



MU.ST.SEE

*Connecting Skills for
the social economy*

*MU*lti-stakeholder cooperation
to *ST*rengthen skills development for
*S*ocial Economy Entrepreneurship

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Recommendations

*for replication to share good solutions for building resilience of local
communities through Social economy across Europe*



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Key topics and recommendations

The following topics and recommendations have been identified in the Local Action Plans which propose local solutions for the development and implementation of policies and measures about training for the Social economy.

As already anticipated in the Application form, the recommendations are aimed at distilling from the project's WPs the feedback and the key messages about:

- a) the **multi-stakeholder governance and policy-related frameworks** that better support SE organisations and more inclusive and sustainable market conditions,
- b) the **methodological implications** for initial training, for continuous professional development and structured networking for SE organisations, so to keep up to the challenges that the recovery period is bringing forward;
- c) the **technological perspectives** that can facilitate training, continuous professional development and social learning, as well as collaborative processes that can connect the different stakeholders and target groups.

Based on the rich and inspiring work carried out in the four partner territories with varied groups of SE stakeholders and local public authorities, additional topics have been identified related to **ongoing adaptation of specific competence frameworks and training provisions**, accounting for changing training needs analysis, and **appropriate resourcing**.

The present recommendations address the agenda of local policymakers and public authorities, and of SE organisations and associations, consistently with the idea that only constructive collaboration among these constituencies can generate viable and durable conditions for the SE.

General conditions for training for the social economy players

Introductory overview

The social economy in European countries has been developing as a full-fledged model in the past decade, with the contribution of authorities and undertakers at the national and international level. The European Commission has recently adopted the **Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP)**, which provides a vision and a specific framework to inspire and steer social economy (SE) organisations in the EU ^{[1][2][3][4][6]}. The SEAP aims to help mobilise the full potential of the social economy by improving the right framework conditions, including visibility and recognition, access to finance and markets, and support for capacity building ^{[1][3]}. The social economy is made up of a diversity of enterprises and organisations, such as cooperatives, mutuals, associations, foundations, and social enterprises, which are united around the values of the primacy of people and the social objective over capital, democratic governance, solidarity, and the reinvestment of most profits to carry out sustainable development objectives ^[2]. The SEAP proposes various actions for 2021-2030, focusing on state aid, legal frameworks, socially responsible public procurement, and international collaboration ^[4].

The European Commission has also launched the **Skills for Europe plan**, which emphasizes the need to develop skills and competences in the social economy as a lever for innovative undertakings in the light of inclusion, equity, and justice ^[7]. The Skills for Europe plan focuses on three main areas:

- 1) **Upskilling and reskilling:** The plan aims to support the upskilling and reskilling of individuals working in the social economy, ensuring that they have the necessary skills to drive innovation and address social challenges.
- 2) **Promoting social innovation:** The plan recognizes the importance of social innovation in the social economy and aims to support the development of innovative solutions to social challenges through training and capacity building initiatives.
- 3) **Fostering partnerships:** The plan highlights the need for collaboration between social economy organisations, educational institutions, and other stakeholders to promote the exchange of knowledge and best practices in the field of social economy skills development.

By integrating the SEAP and the Skills for Europe plan, the European Commission aims to create a supportive environment for the social economy to thrive, contribute to fair, sustainable, and inclusive growth, and address key societal challenges ^[8].

Recommendation 1:

- At all levels, the focus of initial and continuous training provisions must shift towards **training in the values and competencies of the Social Economy model**, replacing references to the Third Sector or Social Enterprises.

Governance

Introductory overview

As the Social Economy model is developed and implemented in multiple contexts, with the engagement and involvement of different players across countries, the governance issue arises.

- The recognised and widely acknowledged values of Social Economy can be embedded in diverse undertakings through a combination of policy-oriented learning, strategic action by political actors, and the use of rhetoric, symbols, and policy analysis ^[9].
- Public authorities can promote enabling conditions at local, national, and international scales by developing policies that support the growth of Social Economy, creating operational frameworks that facilitate collaboration between different actors, and fostering a culture that values the principles of Social Economy ^[9].
- Players that can design and implement capacity building actions to strengthen Social Economy undertakings include government agencies, non-governmental organisations, educational institutions, and private sector entities. These players can offer training programs, provide access to resources and networks, and support the development of innovative projects and initiatives ^{[9][10]}.
- To involve these players in policy-making and decision-making, it is essential to create platforms for dialogue and collaboration, such as working groups, task forces, and advisory committees. These platforms can ensure that the voices of different stakeholders are heard, and their expertise is taken into account when shaping policies and strategies for the Social Economy ^[9].

