

SOCIAL
ENTERPRISE
REPUBLIC OF
IRELAND

20
24

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

A Critical Crossroads For Social Enterprise

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Message from our Chair

This pre-budget submission comes at a critical crossroads for social enterprise in Ireland. It is a time of both tremendous opportunity and significant challenge.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the vital role of social enterprises in our society, and there is increasing recognition of their value among the public and policymakers.

The launch of the National Social Enterprise Policy, along with the publication of 'Social Enterprises in Ireland: A Baseline Data Collection Exercise' and increasing policy attention at the EU level, has laid a strong foundation for growth. Social enterprise is seen as a key enabler of our shared island future.



'Social enterprises are collaborating with the government to address a wide range of pressing issues.'

However, the social enterprise sector now faces pressing demands driven by rapid societal and economic changes that directly impact our communities. Social enterprises are collaborating with the government to address a wide range of pressing issues, including the cost of living, healthcare, elderly care, labour market activation, childcare, migrant support, sports and recreation, remote working, climate action, food security, and many other challenges. These demands will only intensify in the future, necessitating adequate support to encourage ongoing collaboration.

Investing in the social enterprise sector can yield significant benefits for our economy. Not only can it address societal issues and enhance local services, but it can also contribute to a doubling of the sector's GDP and increased employment among the socially excluded. Moreover, as businesses increasingly prioritise stakeholder value over shareholder value and environmental, social, and governance considerations become embedded, social enterprises embody these principles and demonstrate resilience while delivering value for money.

In light of the upcoming policy launch by the Department of Rural and Community Development, **we urge the government to demonstrate ambition and vision by investing €13.5 million in a Social Enterprise Transformation Fund to address the sector's 10 key roadblocks.** By acting now, the government can make a resounding commitment to the future of a sector which has shown its commitment to society during very challenging times.



Fergus Finlay
Chairperson, Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland (SERI)

Summary of Asks

Unlock the potential of the social enterprise sector through targeted investment in key areas.

We urge the government to demonstrate ambition and vision by investing €13.5 million in a Social Enterprise Transformation Fund to address the sector's 10 key roadblocks. By investing now, the government can make a resounding commitment to a sector which has shown its commitment to society during very challenging times.

Roadblocks	Asks	Cost (€m)
#1: Social enterprises can't access the same business support as private enterprises.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to Local Enterprise Office and Enterprise Ireland I grants and advice for all social enterprises• Increase the SICAP budget allocations to Local Development Companies and increase the maximum grant allowable to social enterprises from €2,500 to €5,000.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• €1.08• €0.9
#2: Less than 10% of social enterprises can avail of the Community Services Programme (CSP) due to funding constraints, which means they struggle to fund core staff costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce a pilot Shared Services Model under the Community Services Programme which provides funding for two or more social enterprises to hire a shared staff member.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• €1.85
#3: Social enterprises are struggling to progress current participants on labour market activation programmes with multiple employability barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Double the training grant for work-integration social enterprises whose participants are furthest from the labour market.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• €1.56

Summary of Asks (contd.)

Roadblocks	Asks	Cost (€m)
#4: The digital divide between private and social enterprises means social enterprises risk being left behind in the technological revolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure social enterprises can access supports, including the Digital Transition Fund and Trading Online Vouchers • Pilot a technology mentorship programme between social and private enterprises • Pilot a Skillnet Ireland upskilling programme for social enterprises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • €1.3 • €0.2 • €0.2
#5: Social enterprises are burdened with escalating business costs, which further strain their financial sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsidies or grants specifically designed for social enterprises to offset expenses, similar to the successful Community Support Fund and CVESS which assisted thousands of social enterprises across the country • Introduce a Social Enterprise Capital Fund 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • €2 • €1
#6: Lack of awareness of social enterprises among key stakeholders, including public representatives and state bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for a public awareness campaign similar to ARISE • Funding for Phase 2 of an social enterprise awareness campaign for public representatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • €0.5 • €0.1
#7: Lack of investment in circular economy social enterprises inhibits the achievement of Ireland's climate objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for local authorities to scale up small circular initiatives. • Funding to support social enterprises operating in the circular economy in seeking private investment with alternative funding mechanisms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • €1.3

Summary of Asks (contd.)

