

TRAINING ACADEMY ON SOCIAL ECONOMY 2023

12-13 June 2023

NARRATIVE REPORT:

The Training Academy 2023 revolved around the topic of Social Economy and extended over two days: the afternoon of Tuesday 12th June and the whole day of Wednesday 13th June. It was held in Brussels and organised with the support of SOLIDAR's Belgian member, Pour la Solidarité (PLS), which has an extensive experience and solid expertise on the topic. The structure of the Training Academy foresaw a first day aimed at introducing the concept of Social Economy and setting the scene about the state of play in Europe. The second day, instead, was characterised by a more practical approach with the objective to reflect on concrete examples of social economy and advocacy actions developed at national and EU level, as well as to identify synergies between the field of social economy and the work of SOLIDAR's members.

12 JUNE – Day 1

Denis Stokkink, President of the host organisation Pour la Solidarité, formally introduced the session by providing some historical context on the current trends around the concept of Social Economy at European and international level. A general definition of social economy was introduced taking into consideration the following elements: the social aim of the organisation; the democratic governance and the principle of equality between all members. The hosts then provided an overview of some key policy developments: with the adoption of the SE Action Plan in 2021, and the growing recognition of SE enterprises, new perspectives and advocacy paths for SE are opening for the members of SOLIDAR who want to work together on this. Among these is the reinforcing or creation of a legal basis for SE in different countries in Europe, as emerged from PLS' presentation.

Roundtable 1 – starting point



This broad introduction was followed by a **Roundtable, gathering key actors of SE in Europe**, to explain the current state of play at the EU level and actions taken by EU actors at the global level.



Through the discussions with the panellists participants were able to better grasp the stakes of SE in the EU at the policy level but also at the field level and get an understanding of the next milestones and advocacy opportunities in Europe. Panellists included representatives of the European Commission, European Network of Social Integration Enterprises ([ENSIE](#)) and [CONCORD](#).

To start with participants were provided with an overview **Margit Perko, DG EMPL**, about the latest development regarding SE at the European Commission's level, informing the audience of the forthcoming [Council Recommendation on the framework condition for the social economy](#) that was publicly announced on 13th June. The proposal is now being discussed in the Council in view of a political agreement. Once the proposal is adopted, Member States will adopt or update their national strategies for the social economy within 18 months. The Commission will then monitor the implementation of the strategies through regular consultations with Member States.

This document mainly addresses the EU Member States with a proposal to develop strategies for SE and to reflect on what makes sense in their context (if they have a legal base or not, for instance) and further encourages MS to go through this reflection process with stakeholders.¹

The definition of SE was then explained according to the EU SE Action Plan putting emphasis on:

- (1) Primacy of people
- (2) Reinvestment of profits
- (3) Democratic participation

Information was given about the launch, on 13th June 2023, of the [SE Gateway](#), which bundles up all the information available in the European Commission on SE and contains country pages. It will give the opportunity to stakeholders to post about their initiatives and events. Margit Perko also added that SE initiatives involving candidate countries or neighbouring countries will be introduced. Such actions will be carried out by DG INTPA and DG NEAR and will work similarly to the INvestEU programme.

The participants also asked the EC representative to explore the role of the **Western Balkans** in relation to SE. Margit Perko highlighted the importance of working on setting up a strong SE ecosystem and on the legislation in the Western Balkans region also in view to prevent migration caused by social exclusion/poverty (and brain drain) from the region. Participants from non-EU countries were informed that there will be access to funding for Western Balkan countries under the Invest EU Programme (already accessible to EU countries).

Following the Commission's presentation, **Flore de Pauw, ENSIE**, illustrated the role of SE in terms of social inclusion and professional inclusion of marginalised people. The work of Social economy actors is based on the idea that work is a right, checking that everyone has access to work that is tailored to their aspirations and competencies. SE actors also play a crucial role in the upskilling and reskilling of people in Europe as well as the reactivation of people outside of the labour market. Flore de Pauw pointed out that participation in the labour market is just one form of social inclusion and that access to other rights are essential, such as housing and healthcare. However, SE actors provide good practices on a more inclusive labour market, such as through the job training model, in which workers learn new skills while already in the job.

¹ Although Member States will oversee the implementation of the Council Recommendation, part of the framework conditions for the social economy are covered by legislation that is determined at EU level i.e., state aid and public procurement.

