Three Years on: a rapid review of an endurance sport

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120 applications were received from 22 countries in the ESCF Call for proposals in 2020. Financial and non-financial support was offered in 2021 to 7 selected organisations/consortia to develop **plans to scale proven innovations** in 16 countries, 7 of which were in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

This rapid review sought to discover how the scaling journeys had progressed in the three years since 2021. Semi-structured interviews were held with project leads for six of the seven ESCF projects and built around these questions:

1. Where was your project/innovation before selection for the ESCF?
2. What financial and knowhow support did the ESCF offer you? Where else did you turn for support?
3. Where is your project/innovation now in terms of scaling up and impact?

Case studies of each selected project bar one follow in table format, setting innovations working on similar societal challenges alongside each other, taking each question in turn. A reflection on some contrasting themes in their scaling routes and journeys wraps up the review.

What emerges is **six quite different scaling journeys** whereby European networks, projects and funds connect organisations with similar missions but approaches have to be flexed to the national context and delivery to the regional and local setting. **ESCF had played a role in resourcing and/or knowledge development** for all the social innovation owners. For the more formalised innovations owned by mature organisations, ESCF provided scarce financial resources dedicated to strategic development rather than frontline delivery. For those with more shared ownership around key principles, it provided them with social innovation knowhow to expand their thinking beyond service delivery _and_ the resources to make specific plans.

Three years on, **the six innovation promoters show ongoing commitment** to the cause area or principles of their initiative as presented within ESCF. All continued to be part of European/ international networks and projects that serve as engines of expansion, research and policy. Several show strong presence in the policy-political sphere either in either adversarial or cooperative ways in different places and levels of governance at different times.

There are some small signs in online materials that they've taken on language from ESCF about lived experience and scaling-up. Although the social innovations may have had 'lived experience' knowledge at their origins, there was no indication that 'lived experience' was specifically valuable to the scaling-up process. Duo and IPS can show (do show) **strong numerical growth** in terms of people reached; others show expansion from pilot to pilot reaching small numbers in new territories. Those working through open adoption rather than branching or affiliation, it is **unclear how to measure numerical growth** as there isn't affinity to a defined model.

The networks and organisations involved in scaling these social innovations experience the process as **complex, messy and stop-start**. Scaling journeys don't tend to conform to neat plans; they defy project management and risk registers. There are substantial external and unpredictable dependencies which mean that as we move further up the Genio pyramid (fig 2), it becomes more

helpful to think of government bodies 'adopting' innovations than of promoters 'scaling' them. In order to make some sense of these idiosyncratic scaling journeys, we have made inferences from the interviews to categorise the routes and journeys within the European knowledge base.

Figure 1 Scaling routes from European Commission (2022)

Figure 2 Scaling journey Trowbridge 2022/Genio 2019

On this basis, almost all **ESCF projects have moved up at least one step** in at least one country in the scaling journey from 2020 to 2024, the least progress being made in the most polarised context. **Affiliation is the most common scaling route**, followed by open adoption.

Innovation	Scaling route[1]	Scaling journey 2020-24[2]	ESCF benefits
Duo for a Job #1	Branching	Interconnected demos in Belgium > Partial adoption in Belgium > Pilot in France and Netherlands > Interconnected demo projects in France	Financial resources
Alternatives to Detention #2	Open adoption	Interconnected demo projects (different models around general principles)	Financial resources and knowledge transfer
Long Live the Elderly #3	Affiliation	Interconnected demo projects in Italy > pilot in Belgium	Financial resources and knowledge transfer
Individual Placement & Support #4	Affiliation	Interconnected demo projects Denmark and UK > partial adoption in Denmark > close to consistent adoption in Denmark > pre-pilot awareness in three countries > closed pilot in France	Financial resources and knowledge transfer
ASSIST (SUITE) #5	Affiliation	Pilot in ES to Interconnected Demos in IT	Financial resources and knowledge transfer
Social Housing Agency #6	Open adoption	Pilot in HU to pilots in Poland, Slovakia, Romania	Financial resources and knowledge transfer

[1] From: European Commission (2022) Scaling Up Social Innovation: Seven Steps for Using ESF+ p37. Web:
https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1f092971-e08c-11ec-a534-01aa75ed71a1/language-en
[2] From: Trowbridge et al (2022) Learning As You Scale: Genio and PVM p11. Web:
https://www.genio.ie/system/files/publications/Learning_as_you_scale.pdf