At the micro level – mobilising individuals

Recommendation 2:

- Encourage participatory processes that can help identify the training needs and the available assets of the different contexts and can leverage the local resources towards common goals and objectives for SE development.
One example of how local governance can involve stakeholders and citizens in decision-making is the preparation of local plans through a participatory approach.

Recommendation 3:

- Support youth initiatives in the Social Economy, creating or improving youth collaboration spaces where young people can find appropriate training resources, collaborate, develop ideas, and work on projects related to the SE.

At the meso level – mobilising organisations and institutions:

Recommendation 4:

- Encourage interorganisational collaboration, implying exchange of practices, mutual learning, co-programming and co-design. These practices can represent continuous hands-on and on-the-job training.
Collaboration between various actors, including Social Economy enterprises, businesses, public institutions, social partners, civil society organisations, etc., can lead to a more integrated and

efficient method of local governance, whereby the involved players share knowledge and competences, responsibility for common decisions, drive towards improvement.

Recommendation 5:

- Call for a direct engagement of public authorities with responsibilities and competences in the capacity building process, as a key element to achieve larger and sustainable impact.

Recommendation 6:

- Plan the activation of novel intermediate roles within local authorities and/or public administrations, such as *intermediaries* who are specialised in the field of social innovation and Social Economy. These *referent persons* should have the knowledge and competences to spot needs in terms of competences acquisition/training, suggest available training provisions, promote SE initiatives and create the necessary network(s) at the different governance levels to support SE development.

Recommendation 7:

- Embed capacity building initiatives for the Social Economy within existing and/or planned strategic plans. This can help recognise and value the positive role of SE players within the broader strategies for local (territorial and/or sectoral) development.

Recommendation 8:

- Promote and disseminate good practices, also those developed in the framework of funded projects. Local project partners should set up local circles of influence to support, for instance, the use of the MU.ST.SEE platform.

At the macro level – mobilising transnational organisations and institutions

Recommendation 9:

- Call the EU institutions and agencies to encourage more collaborative and participatory approaches with Social Economy representative/second-level organisations and federations, to develop consistent policy frameworks that can enable SE consolidation based on a permanent and consistent “training facility”.

Recommendation 10:

- Monitor the role of the recently created “European Competence Centre for Social Innovation” and of the national “Competence Centres for Social innovation” in order to share the benefits resulting from their action, and to assess the extent to which their role can help harmonise the approaches and models in training and capacity building in the SE domain.

Policy planning for the social economy

Introductory overview

The creation of enabling conditions that can facilitate and foster Social Economy (SE) development is the prime responsibility of policymakers at different levels and in different sectors.

- Multiple policy areas intersect in the development of SE, including territorial development, innovation in industry and agriculture, education and training, culture, digitalisation, and environment protection ^{[11][12]}.
- Initial and continuous training is a key component in any of these sectors, ensuring that the workforce is knowledgeable, competent, and able to understand the changing contexts and the challenges ahead ^{[11][12]}.
- Policy coherence for development matters in the interdependent world we live in, where policy impacts have no borders. All countries have a shared responsibility to ensure that their policies are conducive to, or at least do not undermine, development elsewhere ^[12].
- Public authorities can promote enabling conditions at local, national, and international scales by developing policies that support the growth of SE, creating operational frameworks that facilitate collaboration between different actors, and fostering a culture that values the principles of SE ^[11].
- To ensure the embedding of SE democratic values, it is essential to involve players that can design and implement capacity building actions, such as government agencies, non-governmental organisations, educational institutions, and private sector entities, in policy-making and decision-making processes ^{[11][12]}.

Recommendation 11:

- Develop policies (at different administrative levels: local, regional, national) that create the enabling conditions for SE players to cope with the growing complexity of their contexts. Policies for training and people's growth can play a central role.

Recommendation 12:

- Call all relevant players to co-construct a vision for the role of Social Economy actors at European level. The EU should facilitate a collaborative process involving SE actors, policymakers, and other stakeholders to co-create a clear and comprehensive vision for the role of the SE. This vision should guide the development and implementation of policies – comprising training – that support the SE sector.

Recommendation 13:

- Encourage social innovation through capacity building measures at macro and micro level (i.e., focussing on the broader context assets and on the organisations) to help create new opportunities for young entrepreneurs and promote the development of the social economy. Social innovation can be a key driver of economic a more just and sustainable growth and development.

Recommendation 14:

- Foster a new mindset. There is a need to attract young entrepreneurs and “operators” to the Social Economy, bringing forward new mindsets that value social impact and innovation. This can involve promoting social entrepreneurship and highlighting the potential for social impact in different domains, comprising education and training systems.