Roadblocks	Asks	Cost (€m)
#8: Social enterprises are not ready to avail of social procurement opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll out of a social enterprise verification process to Ireland • Develop an online platform which connects social enterprises with supply and demand-side partnerships for procurement • Develop a procurement-readiness programme specifically for social enterprises which covers the costs of procurement specialists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • €0.2 • €0.3 • €0.2
#9: Many scale-ready social enterprises are unable to take on social impact investment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for an awareness campaign of alternative legal forms for social enterprises - particularly those which enable social enterprises to access equity investment • Funding for a mentoring programme for social enterprises who wish to consider a change in legal structure to access equity investment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • €0.1 • €0.1
#10: Lack of funding support for a national representative body for social enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for the core costs of a national representative body for social enterprise in Ireland. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • €0.6

What is a social enterprise?



An organisation which seeks profits but uses them to advance its social, societal, or environmental purpose instead of primarily benefiting its members or investors, as purely commercial businesses do.

The National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022 defines a social enterprise as:

'an enterprise whose objective is to achieve a social, societal or environmental impact, rather than maximising profit for its owners or shareholders. It pursues its objectives by trading on an ongoing basis through the provision of goods and/or services, and by reinvesting surpluses into achieving social objectives. It is governed in a fully accountable and transparent manner'.

Social enterprise organisations in Ireland typically incorporate an 'asset lock' mechanism in their structure, which restricts or limits the distribution of property and income to the members, owners, or managers of the organisation.

As outlined in the policy, social enterprises *'make a valuable contribution to the social and economic progress of Ireland through the creation of jobs and through the delivery of a broad range of services in areas such as homecare, child care, employment activation, retail, hospitality and catering, environmental services, and social housing'.*

A sector at the heart of Irish society

Ireland has a rich and storied history of involvement in social enterprise, with numerous notable examples spanning various sectors and industries.



Ireland has a long history of involvement in social enterprise: the GAA, agricultural co-ops, the credit union movement, disability services, housing co-operatives, community games, childcare, homecare providers, community tourism, and creative arts.

Dr. Senan Cooke, Dunhill

Most social enterprises start out as a response by active citizens to a perceived local need. They are strongly rooted in their community and develop through trading activity carried out in their local town or village. The provision of disability services, housing co-operatives, work-integration social enterprises and community games further exemplify the diverse range of social enterprises in Ireland. These initiatives aim to enhance the quality of life for individuals with disabilities, long-term unemployed individuals, address housing challenges, and promote community engagement through recreational activities and competitions.

Social Enterprise in Ireland: A Baseline Data Collection Exercise

There are 4,335
social enterprises
operating in Ireland.

A recent report funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development, **'Social Enterprises in Ireland: A Baseline Data Collection Exercise'**, highlights the impressive impact of social enterprises in Ireland as well as challenges facing the sector.



AREAS OF FOCUS

Social enterprises work in various sectors, including Childcare, Community Infrastructure, Health, Youth Services & Social Care, and Heritage Festivals, Arts & Creative Industry.



EMPLOYEES

Employment figures highlight the significant role played by social enterprises as employers in Ireland. Presently, these enterprises provide jobs to 84,382 individuals (3.7% of the Irish workforce).



VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are critical to the success of social enterprises. Approximately 74,825 people actively volunteer in the social enterprise sector, including 30,324 as board members.



INCOME

40% have an annual income of less than €100,000 with a median annual income of all respondents of €180,000. The median annual income reduces to €80,000 in the case of rural social enterprises.

The government is making progress and momentum is building

The Government of Ireland has shown encouraging support for the social enterprise sector.

The programme for government, 'Our Shared Future,' includes a commitment to build upon Ireland's first-ever National Social Enterprise Policy.

Minister Heather Humphreys T.D., in her foreword to 'Social Enterprises in Ireland - A Baseline Data Collection Exercise,' expressed her belief in the potential of social enterprises to address new challenges and create a sustainable and inclusive future.

She emphasised the government's dedication to supporting social enterprises and their positive impact on Irish society, the economy, and the environment.



An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar T.D., visits Lough Ree Access For All - an innovative social enterprise in Roscommon providing accessible boat trips for people with disabilities.

