opportunities and barriers towards social innovation/entrepreneurship (part 3.2), the relevant skills and competences for (future) welfare professionals, to be more innovative and entrepreneurial (part 4.1, 4.2), and the main stakeholders (part 5), all identified by the focus groups. This underlines the strength of a cross-border approach.

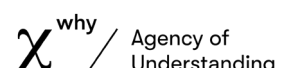


Table 3. Main gaps regarding social innovation and social entrepreneurship per country (results retrieved from literature review)

	Non/Social profit sector		Public sector		Educational sector	
	Gap	Good practice	Gap	Good practice	Gap	Good practice
Belgium	Lack of transversal vision	Social innovation course for social workers (IS); People's University of Social Solidarity Economy (GR)	Fear for privatization; economic impact > social impact	Rising You (BE)	Lack of focus on measuring social impact	
Greece	Lack of welfare focus, gap between supply and demand of social services, lack of entrepreneurial skills and capacity	Master's program in social and solidarity economy (GR); People's University of Social Solidarity Economy (GR)	Lack of policy, strategy, welfare services, support and procurement	GBO-centrale (BE); Entrepreneurship program Municipality of Aigaleo (GR)	Lack of welfare perspective, lack of open science/data	People's University of Social Solidarity Economy (GR)
Iceland	Lack of awareness and (sustainable) funding	Rising You (BE); Entrepreneurship program Municipality of Aigaleo (GR)	Lack of awareness, policy, training and intrapreneurship	(Z)Ondermemen (BE); Master's program in social and solidarity economy (GR); People's University of Social Solidarity Economy (GR)	Lack of awareness and interdisciplinary training	Master's program in social and solidarity economy (GR); People's University of Social Solidarity Economy (GR); Social innovation course for social workers (IS)
Lithuania	Need for strong teams and shared persistence/responsibility	Rising You (BE); Social innovation course for social workers (IS)	Little attention for social innovation		Difference between social innovation and social business is unclear	

The table further already links the identified gaps and needs to the good practices on social innovation/entrepreneurship described in the [national gap analysis reports](#), given that these might provide inspiring answers or solutions that transcend country borders and can be used as examples in the WELFARE curriculum.

3.2 Opportunities and barriers

The focus group participants identified the most important opportunities and barriers to social entrepreneurship/innovation in the welfare sector in their country (**table 4**). Three elements were pinpointed across the countries.

Table 4. What creates most important opportunities/barriers for social innovation and social entrepreneurship, top 3 per country (N=27) (results retrieved from focus groups³)

	Belgium		Greece		Iceland ⁴		Lithuania	
	Top 3 opp.	Top 3 bar.	Top 3 opp.	Top 3 bar.	Top 3 opp.	Top 3 bar.	Top 3 opp.	Top 3 bar.
Financial		■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Network	■		■		■		■	■
Legal framework		■		■				
Policy	■	■		■				■
Education			■					
Personality	■						■	
Own organization								

³ All respondents were asked to fill in a short questionnaire with questions closely related to the focus group discussion. In Belgium (N=8), Greece (N=8) and Lithuania (N=6), all respondents completed the form; in Iceland, the majority of the group did (N_{form}=5 vs. N_{total}=8).

⁴ In Iceland, there was a lot of variation in the answers. Only finances and network were clearly identified as main opportunity/barrier by the majority of the group.



First, **finances** are perceived as the basic aspect that determines survival and upscaling possibilities, and as such, the most important element in making or breaking social innovation and social entrepreneurship. Respondents across countries mentioned the need for larger budgets, for sustainable funding, and for the development of tailored business models, all specifically targeted towards encouraging social innovation/entrepreneurship.

Second, **network** is seen as a powerful tool in terms of collaboration between different stakeholders, sharing knowledge and experience, co-creation, getting different perspectives, upscaling, validation ... It may also help to compensate your own limitations as an entrepreneur.

Finally, **legal framework and policy** are considered overlapping and also identified as main opportunity and/or barrier in three of the countries given they define the context and the borders you need to work with. Mainly bureaucracy, a lack of shared vision and fragmentation of the field – even in Greece and Lithuania, the two countries with an established legal framework (cf. part 2.1, table 2) – are mentioned in this regard.