Moreover, ENSIE's representative pointed out that the reactivation of marginalised groups is economically advantageous besides socially fair as it costs less than unemployment benefits and plays a crucial role in terms social inclusion and personal fulfilment. The social impact study realised by ENSIE ([Impact-WISE](#)) in 2022 shows that around 61% of disadvantaged people have a positive outcome after following an integration path through a WISE. WISEs are defined by ENSIE as enterprises having the three following principles: (a) whose social objective is the social integration and citizenship; (b) are at the core of economic activities and (c) have a strong pedagogical dimension.

To conclude, Flore de Pauw mentioned a booklet created by ENSIE on how SE can contribute to the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Action Plan, with its headline targets (e.g., Principle 4, active support to employment).

Subsequently, **Borja Arrue-Astrain, CONCORD**, brought into the discussion the perspective of the Global South. He noticed that SE actors are becoming also development actors and that the principle of solidarity and responsibility is key in their work. There is a shift in the way the economy is functioning, and which was largely debated during [the Beyond Growth Conference](#) with the need to go beyond GDP to capture the level of wellbeing and development of society, noticed Borja Arrue-Astrain. He added that a [European Parliament Resolution](#) was adopted whereby EU has taken commitment to further develop SE not only at European level but at the international level, as well. An analysis of EU by CONCORD shows that only 8/20 countries have SE as an objective and therefore concluded that a lot of work still needs to be done at the EU level. Referring to the Beyond Growth Conference, Borja Arrue-Astrain stressed that the conference's goal was to think outside of the box to overcome the GDP-centred approach, meaning to view wellbeing as an indicator of development. CONCORD's representative also stressed the need to consider the global impact of the green transition.

The speakers were then asked to elaborate on the **role of civil society** in the area of SE. While for the Commission the role of civil society is essential and hopes the Council Recommendation will support CS work at national level, ENSIE informed that this is a key period for the development of SE in Europe and that a lot is happening. When talking about alternative model, it is now generally understood that we are talking about the SE model. CONCORD complemented that the role of CS includes also raising awareness among policy makers.

SE development under the Spanish Presidency and Spain as example of implementor of SE at country level:

The Special Commissioner for Social Economy of the upcoming Spanish Presidency, Victor Mesenguer, illustrated the SE Policies in Spain and the plans of the Presidency.

Participants learned that in Spain SE derives from the Cooperatives and after the COVID period, SE grew in visibility. Victor Mesenguer explained that in Spain the EC identified 14 economic eco-systems with 12 sectors, SE and care are part of the 12th sector and are key for the future of the economy. SE means sustainability, resilience and responds to the need of the regions in Spain, pointed out Victor Mesenguer. He also noted that Spain was among the first countries to adopt a Social Economy law in 2011, providing such ecosystem with a legislative framework and reinforcing the political and historical identity of the diverse SE actors. A 2023-2027 Strategy was approved under the leadership



of the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy, that also requires an inter-ministerial coordination with 3 other ministries namely Ministry of Health Care, Ministry for Social Agenda and Ministry of Gender Equality. SE benefits of a consensus in Spain and the result of the elections in Spain should not have any impact on it, according to the speaker. The Spanish Presidency will hold a SE conference in San Sebastian on 13-14 November 2023 which will be a place for action for SE actors and reinforced visibility. Events linked to Social Economy will also be organised in September and October by the Spanish Presidency.

13 JUNE – Day 2

The second day after a morning warm-up exercise and sharing of the key lessons learned from the



previous day participants had the opportunity to listen to an academic intervention by **Professor Marek Hudon, from Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management (ULB) and co-chair of the Belgian High Committee for a Just Transition.** Prof. Hudon touched upon the following key information:



WHAT IS SE?

SE is the interaction between social objectives and economy, where profit is not the main concern. However, SE is not the same thing as philanthropy, as this second is carried out by non-profit actors, unlike SE activities that create profit. The professor noted that SE addresses the challenge that the market cannot tackle.

WHAT IS SE's SOCIETAL OBJECTIVE? According to Prof. Hudon, the objective of SE is to have an inclusive (post) growth.



The Professor also introduced the distinction between social economy and social entrepreneurship.

Social economy aims at balancing profit maximization with social progress and protection. It addresses some challenges that the market cannot integrate by investing into sustainable and social missions. It also promotes inclusive growth, job creation, and social cohesion while pursuing specific objectives and values.

Social entrepreneurship instead is the process of creating a company/venture with social economy activities.

