



Blueprint for advanced skills & trainings in the social economy

EU-LEVEL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



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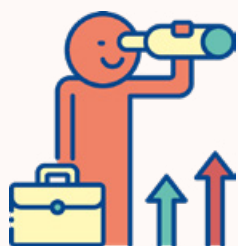
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More Info and contact

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This document is an extract of a complete research developed under the baSE project to identify competences and advanced trainings schemes adaptable to diverse SEE in Europe.

The complete version of the Synthesis Report can be found on www.socialeconomyskills.eu/resources



Acronyms

baSE	Blueprint for advanced competences and trainings in the Social Economy
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
NPO	Non Profit Organisation
SE	Social Economy
SEO(s)	Social Economy Organisation(s)

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1. Introduction

The urge to transition towards a sustainable economy that is non-threatening to the planet, more inclusive for all and fit for the digital age has been widely acknowledged (Kwauk & Casey, 2022; OECD, 2023; Social Economy & Proximity Competences Alliance, 2023; Social Good Accelerator et al., 2022) few countries are considering education policy that can facilitate the development of green skills for such transitions. Where policy discussions are happening, green skills are often conflated with science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM).

To tackle these challenges, novel approaches and new business models are necessary (European Commission, 2021a). The European Union is conscious of these challenges. Since 2017, the European Commission (hereafter EC) has released its Green Deal, its Digital Strategy as well as the Social Rights Action Plan (European Commission, 2018, 2020a, 2020b, 2023) aiming to move toward a more sustainable life for all.

As social economy organisations (hereafter SEOs) are, by definition, driven by a social mission¹, they hold great potential to establish alternative, non-threatening and sustainable business models that address today's challenges. Indeed, thanks to the specific features that lie at the heart of the social economy (such as the primacy of the social aim, the limitation of profit distribution, as well as their local anchorage and their democratic and participatory mechanisms), SEOs often contribute to the emergence of innovative solutions to the supply of sustainable goods and services, or, among other issues, to bridging the employment and digital gaps for those far from the market and technologies. For these reasons, it is imperative to **support the creation of SEOs** and their development.

Yet, as for other industrial ecosystems, the social economy (hereafter SE) is currently facing difficulties, including the **need to reskill and upskill** the workforce to address green and digital competence shortages while preventing the exclusion of workers. Indeed, we see an increase in the number of SEOs driven by an environmental purpose, which automatically raises the demand for workers with green as well as other SE competences. At the same time, reskilling and upskilling efforts are also needed to facilitate workers' reallocation from declining activities to expanding ones. In addition, over the past decade, a set of ground-breaking, emerging technologies have signalled the start of the Fourth Industrial Revolution that is massively disrupting competence needs across a broad range of industries, and the SE is not exempt. *"New data from the Future of Jobs Survey suggests that on average 15% of a company's workforce is at risk of disruption in the horizon up to 2025, and on average 6% of workers are expected to be fully displaced."* (World Economic Forum, 2020, p. 8).

Therefore, to support the SE sector, which holds great potential in the face of the current grand challenges, it is necessary to **strengthen future and current SE workers** through the design and supply of adapted curricula. *"Developing and enhancing human competences and capabilities through education, learning and meaningful work are key drivers of economic success, of individual well-being and societal cohesion."* (World

¹ What is usually called the "social mission" can encompass contributing to the well-being of people or communities as well as benefiting the environment or various elements of a social system.

Economic Forum, 2020, p. 8). For this reason, and in conjunction with the EC Pact for Skills strategy², the baSE project aims to reinforce the capacities of the SE and its human capital in key areas such as the digital and green transitions and inclusiveness.

To reach this goal, the **baSE project** involves 25 partners (SE federations, umbrella organisations and support structures, higher education and vocational education and training (VET) providers, research institutions and sector experts) from 10 European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Spain) forming an alliance for sectoral cooperation on competences for the social economy and proximity ecosystem. More precisely, the baSE project focuses on competence mismatches for the upskilling and reskilling of SE practitioners, managers and supporters, by contributing to developing a new strategic approach (Blueprint) for sectoral cooperation on the supply of skills for new or updated occupational profiles in the SE sector.

The present report synthesises the extended research conducted in each of the 10 countries involved in the project, in order to understand, at European level, the needs of SEOs in terms of reskilling and upskilling to effectively face the green and digital transitions as well as the inclusiveness challenge.