Recommendation 15:

- Focus on youth involvement and mentoring programmes. Engage the next generation in the social economy through training and mentoring programs that encourage leadership and continuity.

Recommendation 16:

- Intergenerational mentoring programs. Establish mentoring programs that pair young individuals interested in the social economy with experienced leaders in the field. This allows for the transfer of knowledge and experience, as well as the development of leadership skills.

Recommendation 17:

- Education in schools. Introduce the social economy into school curricula to promote awareness from an early age. This may include school projects related to the social economy and visits to local organisations.

Recommendation 18:

- Promote digitalisation. Policies that promote digitalisation, such as funding for digital infrastructure and training for digital skills, can help organisations to improve their efficiency and competitiveness.

Recommendation 19:

- Foster more awareness on the importance of social economy capacity-building and how it can be linked with key European topics such as green transition, innovation, sustainability and how and why this is important for social economy actors.

Recommendation 20:

- Support community building initiatives that could encompass relevant community players such as enterprises, parishes, etc.

Ongoing needs analysis and sharing of knowledge

Introductory overview

The creation of enabling conditions that can facilitate and foster Social economy (SE) development is a prime responsibility of policymakers at different levels and in different sectors. Multiple policy areas intersect in this endeavour, including territorial development, innovation in industry and agriculture, education and training, culture, digitalisation, and environment protection.

Initial and continuous training is a key component in any of these sectors, ensuring that the workforce is knowledgeable, competent, and able to understand the changing contexts and challenges ahead ^[13].

European policies for training and skills development focus on promoting increased, effective, and inclusive investment in training and upskilling to harness the full potential of the European workforce. To achieve this, the European Commission has proposed the 2023 European Year of Skills, which aims to help further develop skills intelligence tools, promote tools and instruments for increased transparency and easier recognition of qualifications, and support skills development through various EU initiatives, such as the European Skills Agenda, InvestEU programme, European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, European Regional Development Fund, Just Transition Fund, European Solidarity Corps, and the Programme for Environment and Climate Action (LIFE). In addition to these policies, there are other ways to promote training and skills development, such as:

- Providing resources and incentives for social research to encourage new ideas and approaches.
- Guaranteeing continuous learning for local actors to ensure ongoing knowledge production and sharing.
- Promoting knowledge-sharing between organisations through networking events, conferences, offline and online platforms, and other opportunities facilitated by local governance structures.

Recommendation 21:

- Provide resources and incentives for social research can help encourage new ideas and approaches.

Recommendation 22:

- Guarantee continuous learning for local actors to ensure that knowledge production is ongoing and shared.

Recommendation 23:

- Promote knowledge-sharing: Sharing knowledge and experiences between organisations can help to build a more collaborative and effective approach to local governance. Local governance structures should facilitate opportunities for knowledge-sharing, such as networking events, conferences, offline and online platforms.

Recommendation 24:

- Foster quantitative and qualitative evaluation of capacity building initiatives focusing on the impact of these actions. Then, invest in the communication of those impacts.

Recommendation 25:

- Rediscover, shape the organisations and disseminate the founding values of the third sector organisation (participation, mutuality) to make them an attractive workplace for jobseekers

Recommendation 26:

- Promote the use of a platform as a resource centre at the national or regional level, such as the MU.ST.SEE platform.

Recommendation 27:

- Improve the EU's one shop stop, the EU Social Economy Gateway, that should include information a dedicated section on resources for social research.

Recommendation 28:

- Ensure that more dedicated ESF Social Innovation+ initiatives support and facilitate knowledge sharing amongst social economy stakeholders.

Recommendation 29:

- Promote international collaboration and knowledge exchange: Foster cooperation among different countries and regions within the European Union to share best practices, experiences, and knowledge in the field of the social economy. This can enrich training and skill development.

Methodological adaptation/flexibility

Introductory overview

To meet the evolving needs of learners and the demands of a rapidly changing world, training and skills development should incorporate flexible solutions that can accommodate different learning styles and schedules.

The ability to trigger innovation in processes, goods and services and to adopt new practices greatly relies on the professional skills of those who work for social economy organisations. Their ability to meet new market challenges intertwines with their capacity to access meaningful training and continuous professional development opportunities, or initial training in the case of young or would-be entrepreneurs. In this process, a number of players are accountable for the definition of a shared vision about the possibility to build back better and ensure a more sustainable and inclusive development model. Not only are enterprises, social economy organisations and other economic actors in charge, but also local public authorities have a direct responsibility in creating the enabling conditions for the transformation underway, implying political, budgetary, cultural and symbolic conditions.