Recognising the crucial role of social enterprises during the pandemic, **Minister for Finance, Michael McGrath T.D.**, emphasised their significant contribution.



Minister McGrath also acknowledged the return on investment of social finance in the sector, emphasising that while individual loans may not be sizable, their social impact far outweighs the monetary value.

An example of government support for social enterprises is evident through **Minister Simon Coveney T.D.**'s membership in Ludgate, a non-profit social enterprise. Ludgate's digital transformation initiatives have resulted in job creation, a strong community network, and programs nurturing growth and rural regeneration.

Five major political parties in Ireland (Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Green Party, Sinn Féin and Labour) have signed SERI's Social Enterprise Charter and appointed spokespeople for social enterprise and the government has made significant progress towards these hallmarks, including:

- Implementation of a National Policy for Social Enterprise
- Consultation process in advance of a second National Policy for Social Enterprise
- Publication of 'Social Enterprises in Ireland - A Baseline Data Collection Exercise.'
- Awareness Raising Initiatives for Social Enterprise (ARISE) Scheme
- Allocation of €20 million for the construction of new Community Centres
- Creation of additional Community Service Programme (CSP) roles, redesign of the programme and increase in wage subsidy grant
- Support of the Hybrid Social Finance Loan introduced by Community Finance Ireland, Rethink Ireland and DCU.

With the political will and ongoing commitment to supporting the sector's development, the social enterprise ecosystem in Ireland is poised for further growth and success.

10 roadblocks and what we can do about them

Roadblock #1: Social enterprises can't access the same business support as private enterprises



Access to tailored business supports and advisory services is crucial for the growth and sustainability of social enterprises. However, social enterprises often face barriers in accessing such support, as existing programmes and services are primarily designed for private businesses deemed 'commercially viable'.

For example, while Local Enterprise Office training supports are available to social enterprises in some counties, this is not the case across the country. Furthermore, social enterprises are deemed ineligible for vital growth funds offered by Local Enterprise Offices, such as Trading Online Vouchers, Feasibility Study Grants, Priming Grants and Business Expansion Grants.

As a result, it falls to other support organisations, such as the Local Development Companies, to provide business support and small grants. These supports, while valuable, are hampered by the maximum allowable grants under the SICAP programme (€2,500 for social enterprises).

The government should open enterprise funds to social enterprises and ensure countrywide access to Local Enterprise Office training. By levelling the playing field and providing equitable access to business support, social enterprises can thrive and contribute more effectively to economic and social development.

Existing government commitments:

- Policy Measures 9 and 10 in the National Social Enterprise Policy provide for:
- improved access to advice and supports to assist social enterprises and social entrepreneurs - including through Local Enterprise Office services and/or Local Development Companies, where appropriate - to develop their business proposals
- tailored training for social enterprises in areas such as business planning, mentoring, leadership, governance, capacity building, financial planning and digital innovation, to help them to improve their business potential as well as leadership and governance skills.

Recommendations from social enterprise practitioners:

- Access to Local Enterprise Office grants and advice for all social enterprises with <10 staff
- Access to Enterprise Ireland grants and advice for all social enterprises with >10 staff
- Increase the SICAP budget allocations to Local Development Companies and increase the maximum grant allowable to social enterprises from €2,500 to €5,000
- Fund research on the effectiveness of SICAP grants to social enterprises



Roadblock #2: Less than 10% of social enterprises can avail of the Community Services Programme (CSP) due to funding constraints, which means they struggle to fund core staff costs



Core staff members are essential for the successful operation and growth of social enterprises. One of the key measures to support the cost of core staff is DRCD's Community Services Programme (CSP) administered by Pobal. The purpose of the CSP is to support community organisations that operate with a social purpose to provide services that meet identified needs and provide employment locally contributing to sustainable, inclusive and empowered communities.

However, given the limited funding available under the Community Services Programme, just 420 of the 4,355 social enterprises in Ireland (9.7%) can access these vital supports. Given that few social enterprises exit the Community Services Programme, it is exceedingly difficult to access new funding rounds when they arise.

The government should explore options to enhance the accessibility and availability of the Community Services Programme through the piloting of a Shared Service Model to fund shared support roles across 2 or more social enterprises. This pilot model would aim to help social enterprises by sharing a staff member who will support them in areas such as governance and compliance, financial management, bookkeeping, marketing and communications and management.

