

European Competence Centre for Social Innovation:  
National Competence Centres Working Group under the ESF+ Community of Practice  
on Social Innovation and Transnational Calls Team

## **National Competence Centres Mutual Learning Event 'Social Innovation Portfolios in Practice: Building Advocacy for Systemic Change'**

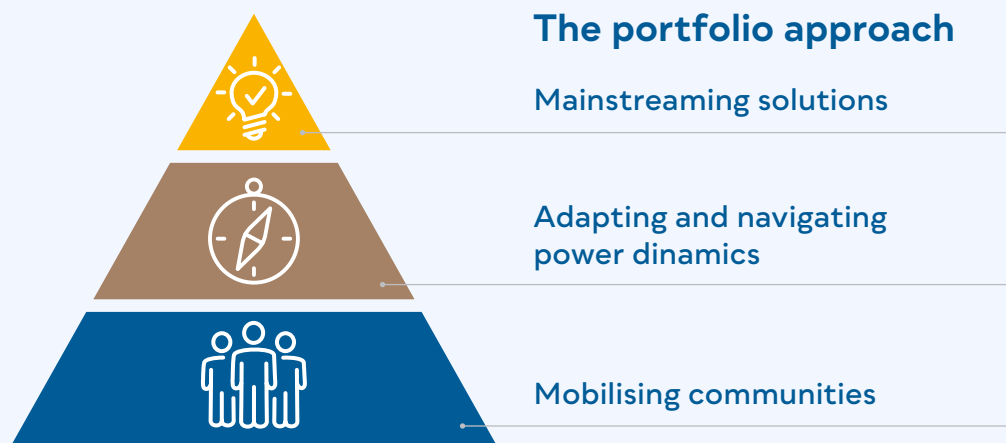
Madrid, Spain  
4-5 May

### **Building resilience and mainstreaming solutions through the portfolio approach**

Across Europe, funders and policy makers struggle to develop and to mainstream solutions to societal challenges, within complex, often contested systems. Persistent societal challenges such as homelessness, long-term unemployment, disability inclusion and environmental-related vulnerability cannot be solved through single, stand-alone innovations. They require adaptive, system-level approaches that recognise power dynamics, elevate marginalised voices, and enable continuous learning across multiple sectors and interventions.

Building portfolios of experimentation and mainstreaming that connect various initiatives and all relevant actors in real time allows for a shift from a project-based approach to a broader, system-level perspective. This enables the management of risks associated with disruptive initiatives, the natural acceptance of trial and error, and the strategic reinforcement of those initiatives that produce the strongest evidence of impact and that can gain traction within wider systems. Innovative solutions are supported to adapt as they are scaled and mainstreamed within wider systems and supporters are mobilised into movements within fields. Portfolio approaches have been used to build resilience and instigate improvements to social, health and environmental systems.

For Member States, European institutions and philanthropic funders the challenge is not whether to engage communities, but how to embed this engagement at scale and ensure that marginalised voices are effectively involved. Using approaches like action research and developmental evaluation across multiple sites of innovation, enables funders to identify common challenges, share solutions and ingrain learning and adaptation into the implementation of scaling and mainstreaming.



Oftentimes, social innovations are focused on developing individual solutions intended to be scaled largely intact within systems. In reality, such approaches often fail to create meaningful societal change and remain rooted in isolated community contexts. This gap highlights the need for new ways of supporting and scaling social innovation. Building portfolios of experimentation and mainstreaming that connect initiatives and all relevant actors in real time enables a shift from project-based interventions to a system-level perspective.

### **What does this look like in practice?**

In Spain, the VIDAS Platform used a developmental evaluation approach that actively listened to citizen voices, resulting in the co-creation of 105 innovative actions responding to community-identified needs. The La Caixa Foundation uses the portfolio extensively in its work to develop and scale solutions. In Ireland, the Housing First programme combines housing, health and lived-experience collaboration to address long-term homelessness. By learning through action research from experimentation to solve implementation challenges (sourcing appropriate accommodation, integrating mental health and addiction support etc.), the national health and accommodation systems were able to rapidly scale the innovation across every region in the country.