4. Education in social innovation and social entrepreneurship in the welfare domain

The focus group respondents were asked about what relevant skills and competences are needed to stimulate (future) professionals in the welfare sector to be (more) innovative and entrepreneurial. On the one hand, this was questioned via a set of predefined skills/competences. On the other hand, an open ended question enabled them to elaborate this list.

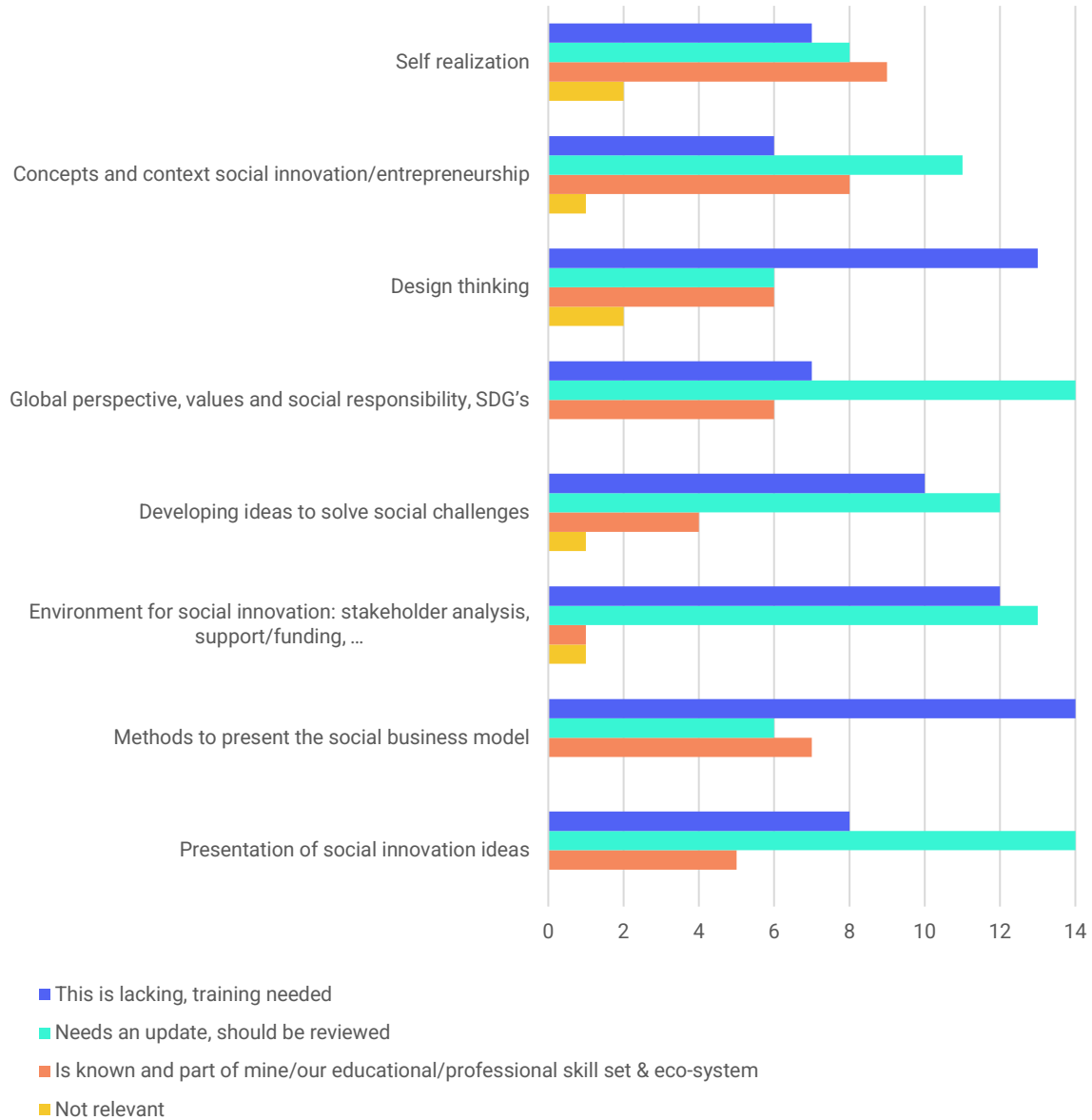
Figure 1 presents the predefined skills. These include skills/competences linked to self-realization, concepts and context concerning social innovation/entrepreneurship, the design thinking methodology, the global perspective and sustainable development goals, developing ideas in response to social challenges, environment for social innovation, methods with regard to social business models, and the presentation of social innovation ideas. Overall, none of these are considered irrelevant, although most are perceived as in need for a review and an update. Also as concerns the skills/competences marked as most known of all – e.g., self-realization, and concepts and context – there is room for updates and/or training.