It's important to stress that such a measure should not lead to reduced investment from the government in the broader Community Services Programme. Rather, it should be seen as a valuable addition to the programme, strengthening the impact and reach of social enterprises through collaboration.

Existing government commitments:

- Policy Measure 12 in the National Social Enterprise Policy provides for the identification of:
- any gaps which may exist in terms of financial support to social enterprises, including at start-up phase, and work to address those gaps.
- Our Rural Future Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 commits to the delivery of: a suite of new measures to support the development of Social Enterprises in rural areas to increase their social, economic and environmental impact and contribute to job creation locally.

Recommendations from social enterprise practitioners:

- Introduce a pilot Shared Services Model under Pobal's Community Services Programme (CSP) which provides funding for two or more social enterprises to hire a shared staff member
- Explore ring-fenced core funding for social enterprises outside of the Community Services Programme



Roadblock #3: Social enterprises are struggling to progress current participants on labour market activation programmes with multiple employability barriers

Labour market activation programmes, delivered as service level contracts by social enterprises on behalf of the state, play a crucial role in empowering individuals facing employment barriers, including the long-term unemployed and individuals with disabilities.

However, social enterprises are confronted with challenges in providing comprehensive support to programme participants due to insufficient funding allocated for training. In the context of full employment, those engaged in labour market programmes often consist of long-term unemployed people, furthest from the labour market, who require more intensive, deeper training and support.

For social enterprises engaged in delivering the Community Employment Scheme (CES) there are two issues that relate to the training grant provided. Firstly, the average training grant stands at €250 per person per year. As there has been no increase in the training grant for over a decade and given inflation in recent years, this amounts to a significant reduction in grant value. Secondly, the grant is ring-fenced for use on QQI accredited and related certified training only.

Given the profile of long term unemployed people, non-accredited training, in the form of bespoke personal development programmes, is required to improve employment outcomes and fill local job vacancies. We estimate the total cost of providing adequate training grants for the current cohort of Community Employment participants to be €12m. However the proposed measure below refers specifically to the cohort of participants employed by Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISE's) only.

Recommendations from social enterprise practitioners:

- Double the training grant for work-integration social enterprises whose participants are furthest from the labour market

Roadblock #4: The impending digital divide between private and social enterprises means social enterprises risk being left behind in the technological revolution



The rapid advancement of technology presents both opportunities and challenges for social enterprises. Incorporating technology into the back-office work of social enterprises offers opportunities such as streamlined operations, enhanced data analysis, improved marketing and outreach, strengthened governance and compliance, and increased collaboration and partnerships.

However, the lack of resources, expertise, and support in adopting new technologies puts social enterprises at risk of being left behind in the digital age. Without integrating technology, social enterprises may face inefficiencies in their operations, resulting in decreased productivity and higher costs. They may miss out on automation, streamlined processes, and data-driven insights that can enhance efficiency.

In a digital age where beneficiaries, customers and stakeholders increasingly expect convenience, accessibility, and online presence, social enterprises that lag in technology adoption may appear outdated or less appealing. This could lead to a decline in support, partnerships, and funding opportunities. The government can take proactive measures to bridge this digital divide by facilitating access to existing supports for private enterprises and fostering mentorship collaborations between social enterprises and private enterprises.

Existing government commitments:

- Policy Measures 10 and 12 in the National Social Enterprise Policy provide for:
 - tailored training for social enterprises in areas such as...digital innovation, to help them to improve their business potential as well as leadership and governance skills.
 - identifying any gaps which may exist in terms of financial support to social enterprises, including at start-up phase, and work to address those gaps.

Recommendations from social enterprise practitioners:

- Ensure social enterprises can access various supports provided to private enterprises under the Digital Transition Fund
- Facilitate access to the Trading Online Voucher for social enterprises.
- Pilot a mentorship collaboration between social enterprises and private enterprises with experience of technology adoption
- Pilot a Skillnet Ireland upskilling programme for social enterprises



Roadblock #5: Social enterprises are burdened with escalating business costs, which further strain their financial sustainability



These costs include rent, utilities, insurance, and compliance with regulations, among others. As social enterprises operate with a dual bottom line, balancing social impact and financial viability, these rising business costs pose a significant threat to their operations. The government should recognise the unique nature of social enterprises and provide targeted financial relief measures to alleviate the pressure of escalating business costs.

