

The fourth Regional Meeting of RESEES Partners 25-26 March 2026, Rovaniemi, Finland

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The fourth partner meeting of the European RESEES project took place in northern Finland on 25–26 March, bringing together representatives of all partner organisations, along with stakeholders from participating regions. The event provided a valuable platform for the exchange of knowledge, experiences and good practices in the field of social economy.

The meeting focused on the **role of the social economy as a key driver of sustainable and inclusive regional development**. In the opening session, hosts from Lapland presented several good practice examples, showcasing successful approaches to connecting local communities, supporting social enterprises and integrating the social economy into regional development policies.

The programme also addressed broader development themes, including **capacity building of organisations, innovative financial and support mechanisms, and the importance of collaboration between public, private and civil society actors**. Special emphasis was placed on networking at both local and international levels, which is increasingly recognised as a key factor for the success of social economy initiatives.

Discussions provided participants with deeper insights into current challenges and opportunities in the sector, while also enabling the exchange of practical solutions that can be transferred to other partner regions.

The meeting in Rovaniemi further strengthened cooperation among partners and fostered new ideas, partnerships and synergies that will contribute to the continued development and successful implementation of the RESEES project.



SOCIAL HANDPRINT AND PROJECT FAMILY

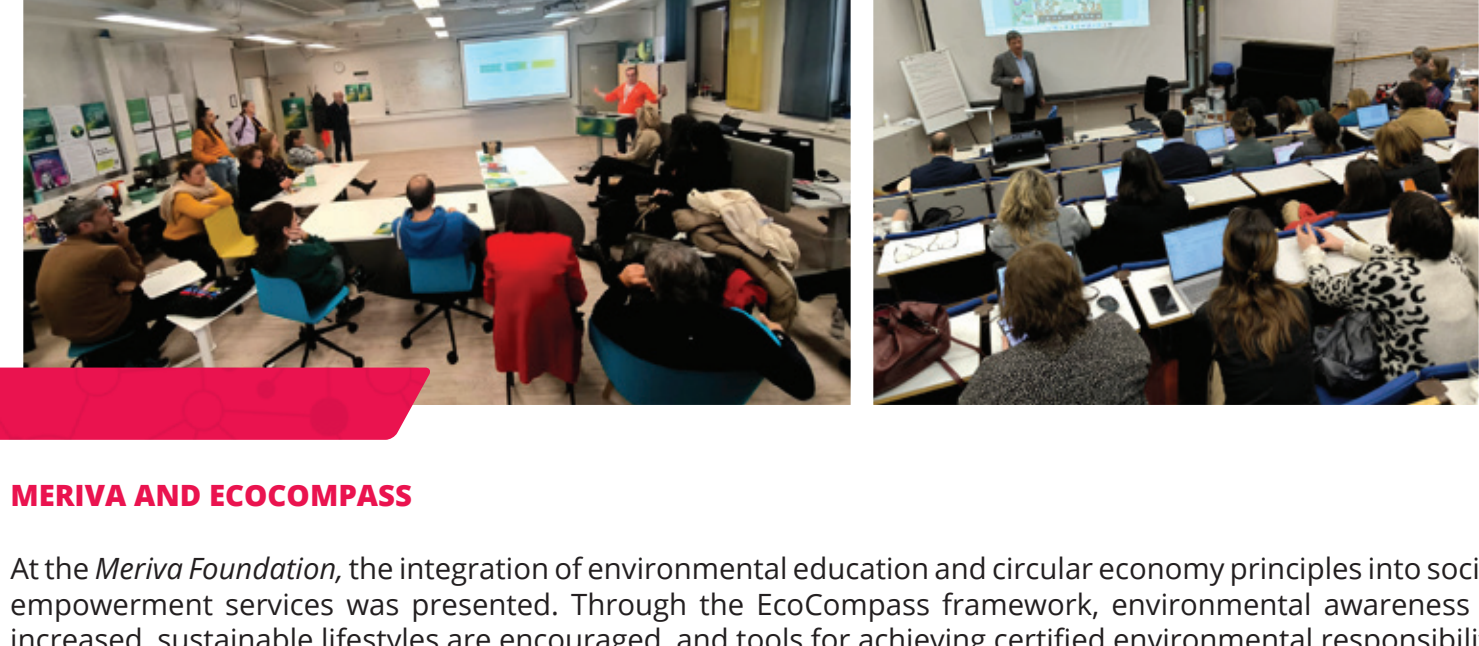
The *Social Handprint and project family* was introduced as a collaborative model in which the employment of disadvantaged groups is promoted, corporate social responsibility is strengthened, and workplace diversity is enhanced. A broad network of regional actors is brought together, and projects at different stages of development are implemented jointly by numerous organizations. (www.sosiaalinenkadenjalki.fi)

LAPLAND REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR NGOS

The *Lapland Regional Advisory Council for NGOs* was presented as a coordination body through which cooperation between associations and regional authorities is facilitated. The role of associations in promoting citizens' well-being and inclusion is emphasized, while their voice in regional development processes is strengthened and their activities are made more visible. (<https://www.lapinliitto.fi/aluekehitys/jarjestoneuvottelukunta/>)

The *Employment Toolkit for NGOs* was highlighted as a practical support tool through which associations are provided with guidance on recruitment processes, while job seekers and students are informed about employment opportunities within the nonprofit sector. Key information, step-by-step instructions, and support contacts are made accessible in one place.