	Duo for a Job #1	**Alternatives to Detention (ATD)** #2
Objective	*To scale a programme for young people with a non-EU migrant background to find a job with the guidance of 50+ mentors.*	*To increase adoption of community-based alternatives to detention of non-EU migrants based on social work.*
Where was your project/innovation before selection for the European Social Catalyst Fund?	Duo started out as a small-scale social innovation in Brussels and was selected for a Social Impact Bond (SIB). The consultancy firm Roland Berger conducted a pro bono social impact evaluation as part of the SIB. Duo had already experienced city-to-city scaling (replication) in different regions of **Belgium**, whose political and linguistic differences they consider a good learning ground for wider scaling.	Alternatives to Detention of migrants and refugees, especially children, was and remains a rights-based campaign movement taking place in a highly politicised environment. The **European** ATD network provides members not only with knowledge but also moral support for each other. There are various alternative models to detention so it's not possible to quantify the 'scaling'.
What financial and knowhow support did the European Social Catalyst Fund offer you? Where else did you turn for support?	For Duo, the funding leveraged resources for directors to research and promote the model in new territories and resource back-office functions like knowledge management, HR, IT and finance. Most funders - public, private and philanthropic - like to fund frontline services but ESCF allowed funding for strategic development. They felt able to share some of their social innovation and scaling knowhow from Belgium with other ESCF projects. After ESCF, Roland Berger has advised to pause expansion to other countries to consolidate their growth in **France**, **Belgium** and **Netherlands**. In France, they are very involved with Epic Foundation for funding and networking; with Ashoka for networking and office space; with Collectif Mentorat to systematise and promote mentoring methods.	The ESCF programme was valued because it offered the capacity to think strategically about the aims and how to get there ("to help us find our compass"), whereas other funders want to see delivery projects. The hope was that **EU funding** would follow from the ESCF capacity-building but this hasn't materialised despite several bids to the Citizenship programme. It is impossible to know what role ESCF played in recent developments because ATD is a long-running campaign, rather than a new social innovation selected for scaling potential. The language of social innovation and scaling is not in the ATD network's daily vocabulary, whereas rights and advocacy are.
Where is your project/innovation now in terms of scaling up and impact?	This extensive networking inside **France** has had a snowball effect, whereby their presence grew from one base in Paris serving seven duos in 2019 to 3 bases serving 400 duos countrywide, a fourth base opening in Lyon in 2024. Each new location was almost always opened thanks to a private or philanthropic funder in France: public authorities want to see a tangible presence in their location before funding it. The first step was always to have a researcher scope the situation in each potential new location **Spain** is the next potential country, but Duo had slowed down expansion here two years ago to focus on consolidation. One of the Managing Directors now lives in Barcelona, has links with potential funders and Duo has just won ESF+ funding for the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation to assess scalability in Spain. Duo has also appeared at the European Mentoring Summit so is active at EU level.	The ATD network has had to be very adaptable to changing political colours of governments at various levels. The **EU's European Pact on Migration and Asylum** has become more pro-detention, so the EU policy environment has become less amenable to ATD advocacy. However the technical relationship with DG Home remains good. Meanwhile the **Belgian** federal government has passed a law against detention of child migrants unlike the rest of **Europe**. **Italy's** national government has become more hostile to migration after an election so ATD partners are working more with Regions and cities. The recurring theme here was the politicisation of migration: the immense difficulty of "departing from a point of disagreement": migration good vs migration bad. If migration is bad, then detention is preferred; if it's good, the community-based integration is preferred.
	Long Live the Elderly (LLE) #3	**Individual Placement and Support (IPS)** #4