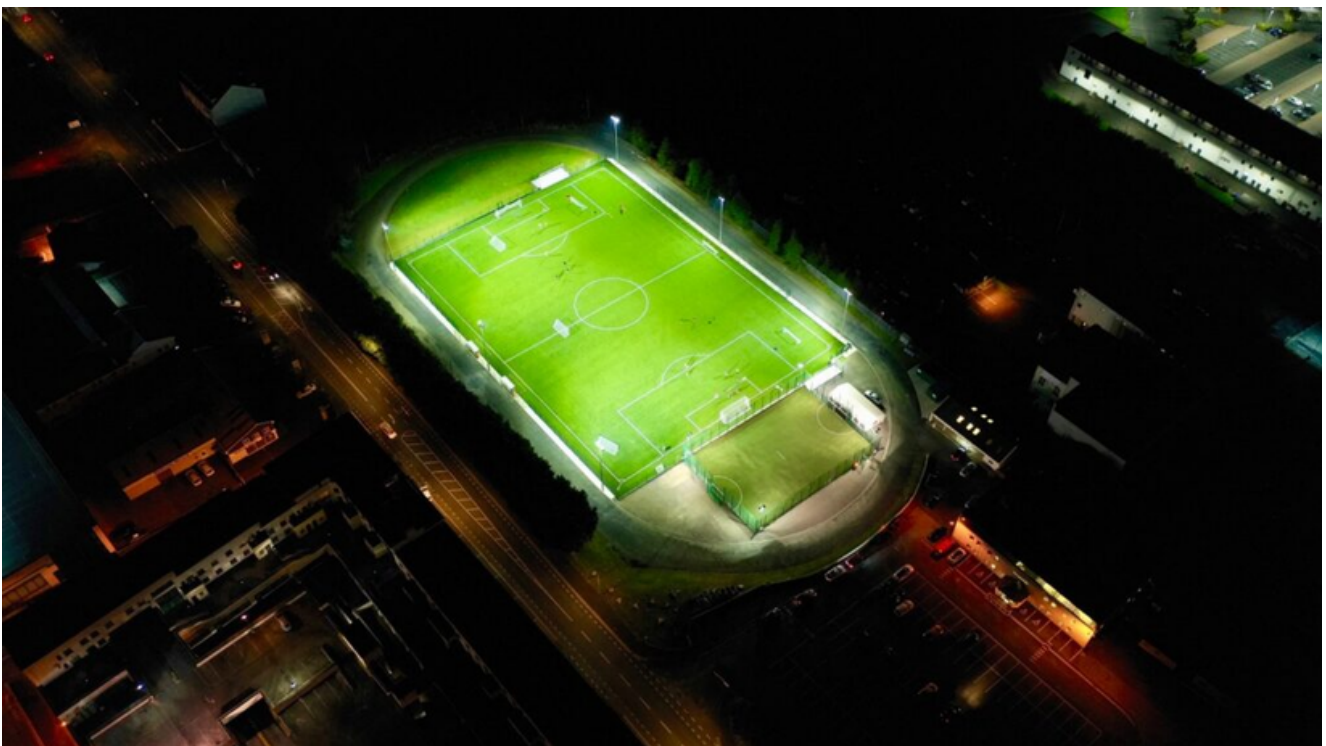
By addressing the issue of spiralling business costs, the government can alleviate the financial strain on social enterprises, allowing them to focus their resources on fulfilling their social missions and driving positive change within communities. Moreover, ensuring the financial sustainability of social enterprises will contribute to the overall economic growth and social well-being of the nation.

Another way social enterprises can seek support for costs is by corporate partnership. One of the aims of the National Social Enterprise Policy is to encourage private sector investment for supporting social enterprises, including through philanthropy and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. However, one obstacle faced by social enterprises is the lack of information regarding which corporations are receptive to CSR and the specific opportunities available for partnership.

To address this challenge, it could be beneficial to establish a register similar to Boardmatch, but specifically focused on CSR/ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) collaborations. This register would provide social enterprises with valuable insights into potential corporate partners and the nature of partnerships they offer, fostering greater transparency and facilitating meaningful connections between social enterprises and corporations committed to making a positive social impact.

