**The biggest trends for Social Innovation in 2020**

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The year 2020 represents the beginning of a new decade, the third of the 21st century. The social, economic or environmental challenges which societies will have to face in future years will force governments, corporations, organizations and citizens to face them globally with responsibility, creativity and urgency. In a context characterized by globalization, uncertainty and complexity, innovation becomes a key lever to foster growth, development and the sustainability of our contemporary societies. According to Frost&Sullivan[[1]](#footnote-1), this decade will be characterized by “the need to harmonise multiple types of innovation to address complex and interlinked global societal challenges” and in this sense, the notion of “convergence” regarding social innovation becomes crucial.

As evident in previous years, global challenges, as stated in the **Sustainable Development Goals** of the United Nations[[2]](#footnote-2), cannot be met from a unilateral perspective, and social innovation is recognized as an important component to this new framework. They demand innovative solutions implemented jointly by the whole society and accomplished with a **mission-oriented approach** which brings us to a New Innovation Paradigm[[3]](#footnote-3). Social innovation cannot be understood any longer as a siloed field. what becomes prominent is the need to foster the potential of social innovation through a constructive approach which requires interaction between both sectors and actors, as well as interdisciplinarity to solve grand challenges.

The **relationship between democracy and social innovation** will lead us to another level of understanding about what democracy is, how to build more democratic institutions, organisations and societies and how democracy can be encouraged. In this sense, social Innovation can support democracy by applying the social innovation processes to promote public participation and engage citizens to build a socially sustainable future. Social innovation can also help the systemic transformation of society and its institutions., but to do this, “political leaders must foster innovations in participatory democracies at a much bigger scale”.

Following this vein, social innovation will be present in the next EU funding program, Horizonte Europe, as a cross-cutting issue, essential for building the future of the continent and the wellbeing of all European citizens. There is a common acknowledgement that social innovations are able to respond to the megatrends of our society and cope with future challenges such as globalization, sustainability, digitalization, demographic or climate change. Emerging pressures such as migration, ageing or the urbanization of the world will put the focus on social innovations as facilitators of sustainable solutions to their challenges.

**Eight trends to watch out for regarding social innovation in 2020**

Within this framework, in 2020 social innovation will be related to:

**Sustainable Development Goals and Social Innovation.** To achieve the 17 goals set by 2030 it will require new forms of innovation in development but also for development. In this sense, social innovation is an specific element to work with across the 17 SDGs in order to help meet societal needs.

**Urbanization and social innovation.** The world is becoming prominently urban**.** The role of cities is reinforced as spaces for experimentation and laboratories of opportunities to build **Smart, Green, Sustainable, Equitable, Inclusive and Resilient** societies.

**Migration and Social Innovation**. Migration is becoming an urgent and challenging issue for Europe which hosts regionally the largest number of international migrants (82 million)[[4]](#footnote-4). Social innovation has a lot to offer to the challenge of migration. Since 2015, year in which Europe experienced an unprecedented arrival of refuges and irregular migrants, several initiatives from the public and private sector as well as from society have emerged bringing up bright ideas to pave the way to integrate the newcomers into European culture and countries.

**Social system and social innovation**. In a decade with more people aged over 30 than under[[5]](#footnote-5), the decade of the “yold” as named by the John Parker[[6]](#footnote-6), it is imperative to rethink how to improve our social system and make them more inclusive and equalitarian, in terms of education, healthcare or cultural services. Social innovation offers us a new perspective from which the complex problems of our societies can be tackled and also the capacities of our communities and individuals can be empowered, changing the relationships between people, which result in greater social inclusion.

**Climate change and Social Innovation.** Climate change is one of the most urgent challenges of this century. Actions to combat climate change have gained the attention of social innovation practitioners, innovators and the community as a whole. Social innovation actions regarding the mitigation of climate change can be split into several missions designed to cope with smaller but real objectives to combat this daunting challenge. Among these initiatives we can found the following: moving away from fossil fuels, looking for alternatives to the use of plastic or fostering re-forestation, among others.

**Technological development and social innovation** Despite the undoubted value of the digital world, new digital technologies will transform our societies as we know. From the education field to the work environment, from policy making to the forms of relationships, our societies will experience radical changes. Digital Social Innovation (DSI) has a huge potential to strengthen collaborative and open technologies to tackle some of the most prominent challenges in Europe.

**Circular economy and social innovation**. In 2015, the EU launched the [Circular Economy Action Plan](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/index_en.htm) which defined a set of actions to be implemented by member states in order to deal with future challenges and paving the way towards a climate-neutral, circular economy where pressure on natural and freshwater resources as well as ecosystems is minimised.  In 2020, the EU will continue to make a strong commitment to the circular economy, and thus, social innovation finds fertile ground for its development

**The future of work and social innovation**. In a world of constant change, societies will need to be more *intuitive*, to sense and respond to new technological opportunities, social challenges, and citizen’s needs and it is here where social innovation can find its role to make societies more inclusive, resilient and equal.

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1. Frost&Sullivan 2014. The Whitepaper Social Innovation to answer Societal Challenges. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Sustainable Development Goals were set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 for the year 2030. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Howaldt, J. (2019). Rethinking Innovation: Social Innovation as Important Part of a New Paradigm. En J. /. Howaldt, *Atlas of Social Innovation: A world of new Practices* (Vol. 2, págs. 15-20). Munich: oekom Verlag GmbH. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2019. The International Migrant Stock 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. By 2030, the population aged 65+ in Europe is expected to reach at 88 million. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Parker John 2020, “The decade of the yold” in The World in 2020. 21st of November 2019. The Economist. <https://worldin.economist.com/edition/2020/article/17316/decade-young-old-begins> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)