It is interesting to note that the skills and competences that were added to this list, are similar across the countries. **Figure 2** indicates that creativity, critical thinking/open attitude, entrepreneurial personality (e.g., confidence, determination, decisiveness, leadership, resilience), and soft skills (e.g., active listening, collaboration, conflict resolution, empathy, working in a team) were identified in all four countries. Skills/competences mentioned in three of the countries – Belgium, Iceland as well as Lithuania – are developing ideas/thinking out-of-the-box/prototyping, and networking/lobbying. In multiple countries, respondents agreed that the main challenge with regard to skills and competences is in the need for combining two different – apparently opposite – skill types: socially-oriented soft skills and economically-oriented hard skills.





Figure 1. What skills are needed to improve social innovation and social entrepreneurship skills? (N=27) (results retrieved from focus groups⁵)



⁵ All respondents were asked to fill in a short questionnaire with questions closely related to the focus group discussion. In Belgium (N=8), Greece (N=8) and Lithuania (N=6), all respondents completed the form; in Iceland, the majority of the group did (N_{form}=5 vs. N_{total}=8).



Figure 2. What are relevant skills/competences for professionals in the welfare sector to be (more) innovative and entrepreneurial? (N=30⁶) (results retrieved from focus groups)



⁶ Belgium (N=8), Greece (N=8), Iceland (N=8), Lithuania (N=6).



5. Stakeholders

Finally, as concerns the main stakeholders who should be involved in testing, improving, and discussing the WELFARE curriculum and training, results from the focus group reflect the **quadruple helix model of innovation**:

- Academia (BE, GR, IS, LT): research, collaboration with students, education
- Industry (IS, BE): people in the field, people that know the obstacles/have tried, social innovators
- Community (LT): local people
- Government (IS, BE): the state, policy, decision makers

The focus group respondents in Lithuania, Iceland and Belgium additionally emphasized the importance of an **interdisciplinary approach**, of creating and encouraging dialogue between all four disciplines, given that social innovation and social entrepreneurship apply to “cross-cutting themes” that transcend disciplines and domains.





6. Conclusion

- Social innovation, social entrepreneurship and social enterprise are distinct though closely connected concepts. Nevertheless, approaches and development strongly differ across and within EU countries.
- The gaps in social innovation and social entrepreneurship vary across Belgium, Greece, Iceland and Lithuania, but there is strong overlap between the identified opportunities and barriers, and the skills and competences needed to become (more) innovative and entrepreneurial. This underlines the relevance of an international WELFARE curriculum, OERs and platform, and its capability to go beyond country differences.
- Finances, network, and legal framework and policy are considered the main factors that create opportunities or barriers to come to social innovation/entrepreneurship.
- The most commonly cited skills and competences to be(come) social innovative and entrepreneurial across the four countries are creativity, critical thinking/open attitude, entrepreneurial personality (e.g., confidence, determination, decisiveness, leadership, resilience), soft skills (e.g., active listening, collaboration, conflict resolution, empathy, working in a team), developing ideas/thinking out-of-the-box/prototyping, and networking/lobbying.
- Stakeholders involved in the development of the WELFARE project should represent the quadruple helix model of innovation, i.e., academia, industry, community, and government.



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