This report starts with a description and definition of the SE (section 2). It then presents a mapping of the SE in the EU, starting with a historical perspective. The mapping continues with an explanation of the differences in policy frameworks between EU countries, and finally gives a statistical overview of the importance of the SE in the baSE partner countries (section 3). We then explore the opportunities and challenges for the SE in the future, specifically explaining how the SE constitutes a suitable path toward a fair and inclusive twin transition (section 4). This theoretical content sets the stage for the empirical assessment of SE competence needs in the 10 baSE partner countries (section 5). The methodology is detailed before presenting the overview of the results. Following the analysis of the aggregated results, overarching recommendations are provided. Subsequently, the national syntheses are presented.

² <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1517&langId=en>

6. EU-level policy recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the national synthesis report of 10 countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Spain).

1. Strengthening EU financial support

Regarding financial support, there is a real need to continue and improve support for SEOs, **taking into account and including small SEOs**. Exemplary organisations that develop social innovations, as well as organisations that contribute to the transitions, should be supported and encouraged. The structural funding of SEOs can take several forms (dedicated venture capital fund, funding streams, European Social Economy Fund that pools resources from various EU programmes, etc.).

- The EU should establish a **dedicated venture capital** fund aimed at fostering innovation and growth in the SE sector. This fund should target start-ups and initiatives that demonstrate a potential for both economic and social impact, further enhancing the sector's development and sustainability.
- The EU should allocate dedicated funding streams for the development and expansion of SEOs, encouraging financial institutions and investors to offer **tailored financial products and incentives**, such as favourable loan terms and tax benefits, to support the growth of the SE sector.
- The EU should establish a European Social Economy Fund that pools resources from various EU programmes, while also promoting the **inclusion of social impact indicators** in financial reporting and evaluation criteria for funding allocation to **measure the social and economic benefits generated by SEOs** across the member states.
- The European Commission should enhance support for the SE sector by increasing the availability of grants, subsidies, low-interest loans, and specific funds for skill development, particularly in the green and digital transitions. They should also prioritise funding for initiatives aligned with EU sustainability and climate goals, creating incentives for organisations that invest in upskilling their workforces.
- Enhanced EU funding opportunities and improved funding accessibility should be made available to SEOs, particularly smaller entities, by:
 - Enhancing funding options and **simplifying access procedures**, focusing on creating transparent pathways and tailored support for smaller entities to ensure equitable access and promote their sustainability within the EU;
 - Providing capacity-building programmes to help small SEOs develop grant application competences and financial management capabilities;
 - Establishing targeted financial support schemes for small SEOs, especially non-profit entities that rely heavily on volunteer work. These schemes should be designed to alleviate the economic burden of training and skills development, enabling such organisations to invest in the growth and development of their workforces without straining their resources.

- Impact-oriented procurement pilots should be launched to find enduring solutions to the challenges imposed by the triple transitions. These pilots could not only provide valuable learning experiences but also serve as models for future initiatives.
- A dedicated EU funding programme should be created to encourage and financially assist SEOs in their endeavours to contribute to the green transformation. SEOs engaging in eco-friendly practices, sustainable energy adoption, and circular economy models should be eligible for grants and sustainable business development resources.
- The European Commission should allocate resources, within dedicated Erasmus+ programme calls, to develop **specialised curricula for SE education**. This will strengthen education and competences development within the SE sector and contribute to the economic and social well-being of communities across the EU.
- Continued and regular financial support should be provided for existing initiatives like the Large-scale Skills Partnership for the Proximity and SE Ecosystem. The creation of sustainable funding based on good governance with the contribution of stakeholders from different levels will balance interests and improve collaboration.
- A long-term EU financial strategy should be created to advance sustainable funding for up/reskilling in the SE sector. This strategy should ensure a reliable funding approach and foster good governance practices to effectively support ongoing competences development initiatives within the sector.