At this point Prof Hudon presented the three models of social entrepreneurship:

1. Social enterprise model
2. European model of SE defined by the Network on SE studies (EMES)
3. Social innovation school

Social enterprise: generates income to fulfill a social mission. There is no direct link between social mission and activities (we can talk rather about social responsibility) and no profit distribution.

EMES: is based on continuous production of goods or services (to differ from voluntary /occasional), characterised by a significant level of economic risk because without this aspect it would only be philanthropic work. Finally, there is minimum level of work remuneration (jobs).

Social innovation: creates new and better means to answer social problems. Has a direct link between social mission and activities and there are no constraints on profit distribution

WHAT ARE THE SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE OBJECTIVES OF SE? The explicit social objective is to serve the community through a collective and dynamic approach - with high level of autonomy and democratic governance - and with limited profit distribution. Prof Hudon clarified that this high level of autonomy illustrates that this is not dependent on public sector and is also not a direct part of market economy.

This is important when it comes to legislation, for example in the US the law imposes the boards to maximising profits. In Belgium, the maximum level of dividend redistribution is 6%.

WHAT ARE THE TRADITIONAL TYPES OF SE ACTORS?

There are the **non-profit organisations** where surplus are reinvested to support the mission of the organisation and rely on a diversity of funding such as grants, donations, events organisation; and the second type are the **cooperatives**, organisations that are owned by a group of individuals who have come voluntarily together to meet some economic, social and cultural needs. The primary goal of the cooperative is to serve the interests of its members rather than generating profit for external stakeholders.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Prof. Hudon also explored the challenges and opportunities for Social Economy.

Opportunities:



- SE is a vehicle for Just Transition, as SE actors have a sustainable development (SD) objective.

SE actors integrate the environmental dimension into their initiatives, recognising the necessity to move beyond mere compensation for their carbon footprint and rather move towards a just transition paradigm. This alignment creates a clear synergy between SE and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SE activities encompass all aspects of transition, offering an opportunity to bridge the gap between discussions of just transition and social economy, which are discussed separately in academic circles and conferences. This integrated perspective fosters a more comprehensive understanding and collaboration towards achieving both social and environmental objectives. The bottom-up approach that builds on the grassroots organisations is crucial.

When do we have a case for SE & SD?

When the social mission is aligned to societal challenges. SE emphasises the social dimension of environmental issues and enhances the management of trade-offs. SE is also about participative and bottom-up approaches that are required for the ecological transition, that is when SE and SD act in synergy.

When SE cannot make the case for SD ?

The difficulty is mostly an economic challenge that primarily stem from economic hurdles that must be overcome to keep the wheels turning. Questions arise, like whether SE can manage to make ends meet and achieve financial sustainability. Furthermore, the issue of selling fair trade products in conventional supermarkets also arises, as an example of conflict between wanting to promote an alternative economic models, but having to survive to the current one. In order to achieve economic sustainability, there is the prospect of making micro-finance collaborations with banks a reality, which opens up to further ethical questions. As SE endeavours to grow, it encounters a number of complex issues and is then struggles with various models of sustainable development.

Challenges:

- Funding is identified as the main challenge: In Belgium, only 1% comes from SE actors. The rest comes from traditional actors.
- Impact measurement: This aspect was not crucial in the initial stages of social economy. However, it cannot be avoided nowadays as there is the crucial issue of impact measurement metrics and what they will say about you and your organisation.
- Mission drift: there is the issue of evolution between the mission goals and the practice. The question there is how you grow without drifting away from your mission?. How to ensure hiring that is aligned with the organisation's goals? The core aspect here is to ensure that the new people are still aligned with the core values of the organisation. A final aspect is the need to ensure space for negotiation and discussion between the members of the organisation, so that each member agrees with the mission goals at any moment.

Roundtable – examples from SE actors

The second part of the morning allowed participants to enter the more practical part of the training by listening to different examples of actors operating in the SE area, including from some of the participants themselves (4 organisations were members of SOLIDAR). In a roundtable format they



presented their respective organisation's work in Europe and at the international level in the realm of social economy.

[SMART](#) Cooperative, from Belgium, presented their work. Their mission is to enable self-employed workers or group to focus on their core business, while minimizing the risks, by pooling tools like insurance, common treasury, means of protection, etc., and guaranteeing best social protection. They explained that the cooperative is funded through a commission on their members' contracts, specifying that there is no profits, as per their status; in fact, shares grant you voting power, no dividends.