Recommendation 30:

- Promoting participatory training needs analysis (TNA) - since the very first steps of training design.

Recommendation 31:

- Participatory approaches to training and development, such as the challenge-based methodology described in MU.ST.SEE, can help to engage learners and promote active learning. Encouraging participation can also help to build trust and legitimacy in training and development initiatives.

Recommendation 32:

- Provide flexible training options, entailing in-person, online, and hybrid training sessions, which can help to accommodate different learning styles and schedules. Providing flexible training options can help to increase participation of learners and their motivation to learn.

Recommendation 33:

- Emphasise practical learning: A learning approach based on a mix of practical challenges and concise/relevant theoretical content can help to develop the skills and knowledge needed for social innovation. Local governance structures should prioritise practical learning opportunities, such as internships, apprenticeships, and hands-on projects.

Recommendation 34:

- Fostering a common culture of change can assist overcome resistance to change and encourage an attitude of innovation and continuous improvement. Training and awareness-raising programmes can facilitate such changes in the stakeholders' mindsets.

Recommendation 35:

- Encouraging the “evaluation” of competences in the third sector organisation in order to enable them to read the abilities of their employees and to enhance their readiness for the future challenges

Recommendation 36:

- Strengthen the validation of competences, in particular those acquired in non-formal contexts

Recommendation 37:

- Strengthen the partnership between administrations and stakeholders

Recommendation 38:

- Encouraging the detection of project leaders through the field (network through local associations, enterprises, etc...)

Recommendation 39:

- The EU should encourage member states to provide a range of training options, including in-person, online, and hybrid sessions. The EU should invest in digital infrastructure and provide grants to social economy enterprises and their representative organisations (often providing training) to ensure access to these flexible training options. This will cater to diverse learning styles and schedules, making training more accessible.

Appropriate resourcing

Introductory overview

Social economy organisations in Europe are currently facing various skills challenges as they work towards creating more inclusive, creative, and sustainable societies and economies ^[16]. Here are some specific challenges they are encountering:

- Reskilling and upskilling: Many social economy organisations focus on reskilling, upskilling, and facilitating access to the labour market ^[14]. They play a crucial role in addressing the skills gap and ensuring that individuals have the necessary competencies to succeed in the changing job market.
- Labor and social integration: Social economy entities tackle some of the biggest challenges facing society, including labour and social integration ^[15]. They work to create opportunities for individuals who may face barriers to employment and social inclusion, requiring specific skills and approaches.
- Access to finance: Access to finance is one of the most pressing challenges for community organisations and social enterprises ^[18]. Social economy organisations need financing from both market and non-market sources to support their operations and growth, requiring skills in financial management and fundraising.
- Innovation and adaptation: Social economy and social innovation go hand in hand, contributing to the development of more inclusive, creative, and sustainable societies and economies ^[16]. However, this requires organisations to continuously innovate and adapt, which can be a challenge in terms of acquiring and developing the necessary skills.
- Networking and collaboration: Sharing knowledge and experiences between organisations can help build a more collaborative and effective approach to local governance ^[17]. Social economy organisations need skills in networking, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing to leverage the collective expertise and resources of the sector.
- Digitalisation and technology adoption: As digital transformation becomes increasingly important, social economy organisations must have the skills to adapt to the changing landscape and leverage digital tools and platforms effectively. This includes skills in digital marketing, data analysis, and online collaboration.

Appropriate funding is necessary to support innovative, punctual, and tailor-made training for social economy organisations to meet these skills challenges. Funding can help to develop and deliver training programmes, provide financial support for learners/trainees, support the development of training infrastructure, promote collaboration and knowledge sharing.

By providing appropriate funding, policymakers can help to ensure that social economy organisations in Europe have the skills and resources they need to thrive and contribute to the region's social and economic development.

Recommendation 40:

- Invest in capacity-building for social innovation, supporting the development of skills and competences of social agents. This can include training programmes, workshops, and other initiatives that support capacity-building.

Recommendation 41:

- Provide investment for organisational capacity-building actions to improve the expertise and know-how of local networks of social economy actors.

Recommendation 42:

- Offer support to social innovation through experimentation incentives, which can encourage new ideas and approaches to social challenges.

Recommendation 43:

- Reinforce the investment in knowledge and resources exchange among actors from social economy. Promote opportunities for inter and intra sectorial contacts at national and European level.

Recommendation 44:

- Call the EU to allocate additional funding and resources to develop capacity-building programs aimed at enhancing the skills and competences of social agents engaged in social innovation. These programs should cover a wide range of topics, including leadership, project management, and innovation strategies.

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