2. Enhancing education and training in the social economy sector

As regards education and training, it is important to take advantage of existing plans and initiatives at the European level. It may also be pertinent to develop new programmes that really sustain and foster education and training in the SE at the EU level. To do so, research has an important role to play, by generating **comprehensive data and high-quality study materials for education and training purposes**. The development of a European Competences Framework will allow for cooperation and comparison between member states. In the same vein, federations, if supported and developed, can work on developing common standards for education and training. Training and education should be designed to facilitate everyone's participation, meaning that **courses should be short, specific and blended, developing a wide range of competences, and using diverse teaching methods**. This training should be accessed using vouchers developed by the EU. But the SE should not be set apart: it should be included in all education levels, in collaboration with educational institutions.

- Member states should expand the range of high-quality and inclusive training and competence development opportunities available to the social economy workforce, so as to effectively address the multifaceted challenges posed by the triple transition, namely the green, digital and social transitions.
- The European Commission should reinforce its commitment to and support for the aspects of the Social Economy Action Plan (2021) that pertain to the advancement of SE education and training. This involves allocating more resources and policy attention to the development and implementation of education and training programmes for the upskilling and reskilling of the SE workforce.

- The creation of tailored European curricula for the SE and of research initiatives in SE subjects should be supported through targeted calls within the Erasmus+ and Horizon programmes. This will ensure the availability of high-quality educational resources for training and education in the SE sector.
- The EU should reinforce collaboration with and support to existing European networks working on reskilling and up-skilling within the SE ecosystem.
- The European Commission should endorse and support research initiatives on SE topics with the aim of generating comprehensive data and high-quality study materials for education and training purposes. Furthermore, it should encourage European higher education institutions to initiate research and education programmes in the field of the SE, possibly through the Horizon programme and similar avenues. This will help develop a qualified workforce and expertise in the SE, fostering the sector's growth and impact.
- The EU should financially, organisationally and politically support the development of a common European Competences Framework associated with the roles and occupational profiles of the SE sector, and **include these profiles in the EC system** of recognition of professional qualifications in practice.
- Federations and confederation of SEOs should be supported to develop common standards for education and training (certification) and harmonise SEOs from different countries regarding the needs for SE education and training.
- Support should be given to local, national and European SE initiatives to offer **regular informal training programmes** to better cater to the specific needs of various SE organisations. Most non-formal training programmes in the SE sector are organised as part of EU-funded projects, resulting in this training being offered sporadically rather than as part of the regular training offer of the support system.
- Training providers should be encouraged to collaborate to ensure that the available training courses address the skills needs of the SE workforce and are tailored to the unique characteristics of SEOs, not only as regards the content of the learning but also as regards the learning strategy.
- Short, specific and blended training programmes should be developed to cater to the needs of SE workers, enabling them to balance their work, personal and educational commitments. These programmes should **prioritise flexibility** to accommodate learners' varying schedules and needs.
- Diverse teaching methods, including “global learning”, “transformative learning” and “critical literacy”, should be incorporated into the SE training offer and education programmes.
- An emphasis should be placed on the development of ethical, social and civic competences as an integral part of SE education and training. These competences should be incorporated into curricula to prepare SE workers for the multifaceted demands of their roles.
- Member states should promote the integration of SE topics across all education levels to encourage **learners' engagement and career paths in the SE sector**. This approach will contribute to the promotion of social entrepreneurship and nurture a workforce that is socially conscious and well-equipped to tackle the complexities of the triple transition. Similarly, at the European level, the European Commission should adopt recommendations on the inclusion of SE topics in all levels of formal education and on the support of non-formal training on SE in the member states.
- Member states should collaborate with educational institutions to integrate SE-related courses into the curriculum of universities and vocational schools, developing comprehensive educational programmes and curricula that incorporate SE concepts, business models, and practical compe-

tences at various educational levels, from schools to universities.

- Member states should facilitate **partnerships between SEOs and educational institutions** to offer apprenticeships, vocational training, and professionalisation schemes specifically tailored to the diverse needs of the SE sector, focusing on competences related to the green transition, digitalisation, inclusiveness, and day-to-day challenges.
- The Commission could encourage member states to introduce voucher systems that allow individuals and employees to access SE training programmes, ensuring that training programmes are accessible to all, with a focus on reaching marginalised and underrepresented communities to promote inclusiveness and diversity within the SE sector. Additionally, it could encourage collaboration between sector-specific networks, associations, and educational institutions to provide practical, sector-specific training and mentoring opportunities.