Objective	*To scale a community-based pro-active monitoring programme targeting people aged over 80 living alone with frailty.*	*To scale IPS for people with severe and enduring mental health conditions to gain and sustain paid employment.*
Where was your project/innovation before selection for the European Social Catalyst Fund?	The impetus for LLE was the European heatwave of 2003 in which thousands of isolated elderly people died. The approach combines Catholic social teaching with public health evidence. By the time of ESCF, LLE had expanded from Rome around different cities (Rome, Genoa, Napoli) in **Italy** and from 2016 onwards from cities to smaller neighbouring towns and rural areas. Over time, the LLE team learnt that isolation affected older people in other European countries too and began to reach out to other Sant'Egidio communities.	Several European organisations, including a **Danish** academic thinktank, found each other at an **American** conference on IPS in 2019 and decided to convene a European network to promote IPS collectively. Together, they had institutionalised knowledge and have mapped stakeholders and potential philanthropic funders.
What financial and knowhow support did the European Social Catalyst Fund offer you? Where else did you turn for support?	ESCF was attractive because it allowed Sant'Egidio to centre the LLE approach rather than following a pre-determined policy objective e.g. of a European funding bid or of a philanthropic foundation. Not only did it offer financial support to explore scaling-up, it also guided them on how to scope replicability, how to frame LLE as a scalable social innovation appealing to policy-makers in other European countries. This led directly to the introduction of LLE in one district of **Antwerp** funded from 2022 by the City and the Region. LLE has not participated in other European projects and networks due to the risk of mission drift as projects tend to be attached to pre-determined policy goals.	In 2020/21, the network participated in ESCF, whose added-value was the discipline of planning and reporting and centring lived experience ("it kept us honest"). As the project lead was already a convenor and enabler of SIBs with significant internal knowledge, they felt able to share knowhow within ESCF rather gaining knowledge from the process. There is a critique of the ESCF approach that the cohort of scalers was too varied to allow transferable learning. The funding, however, was a rare opportunity to resource a strategic approach to growth. The **Danish** thinktank had learnt how to communicate academic evidence in the policy sphere: "this would never have happened without ESCF".
Where is your project/innovation now in terms of scaling up and impact?	There has been no progress in **Prague** or **Warsaw** but now there are good prospects for 2025 in Barcelona with the Region of **Catalonia** due to the initial replication in Antwerp, showing the **Catalans** that this is not just an **Italian** but a **European social innovation**. Back home in Italy, assessment of frailty has been put at the centre of a planned transformation of community care supported by the post-Covid **EU Recovery Fund**.	After an early setback where central government rejected RCT evidence, IPS was adopted in a few municipalities in **Denmark**, promoted by an academic thinktank and co-funded by a major foundation Then policy guidance changed and IPS was adopted and is being rolled out across all municipalities (running employment services) with the participation of psychiatric services (from the regional health service). There are now opportunities to adopt IPS in the law governing job centres as it already is in the 10-year plan for psychiatric services. In **France**, IPS was trialled for disabled people but became politicised. In **Czechia** it has been rolled out in two Regions on the basis of modelling future savings. In **Croatia**, **Moldova** and **Spain** there is professional interest in IPS but no funding yet for a pilot.
	Home Energy Advisors (HEA) #5	**Social Housing Agency (SHA)** #6
Objective	*To scale SUITE to reduce energy poverty by giving training and support to social services providers.*	*Planning scale-up strategies to create affordable housing for homeless, vulnerable and low-middle income groups in CEE*

Where was your project/innovation before selection for the European Social Catalyst Fund?	In **Catalonia** (Spain), Ecoserveis has been running for 30+ years and In Italy, AISFOR is an institute with a similar mission to ECOSERVEIS. ASSIST had been a **Horizon 2020** project researching energy poverty advisory structures in Europe. This R&D project gathered and codified the knowledge for the competences and qualities of the role of household energy advisor, whether paid or voluntary. Some of the same partners, led by AISFOR and ECOSERVEIS, continued the journey in SUITE which was selected for ESCF in 2020. Provision of Home Energy Advisors was the key part of both.	Streets for Homes NGO and Metropolitan Research Institute had been worked together since 2015 in Budapest. Originally MRI had brought the idea of SHAs into **Hungary** with a conference but would not follow through on implementation of pilots with municipalities. Through community fundraising, the NGO grew their own SHA to 40 apartments then made the offer of support to Hungarian municipalities. City of Budapest and two districts began to work with them in 2019 as they have very low social housing stock compared to European comparators.
What financial and knowhow support did the European Social Catalyst Fund offer you? Where else did you turn for support?	Other research & development (R&D) programmes offer operational, technical and managerial support but not the capacity-building around the strategic vision around social innovation and scaling-up: this is what they got from ESCF. Social Innovation to them means identifying the societal challenge and working out what products and services would solve it. ESCF provided the meeting points and some input that led to their winning a capacity-building tender from the **European Commission**.	They applied to ESCF in order to develop a handbook (implementation guidance) for municipalities in **Hungary** starting in Budapest. Their Polish partner Habitat for Humanity worked well with them in ESCF but the Spanish one was sidetracked by the Covid19 response. Genio staff were clear and supportive throughout; the NGO had to make some inconvenient changes to their contract for ESCF in the early days but later saw these were beneficial and constructive. The Hungarian partners are familiar with social innovation because it is common to international donors on whom they depend because of the polarised politics in Hungary. ESCF affirmed for them that scaling up should be not just about growing their own organisation but inviting public sector partners to adopt their innovation. There is disappointment from the partners in Budapest that further funding for scaling-up was not forthcoming in an ESCF II.
Where is your project/innovation now in terms of scaling up and impact?	In the **Catalan** and **Italian** cases, the scaling plans under ESCF were sound but the two-year time-frame was unrealistic. The province of Barcelona has allocated 0.5m EUR per year for four years to deploy energy advisors for poor households, working jointly with a major NGO. AISFOR has now created a separate NGO to promote the role of home energy advisor (HEAs) in Italy working through a mix of 200 public sector partners (social landlords) and NGOs. The partners in CEE were more remote and lost touch with AISFOR and ECOSERVEIS in the absence of a funded project. The **Polish** and **Hungarian** partners were in the public sector themselves, where they found it hard for them to advocate for a new model internally.	SHA pilot implementation was ready to start in 2022 in **Budapest** but was delayed by two years due to the Ukrainian war. Now, the NGO's Director is seconded to develop the approach in the City of Budapest housing department. Previous policies tended to offer rental support but not a real systemic change like having well-managed social housing. Three new municipalities outside Budapest have also responded and are assigning resources and personnel to small pilots covering tens of housing units. **Bratislava** and **Bucharest** are also designing small pilots. Things have moved much faster in **Poland** where having a larger better-resourced NGO and a slightly less polarised politics has led to wider adoption by municipalities and legislative reform favouring but not mandating SHAs.