(<https://www.kansalaistalorovaniemi.fi/jarjestotyllistaminen/jarjestotyllistamisen-tyokalupakki/>)



MERIVA AND ECOCOMPASS

At the *Meriva Foundation*, the integration of environmental education and circular economy principles into social empowerment services was presented. Through the EcoCompass framework, environmental awareness is increased, sustainable lifestyles are encouraged, and tools for achieving certified environmental responsibility are provided. (<https://www.meriva.com/>)

CONCLUSIONS OF THE WORKING GROUPS

Within the project, four Working Groups were established, through which partners jointly contributed to the development and strengthening of the social economy. Each group was dedicated to a specific thematic area – from raising public awareness and strengthening capacities, to fostering cooperation among stakeholders and improving the measurement of social impact.

Through their activities and results, an important contribution has been made to improving the understanding, visibility and effectiveness of the social economy at the regional level. The conclusions presented reflect shared learning, practical insights and policy-relevant recommendations that will support the further development of the sector.

Working Group 1: Promotion and Awareness Raising about the Role of the Social Economy

Working Group 1 (WG1) focused on how to improve the visibility of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) and strengthen public awareness of its role and impact. The discussions showed that **communication remains one of the weaker areas** of the sector, even though it is essential for wider recognition and support.

One of the main findings was the **presence of a certain mistrust within the SSE sector towards communication professionals and marketing approaches**. At the same time, many organisations and professionals working in the sector do not have sufficient communication skills or resources to promote their work effectively. As communication is often underfunded or not seen as a priority, the sector's visibility remains limited.

WG1 therefore highlighted the **need for a more strategic and proactive approach to communication**. Participants stressed that every project or initiative should include a dedicated budget for communication activities. They also recommended using a wider range of communication channels and formats to better inform the public about the value of the social economy.

Another important recommendation was to strengthen **cooperation with the media** and adopt more professional communication practices, including some approaches more commonly used in the private sector. This could help social economy organisations reach broader audiences, improve public understanding and increase the impact of their work.

Overall, WG1 confirmed that stronger communication is not only a promotional tool, but also a key condition for building trust, visibility and long-term support for the social economy.



Working Group 2: Capacity Building in the Social Economy

In Working Group 2 (WG2), attention was focused on capacity building in the social economy and on understanding how the development of skills and competences can contribute to the long-term development of the sector. The work was initially centred on an analytical phase, which gradually evolved into a more in-depth reflection on policies and their impact on the development of the social economy.

Regional SWOT analyses were conducted in all partner regions, on the basis of which an interregional SWOT analysis was also prepared and validated. In addition, one good practice per region was identified and presented, and key regional policy instruments were analysed. Through this process, a shared analytical framework was established, enabling comparison across regions and a better understanding of common challenges and opportunities.

As an important result, a Social Economy Skills Map at the diagnostic level was developed, through which key challenges in the field of capacity building were identified. It was found that capacity building activities are present across all regions; however, they remain fragmented and insufficiently linked to broader policy frameworks. Initial policy directions were also outlined to support improvements and a more systematic approach to skills development in the social economy.

WG2 confirmed that capacity building is **a crucial enabling factor** for the development of the social economy. Despite the presence of various programmes and initiatives, these are often implemented in a project-based and short-term manner, without sufficient integration into a comprehensive system. It was also identified that training activities are predominantly focused on individuals rather than on organisations as a whole, which limits their long-term impact.

The need for **a more strategic and coordinated approach** was highlighted, in order to ensure stronger links between short-term training activities and the long-term needs of the sector. It was emphasised that, for the sustainable development of the social economy, stronger and more systematic integration of capacity building into regional and national policies and support programmes is required.



Working Group 3: Networking and Cooperation in the Social Economy

Working Group 3 (WG3) focused on strengthening networking and cooperation within the social economy, highlighting how collaboration between stakeholders can drive innovation, inclusion and regional development.