3. Promoting participatory and evidence-based policy-making

The participation of SEOs in EU-level programmes requires a certain **harmonisation of the legal definition**. This would allow for systematic and continuous data collection, namely on the actual training and competence requirements. This data collection would also allow the **monitoring and assessment of the SE's impact and development**, which would in turn bolster support for the SE sector. In the same vein, impact assessment could be more developed. When designing the support addressed to SEOs, the EU should engage SE stakeholders in order to build support mechanism that really fit with their real-world experiences. **A platform for SEOs** could be implemented for them to share good practices. Finally, there is a need for SEOs to engage in **public-private partnerships** and continue to create innovative initiatives that address societal challenges.

- The EU should establish unified standards across the EU for SEOs, regarding their definition, composition and principles.
- The EU institutions should establish a **collaborative approach** when designing policy actions and setting the policy priorities of funding programmes specifically designed for the SE. It is essential to engage a diverse range of stakeholders of SEOs, including cooperatives, non-profits, community enterprises, workers and networks of SEOs, in co-designing strategic policy and financial frameworks to create a more participatory and evidence-based policy-making process.
- The EU should establish a systematic and continuous data collection and analysis programme to gather information about the SE, its training and competence requirements in member states. This initiative is essential to enhance comprehension of the SE's dynamics and diversity, allowing both member states and the EU to cooperatively formulate and enforce more robust policies while ensuring effective monitoring.
- The EU should strengthen reporting provisions for member states on the SE to enable a better understanding, monitoring and assessment of the SE's impact and development. By so doing, the EU can better understand and support the SE sector's growth and impact.
- The EU should establish a **review mechanism** for SE-related education and training policies, incorporating feedback from stakeholders and evidence-based findings. This will ensure that policies remain relevant.

- The EU should engage SE stakeholders, including practitioners, managers, supporters and relevant NGOs, in the policy-making process through regular consultations and dialogues to understand their needs and challenges, ensuring that policies are tailored to their real-world experiences.
- The Commission should create a dedicated platform for the collection and dissemination of data, best practices and research on the SE, enabling evidence-based decision-making.
- The Commission should upgrade the **page Social Economy in my Country**.
- It is recommended to implement rigorous impact assessments to measure the effectiveness of SE policies and programmes, using evidence-based data to adjust and fine-tune policies to ensure they meet their intended goals.
- The EU should encourage SEOs to participate in public-private partnerships and co-creation initiatives to drive innovation and develop tailored solutions for societal challenges. Additionally, it should establish policy innovation labs or think tanks focused on the SE sector, bringing together experts, policy-makers and practitioners to co-create and test innovative policy solutions.

4. Fostering knowledge-sharing

The global knowledge of the SE has to be reinforced, to show European citizens its potential to address the green transition, digitalisation and inclusiveness challenges. To do so, research regarding the SE's contribution to meeting these challenges must be supported. Policy-makers could also be made more aware of the SE's potential through an **annual SE forum**, which would develop networks and partnerships. The experience of SE practitioners could be shared with newcomers, so that they learn about sector-specific solutions. This could be done by establishing **mentoring programmes**. Finally, the use of **digital training materials and tools** will facilitate the accessibility of training for all.

The EU should:

- Support **research projects that focus on the SE** and its role in addressing environmental, economic and social challenges, with a particular emphasis on the green transition, digitalisation, inclusiveness and day-to-day challenges.
- Build EU-wide public awareness to cultivate a positive image of the SE and SEOs, promoting their potential and benefits, best practices and innovative initiatives. This promotion can be done through international conferences and workshops, educational materials and events, and also by using the Social Economy Gateway portal as a comprehensive source of knowledge regarding the SE, its regulatory framework and funding opportunities.
- Support the establishment of SE networks and partnerships, for instance through an annual SE forum at the European level, to encourage knowledge sharing and exchange of information among policy-makers at all levels, especially regarding training opportunities.
- Establish mentoring programmes that pair experienced SE practitioners and managers with newcomers, facilitating knowledge transfer and building a sense of community. These would promote transnational coordination, cooperation and knowledge exchange on sector-specific solutions, drawing on past experiences and best practices in various regions and member states.
- Ensure the availability of European digital training materials and tools in national languages to facilitate accessibility for all within the SE sector. This will enable a broader and more inclusive participation particularly benefiting SE workers with special needs and those at risk of socio-economic exclusion.

Partners





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