There are differences in emphasis between the projects depending on their origins: Duo and IPS have a track record of RCTs and SIBs which gives them greater **familiarity with social innovation thinking**. The ATD network acknowledges that social innovation is not part of its daily vocabulary: they see themselves as a **rights-based civil society movement** engaged in systems change strategy, which is how they approached ESCF. The SHA proponents are familiar with social innovation because of their dependence on international donors.

Whereas most scaling innovations are (to varying degrees) **codified replicable approaches** founded on a research basis, ATD is an outlier as a plural grouping of *alternatives* to detention. The ATD network defines itself against the injustice of detention and in favour of a range of innovative community-based ways of welcoming refugees and migrants developed in partnership with local or regional policy-makers, sometimes being criticised by other parts of civil society for compromises. They see themselves as **creative and innovative without being social innovation practitioners**. European ATD network members see themselves as learning lessons, adapting and replicating approaches flexibly across borders. Like ATD, the SHA model in CEE, especially Hungary, is being promoted in **a polarised context**, in which street homelessness has been criminalised and human rights activists have been targeted by police.

Funding sources along the scaling journey are also highly variable. Most projects ultimately have the **ambition of consistent adoption** within the scope of the national welfare state, but recognise that to move in that direction, they often work first with philanthropic funders, in bigger countries on a regional basis, then seek adoption by a large city, then spread from city to city and to neighbouring towns. In the Danish case, where welfare is highly decentralised, the **widespread adoption by municipalities**, meant that national policy guidance had to catch up. In the case of LLE, there has been no philanthropic funding, but the spread across Italy has still been effective and now out to one site in Belgium and potentially one in Spain in the near future. In SHA case, it is NGO fundraising not major philanthropy resourcing the micro pilots, leading then to small-scale pilots in big cities.

It is striking that the innovations being promoted by Western European organisations that included **plans to scale in CEE** countries did not succeed with the exception of IPS in Czechia. However, SHA, while not originated in CEE, is being promoted by a CEE-based NGO and thinktank and is spreading through small pilots from Hungary to neighbouring countries. Duo for a Job has found France quite open to its model but the Netherlands quite closed, and they don't currently understand why this is. The LLE lead thinks that the likely pilot in Barcelona next year is due to having a pilot in Belgium not just interconnected demonstration projects in Italy.

Three innovations (SHA, ATD, IPS) have made progress at regional and local level, after facing setbacks at the national level, which seems to be more susceptible to **political polarisation**. Most have some kind of ambition around **EU-level funding** bar LLE which fears mission drift. It is the SUITE/ASSIST partners that have become best-placed at EU level: AISFOR and ECOSERVEIS are two co-hosts of the Energy Poverty Advisory Hub (EPAH) working closely with the Commission. They spotted this on the publicly available funding portal, not through any insider information or networking. They have run this for the last four years and were developing the bid at the same time as learning from the ESCF programme. Under EPAH, municipalities individually make requests for technical assistance, but this hadn't provided opportunities for promoting the HEA role; rather for other more technical innovations and solutions offered by the co-hosts. The same partners have now just submitted a proposal to a new four-year EPAH tender, into which the EC has incorporated an innovation workstream, which creates a space where the HEA role could be promoted as a scalable social innovation.

Finally, scaling of social innovations seems to be **an endurance sport with no finish line**, in which mission-driven organisations hold fast to their values and work with a range of partners and policy-makers, facing changing politics, resisting mission drift, and navigating donor demand for innovation. Asked about the origins of their projects/innovations, all interviewees refer back at least a decade. All would like to see an ESCF II that would provide direct resources for delivery in a new location and have already proven their resilience. Whenever the next major opportunity comes, they will be ready to seize it.