[Arbeiterwohlfahrt](#) (AWO), from Germany, presented a good practice in the area of inclusion of refugees in the labour market. AWO partnered up with steel industries in the Braunschweig region and provided through the same project the following services: language courses, psychological support, housing, counselling (and ultimately a job).



[Initiative for Development and Cooperation](#) (IDC), Serbia, presented a good practice of social inclusion of marginalised groups through social entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector. The organisation built a cold storage for raspberries that could be shared by workers and decrease the costs of production. Moreover, they offered courses on how to grow raspberries.

[PRODIVERSA, Progreso y Diversidad](#), Spain, described the work done to include migrants in the labour market through the "Acompañia" project, that inserted people at risk of social exclusion in the labour market while providing catering services for social groups such as refugees centers, centers for minors or people with disabilities.

Finally, [Solsoc, Belgium](#), introduced their work on Social Economy as a development and cooperation reality. They explained that Social Economy is used as a tool to defend a territory, such as in Colombia or Palestine. In fact, Solsoc explained that SE helps re-creating a sense of community in territories where people lost their family, had intensive agriculture and similar traumatic events. In Palestine, Solsoc works with youth groups that are active in occupied territories. They also experiment local democracy in small neighbourhoods, through popular education.

Exercise 1 – Defining common objectives and advocacy opportunities.

Based on what was discussed, including the common points and the differences they observed between their organisation's mission and that of those who presented, the participants were invited to reflect on a common goal and objectives linked to Social and Solidarity Economy that SOLIDAR as a network could work on.

The key ideas of the features of a new Economic model that fosters SE that emerged from the discussions were:

1. What is the goal at the level of SOLIDAR members in relation to a new economic model:

- increase decent jobs

- decrease economic dependence
- export SE solutions to third countries
- increase advocacy capacities
- increase funding
- launch virtual training academy regarding social economy (to explain and learn about the new model)
- getting help from other members of the SOLIDAR network

2. How does Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) interact with this ?

- create an economic system that reduces inequalities, protects workers' rights, shares equal access to services
- share what is done in each country, promotion of SE at local and national level
- SE is a new economic model that is proposed (alternative)

3. What tools do we have in our hands (EU, UN, ILO, OECD, GSEF, national level)?

- look and inspire from territorial experiences
- Decent work Agenda: signing ILO Conventions and monitoring this process
- Implement local policies to adopt/facilitate transition.
- EU policies explored before

What advocacy opportunities for SE? How to design an effective advocacy action on SE

After the lunch, the training focused on good practices in advocacy and learning about key elements for a good advocacy strategy and actions to undertake to bring the voice of SE actors to decision makers.

Salima Chitalia and **Alexis Willemot** from Pour la Solidarité (PLS) presented some examples of successful EU advocacy actions and some key features for a good advocacy strategy to bring the voice of SE to decision makers.

Key features for successful advocacy

Prior to any advocacy action, participants learned that it is important to define a good **advocacy plan**. PLS introduced the key features of such plan.

The first step is to define the **Goal** - which must be clear, articulated and achievable.

In order to do so one must think about the following questions:

- What is the **strategy**?
- What are the measurable **outcomes**?
- What is the **calendar** within which we need to work?
- Who are our **allies**?

Further, when considering the Strategy, other questions need to be asked:

- Are we looking a short term or a long term strategy?
- Are we looking at targeting people only outside of our organisation or also inside?
- What are the deadlines and the tasks that we are setting up and on which basis we will evaluate the result ?

In addition it is important to clearly define the **audience(s)** – the strategy can target multiple audiences with different **messages**.

The session demonstrated the potential to influence European-level policies by establishing advocacy efforts at the EU level while simultaneously driving action at the local level. Channels such as European consultations, publication of policy papers, and contact-making strategies with key stakeholders were showcased as practical approaches to achieve these objectives. By utilising these avenues, SE actors can actively participate in shaping EU policies and ensuring that their perspectives and concerns are well-represented at the European level. This action can also be used as a starting point to foster action at local level.

An example of global advocacy work for Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) was presented by Frédéric Bailly from [Groupe SOS](#), part of the Pact for Impact Alliance.