Recommendations from social enterprise practitioners:

- Subsidies or grants specifically designed for social enterprises to offset expenses, similar to the successful Community Support Fund and Community and Voluntary Energy Support Scheme (CVESS) which assisted thousands of social enterprises across the country
- Introduce a Social Enterprise Capital Fund
- Establish a register similar to Boardmatch, but specifically focused on CSR/ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) collaborations



Roadblock #6: Lack of awareness of social enterprises among key stakeholders, including public representatives and state bodies



The lack of awareness about social enterprises can perpetuate a limited understanding of the potential of businesses to drive social change. This may lead to missed opportunities for collaboration between social enterprises, traditional businesses, and government entities to address societal challenges more effectively.

Addressing this challenge requires concerted efforts to raise awareness and educate key stakeholders about social enterprises and their impact. Advocacy campaigns, public-private collaborations, and targeted educational initiatives (such as DRCD's ARISE initiative) can play a crucial role in highlighting the benefits and significance of social enterprises in Irish society. By increasing awareness, understanding, and recognition of social enterprises, we can foster an environment that supports their growth, encourages investment, and harnesses their potential to drive positive change in Ireland.

Recommendation from social enterprise practitioners:

- Funding for a public awareness campaign similar to ARISE
- Funding for Phase 2 of an social enterprise awareness campaign for public representatives

Roadblock #7: Lack of investment in circular economy social enterprises inhibits the achievement of Ireland's climate objectives



Circular economy social enterprises make a significant contribution towards the achievement of Ireland's climate targets. For example, every year across Ireland, members of the Community Resources Network Ireland (CRNI) save 170,000 tonnes from landfill through reuse, repair and recycling activity. However, this is inhibited by the fact that an insignificant portion of funds from the new 'Circular Economy Fund' is earmarked for social enterprise reuse, repair and recycling activity.

Given Ireland's goal of reducing GHG emissions by 51% by 2030, and the community reuse sector's proven ability in reducing carbon emissions, we're backing CRNI's call for a fair portion of funds from the new 'Circular Economy Fund' to be allotted to these social enterprises, in line with their potential impact.

Recommendations from social enterprise practitioners:

- As recommended in the OECD's 'The Circular Economy in Ireland' report, and called for by CRNI, this could be achieved by providing funding streams to local authorities with the aim of supporting and scaling up small circular initiatives by setting up a dedicated local funding stream.
- Funds should be provided to Local Development Companies and/or Local Enterprise Offices to support social enterprises operating in the circular economy in seeking private investment with alternative funding mechanisms.

Roadblock #8: Social enterprises are not ready to avail of social procurement opportunities



Procurement opportunities present a significant avenue for social enterprises to generate sustainable income, expand their operations, and create more social impact. However, social enterprises often lack the capacity, resources, and expertise to navigate complex procurement processes, which hinders their ability to access these opportunities.

The government should provide tailored training programmes, establish mentorship initiatives, and simplify procurement processes to ensure that social enterprises can compete on an equal footing, access markets, and contribute to economic growth while addressing social challenges.

Existing government commitments:

- Policy Measures 16, 17 and 18 in the National Social Enterprise Policy provides for:
 - capacity-building for social enterprises in relation to procurement processes through workshops and training.
 - working with stakeholders to identify how to improve opportunities for social enterprises in the business-to-business supply-chain and in public procurement.
 - through the Social Considerations Advisory Group, helping policy makers to better understand how procurement can be used to facilitate the advancement of social policy objectives within appropriate and structured public procurement guidelines.

Recommendations from social enterprise practitioners:

- The introduction of a social enterprise verification process to Ireland will allow an assessment to be made on the actual appetite and the opportunities it potentially offers. This could assist with raising levels of awareness among commercial organisations and their interaction with the social enterprise sector
- Develop a collaboration online platform which connects social enterprises with supply and demand-side partnerships for procurement
- Develop a procurement-readiness programme specifically for social enterprises which covers the costs of procurement specialists to support social enterprises evaluate their existing procurement readiness as well as measures they can take to adapt their business model to become more procurement-ready
- Fund a social procurement initiative with one local authority to identify best practice and challenges



Roadblock #9: Many scale-ready social enterprises are unable to take on social impact investment.