Several **good practices were presented and analysed**. The Polo IRIS HUB initiative showed how platforms can support innovation and digital transformation. InnovaSE highlighted the role of social responsibility in strengthening small and medium-sized enterprises, while the Kolaboratu project demonstrated how collaboration in the social economy can improve quality of life in rural areas. The Social Handprint of Lapland illustrated the development of a social economy and innovation ecosystem, and the Observatory of Responsible Public Procurements presented tools for promoting socially responsible public procurement.

These examples demonstrated that **well-structured cooperation networks can deliver concrete results**, support social economy actors and address local challenges through joint initiatives. Despite different approaches, all practices confirmed the importance of collaboration tailored to regional needs.

WG3 identified **public-private cooperation as a key factor for building sustainable networks**. While permanent structures are not always required, clear governance models play an important role in guiding collaboration. Successful initiatives were those that created tangible value for participants and were closely connected to local contexts.

The discussions also highlighted the **need for dedicated teams** to drive such initiatives, working in line with social economy principles. In addition, **linking the social economy to emerging opportunities**—such as entrepreneurship, skills development, technological innovation and the ethical use of artificial intelligence—was recognised as essential for future development.



Working Group 4: Strengthening Social Impact Measurement and Communication in the Social Economy

Working Group 4 (WG4) focused on helping social economy organisations and regional stakeholders better understand, measure and communicate their social impact in a practical and policy-relevant way. The group's work showed that **social impact measurement is becoming increasingly important** — not only for accountability and funding, but also for improving policy-making. However, approaches still vary significantly across regions.

One of the key findings was that social impact measurement remains limited in practice. Only a small number of organisations systematically measure their impact. While many collect operational or environmental data, fewer translate this into clear evidence of their broader social contribution. This will become increasingly important due to **evolving European sustainability and reporting requirements**.

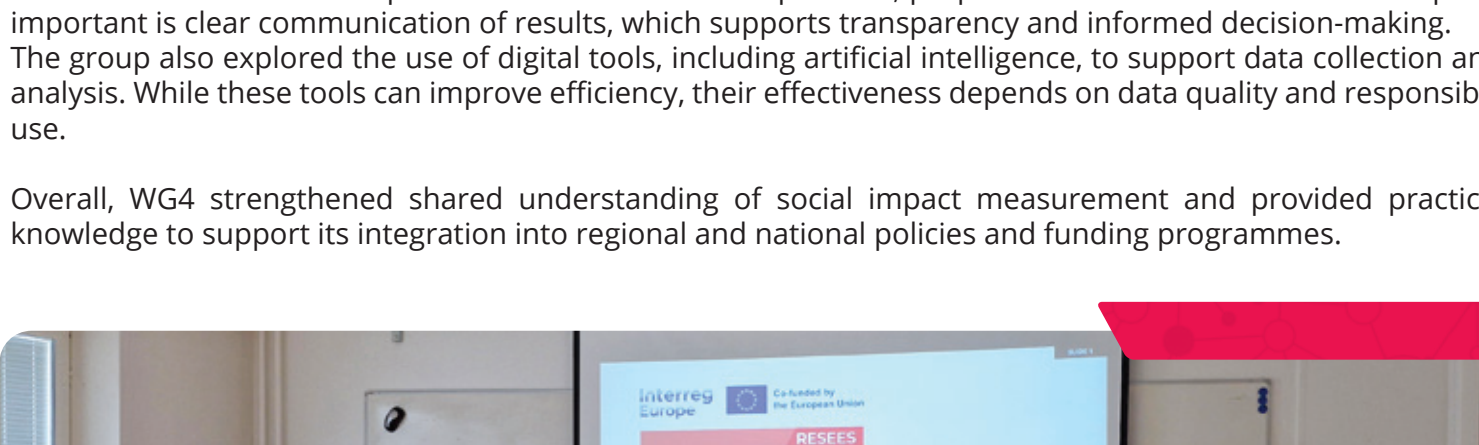
WG4 emphasised learning through practical examples. By sharing **real-life cases**, partners explored how organisations collect data, measure impact and communicate results. This approach supported mutual learning and helped identify solutions that can be adapted across regions.

The group also highlighted the importance of clear definitions and transparent methods. Distinguishing between social, environmental and economic impact is essential for building trust and ensuring comparability of results.

As part of its work, WG4 initiated the development of a **regional Social Impact Observatory**. This platform will bring together key data, monitoring tools and strategic documents, supporting more systematic impact tracking and better alignment with policy objectives. In the long term, it will also enable cross-regional comparison and learning.

WG4 demonstrated that impact measurement must be practical, proportionate and understandable. Equally important is clear communication of results, which supports transparency and informed decision-making. The group also explored the use of digital tools, including artificial intelligence, to support data collection and analysis. While these tools can improve efficiency, their effectiveness depends on data quality and responsible use.

Overall, WG4 strengthened shared understanding of social impact measurement and provided practical knowledge to support its integration into regional and national policies and funding programmes.



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