Frédéric Bailly explained that since the first Pact for Impact Summit in 2019, the [Pact for Impact Alliance](#) (a global alliance for social and solidarity economy) adopted an ambitious roadmap, of bringing a draft resolution to the United Nations, to recognise the SSE and its contribution to sustainable development and the achievement of the SDGs by 2030. In 2022, Pact for Impact Alliance undertook a vast work of awareness raising and mobilisation around the project, in close collaboration with the UN Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSSE). Pact for Impact particularly worked to inform and involve other countries in the project, and to position France at the global level as a major player and driver of the international political momentum experienced by the SSE. On 18 April 2023, the UN General Assembly adopted [a historic Resolution for the Promotion of Social and Solidarity Economy for Sustainable Development](#). Pact for Impact Alliance is now encouraging member states to implement the Resolution. Today 20 countries have a regulatory framework for SSE, the goal of Pact for Impact is to continue to lobby for the continued recognition of SSE at the local, national and international level to implement practical measures to foster the development of SSE in their territories and to adopt a regulatory framework.

Exercise 2 - Design of advocacy actions at national and at EU level

For the second and final exercise, participants were asked to split into two groups and based on the above, and in the context of the upcoming Spanish and Belgian Presidencies of the EU, were requested to design an advocacy strategy to promote SE with action(s) at the national level and at the European level.

In the case of the advocacy action at national level it should target the Spanish Presidency, with the objective of keeping SE high on their agenda and foster collaboration with CSOs. The advocacy action at the EU level should be designed in view of the EP elections, with the objective of influencing the composition of the EP in a way that favours the development of SE in Europe. Each group presented their action to the other group and received feedback.



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Group 1 – Advocacy Action at National Level



Participants focused on Spain and Portugal

Goal: Ensure enabling environment for SE to thrive by taking advantage of the EU momentum

Audience: Institutions, governments, CEOs, general public (as second beneficiary) by

-raising awareness

-working together in coalition, using the upcoming SOLIDAR study visit to Malaga (18-20 October) to organise a meeting to build a coalition and present the coalition at the San Sebastian conference at the end of the year

Timeframe: December 2023

Expected Result:

-Strengthened relationships within the network

-Reflections and recommendations in Malaga to propose a actions (towards decision makers) at the meeting in San Sebastian

Participants also discussed about replicating the SE Gateway at the national level and undertake a comparative analysis to understand the possible impact of SE and to develop a toolbox on SE. They also pointed out that no formal group exists on SE within SOLIDAR, which could be an interesting path for development. It was recommended to look at ENSIE's first analysis of the Council Recommendation to inform the key messages and build synergies with allies.



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Group 2 – Advocacy Action at European Level



As a preliminary action: undertake an analysis of the Council Recommendations and gather thoughts and views.

Goal: push ambitious implementation of the Recommendation and identify missing elements

Strategy:

- SOLIDAR to give short overview by summer break
- From Summer to end October, documents with key messages to be ready
- Document to be presented in Malaga, updated, and endorsed by SOLIDAR members
- Around the event in San Sebastian in November, messages are presented.

Conclusions:

After the two groups reported back to the rest of participants, the training Academy ended with a tour de table and exchanges about the lessons learnt and the closing remarks. Participants unanimously enjoyed the training and improved their understanding of SE, acknowledging that there is a real momentum for SE at national, European and international level. All were interested to continue working on this topic and to work towards implementing the strategies developed during the training. The venue, at SMART premises was also particularly appreciated by the participants. Below the main takeaways identified by the participants:



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🗨️ Q&A ||| Polls

☰ Training Academy Social Economy 20... 👤

🗨️ Q&A ||| Polls

What are the main takeaways that you will bring home from the Training Academy? 8 👤

- 👤 **Anonymous**

 - A broader knowledge about social economy.
 - The perspective of how important it is to work for a transition in the economic system that allows the construction of a more equal / fair society.
- 👤 **Anonymous**

Better percepeion of importance and influence on local economies
- 👤 **Anonymous**

The most valuable type of resource is human resource; as such the social economy approach, which is human-centered, should be introduced and implemented in all countries. This requires a lot of coordination work and commitment by each organization and by Solidar as well.
- 👤 **Anonymous**

Better understanding of social economy

What are the main takeaways that you will bring home from the Training Academy? 8 👤

- resource; as such the social economy approach, which is human-centered, should be introduced and implemented in all countries. This requires a lot of coordination work and commitment by each organization and by Solidar as well.
- 👤 **Anonymous**

Better understanding of social economy
- 👤 **Anonymous**

Social economy can be more political and SOLIDAR has a role to play there
- 👤 **Anonymous**

Social Economy is key for the future
- 👤 **Anonymous**

Better understanding of the concept of Social Economy
- 👤 **Anonymous**

A good knowledge about social economy



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