Taking equity investment as a business provides significant advantages. It injects capital for growth and job creation while sharing financial risks with investors. This funding enables businesses to access expertise, industry networks, and knowledge, fostering innovation and competitiveness. Equity investment stimulates economic growth, reduces unemployment, and builds long-term partnerships for sustained support.

Social impact investing differs slightly from traditional investing in that it provides finance to organisations addressing social and/or environmental needs with the explicit expectation of a measurable social, as well as financial, return. It thus aims to foster economic development while achieving social outcomes. It is one way of channelling more resources towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, the legal structures traditionally adopted by social enterprises in Ireland, Company Limited by Guarantee (77% of social enterprises) and registered charity (88% of social enterprises), prohibit equity investment.



While a 2021 Rethink Ireland report, funded by DRCD, 'Research On Legal Form For Social Enterprises', recommended against adopting a new legal structure to address this issue, it suggested that there is a need to support social enterprises to maximise the use of current legal forms to meet their investment needs. For social enterprises that are scaling, and require private equity investment, the report recommended that:

Models and uses of existing legal forms (for example, establishment of Designated Activity Companies with share capital) should be explored and documented. Consideration should be given to applying legal resources to social enterprises which are actively pursuing these forms of finance.

Recommendation from social enterprise practitioners:

- Funding for an awareness campaign of alternative legal forms for social enterprises - particularly those which enable social enterprises to access equity investment
- Funding for a mentoring programme for social enterprises who wish to consider a change in legal structure to access equity investment



Roadblock #10: Lack of funding support for a national representative body for social enterprise



The social enterprise sector in Ireland is facing significant challenges due to the lack of government funding allocated to support a representative body for the sector. As an example of international best practice, the Scottish government invested in Scotland's national infrastructure of representation and support for social enterprises, to raise public awareness of social enterprise and enable more community and voluntary organisations to understand social enterprise and embrace its potential.

By investing in a representative body, the government can unlock numerous benefits that align with its goals and priorities. Firstly, a representative body can serve as a unified voice for the social enterprise sector, effectively advocating for its interests and contributing to the formulation of policies that promote economic growth, social inclusion, and sustainable development. This collaboration can enhance the government's ability to design effective strategies and programmes, leveraging the sector's expertise and insights.

Furthermore, a representative body can facilitate increased coordination and collaboration among social enterprises, government agencies, and other stakeholders. This collective approach fosters innovation, knowledge sharing, and the efficient use of resources, ultimately leading to improved outcomes and greater social impact. By supporting a representative body, the government can tap into the sector's potential for job creation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development.

Additionally, a funded representative body can help the government assess the effectiveness of its policies, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions based on reliable data and evidence. Moreover, a representative body can work with social enterprise support organisations to co-design capacity building initiatives, providing training, mentoring, and networking opportunities for social enterprise leaders. This investment in skills development can enhance the sector's efficiency, productivity, and competitiveness, aligning with the government's broader objectives of fostering a dynamic and resilient economy.

Lastly, supporting a representative body demonstrates the government's commitment to social innovation and its recognition of the social enterprise sector as a valuable partner in addressing complex societal challenges. By nurturing an enabling environment for social enterprises to thrive, the government can harness their creativity, expertise, and community-oriented approach to achieve shared objectives, such as poverty alleviation, sustainable development, and social cohesion.

Recommendations from social enterprise practitioners:

- Funding for the core costs of a national representative body for social enterprise in Ireland

About Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland (SERI)

A representative body for the social enterprise sector in Ireland. Led by practitioners.

Board members
(in alphabetical order):

Brendan Whelan
Fergus Finlay, Chairperson
John Kearns
John P. Murphy
Lorraine Corcoran
Michelle Fogarty
Pádraig Casey
Páraig Hennessy
Senan Cooke
Shauna McClenaghan
Tim Griffiths

Practitioner Council
(in alphabetical order):

Catherine Coote
Damian Howard
Dara Connolly
David Neville
Donal Traynor
Fiona Nolan
Hugh Brennan
Janet O'Toole
Joseph Fogarty
Karen O'Donohoe
Kathy Purcell
Linda Ledger
Pascal Derrien
Patrick Mulvihill
Karen Leigh
Robert Finan
Rosemary Kunene
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