Blueprint for advanced skills & trainings in the social economy

NATIONAL SYNTHESIS FOR GERMANY

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Project information

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Introduction to national synthesis

This document was written as part of the baSE project – *Blueprint for Advanced Skills and Training in the Social Economy*. This project focuses on competence mismatches for the upskilling and reskilling of social economy practitioners, managers and supporters, and contributes to a new strategic approach (Blueprint) to sectoral cooperation on the supply of competences for new or updated occupational profiles in the social economy sector. The baSE project involves 25 partners (social economy federations, umbrella organisations and support structures, higher education and vocational education and training 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.

Each partner country was asked to write a national synthesis, documenting first the current state, issues and perspectives of the social economy in their country, secondly the competences, skills and training needed to support the social economy ecosystem, and thirdly recommendations addressed to national and European institutions. The 10 national syntheses were afterwards fed into an extended research study in order to understand, at the European level, the needs of social economy organisations in terms of reskilling and upskilling to effectively face the green and digital transition as well as the inclusiveness challenge.

The research report as well as the national syntheses are available on the baSE project website:

socialeconomyskills.eu/resources

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1. Social economy in Germany: current state, issues and perspectives

Instead of a coherent social economy sector, a wide variety of forms, organisational structures, philosophies and traditions of social economy continue to exist in Germany. Social economy organisations (SEOs) are structured into separate “families” with different identities, legal frameworks, research, education and training organisations etc. (Birkhölzer et al. 2021, p. 7). The legal framework is dominated by associations (e.V.), foundations, non-profit limited liability company (gGmbH), cooperatives (eG) and borderline types (Göler von Ravensburg et al. 2018, pp. 57ff). In 2022, there were 656,888 civil society organisations in Germany[1] which is around 18,000 more than in 2016. However, non-profit corporations grew at a faster rate, with their number growing by 27% between 2016 and 2022 (Schubert et al. 2023).

Registered associations account for the largest share of civil society organisations (93,7% in 2022) and have increased by 2% in number since 2016. A total of 14,540 non-profit corporations were identified on the April 2022 commercial register, including 12,611 gGmbHs, 1,878 gUGs and 51 gAGs.[2] A similar rapid growth in numbers can also be observed among public benefit cooperatives. According to the cooperative register, these include 284 cooperatives with recognised non-profit status, 966 energy cooperatives, and another 647 community-oriented cooperatives (such as village stores, cinemas, breweries, community centres and multi-generation houses). In recent years, it can be observed that the share of community-oriented cooperatives, which are increasingly taking over local services of general interest, is increasing in comparison to cooperatives with a primarily economic orientation (Schubert et al. 2023, p. 6).

Existing studies refer to a wide variety of data sources, each of which relates to the various legal forms and sectors. Whereas cooperatives, inclusive enterprises, many associations and foundations are tracked by their interest groups, many areas like neighbourhood or community initiatives are not federated at all (Göler von Ravensburg et al. 2018, pp. 58f.). Furthermore, the database in Germany cannot reflect the EU definition of *social enterprise*.

Nevertheless, it can be said that the number and significance of social economy organisations are increasing, which is probably linked to the growing importance of topics such as responsible consumption, regional economy, CSR and business ethics, summarised as social-ecological transformation issues (European Commission et al. 2020, p. 137).

Since the transformation of the welfare state at the beginning of the 2000s, civil society in Germany has been gaining strength, and new forms of SEOs are emerging. Especially in the coopera-

1 The number is compiled from the association, trade and cooperative registers and the statistics of the Association of German Foundations.

2 The 2016 commercial register still showed a figure of 11,440 nonprofit corporations. This represents a growth of 27% between 2016 and 2022.

tive sector, more and more community and public welfare-oriented organisations are emerging in the areas of infrastructure, public services and social welfare "between the market and the state" (Freise and Zimmer 2019).

For the cooperative sector, citizen energy, solidarity agriculture, services of general interest – such as infrastructure, education or care and culture are growth sectors (Bayer et al. 2021). Due to the increasing number of economic crises – rising cost of living, inflation, rising energy prices, rising rents, low pension benefits – these will be of even greater importance in the future. Overall, cooperative solutions are gaining public recognition and are gradually outgrowing their niche existence.

Their solutions in terms of affordable housing, low-cost and climate-friendly energy supply, healthy food, medical care, neighbourhood assistance, education and culture, even in rural areas, are becoming increasingly convincing. Partnerships with cooperative projects and companies in all areas of services of general interest are also becoming more and more interesting for municipalities.

Seven guidelines and eleven fields of action

In 2022, in the course of the new coalition agreement of the federal government and after decades of demands on the part of SEOs, the German Federal Ministry of Economics and Climate Protection, together with the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, began a national consultation process for community-based business and social innovation, and received more than 100 contributions from academia, stakeholders and entrepreneurs. The resulting strategy responds to current international developments, in particular the EU's Social Economy Action Plan and the UN and OECD resolutions. It also ties in with existing strategies such as the sustainability strategy, the start-up strategy and the digital strategy.
The German cabinet approved the National Strategy for Social Innovation and Public Benefit Oriented Enterprises on 13 September 2023 (BMWK and BMBF 2023). With this strategy, the German government will, for the first time, place cooperatives, social enterprises, organisations and all other actors in social innovation and public benefit-oriented enterprises at the centre of political action.

Whether they are engaged in establishing fair supply chains, collaboratively generating renewable energy, integrating people with previously unequal starting conditions into the job market, or manufacturing products in the circular economy – all such companies prioritise a positive social impact over maximising monetary profit. Social innovations are often created in the process, which the companies use to create jobs and sustainable economic growth. It is particularly often women who, as founders, combine economic success with a sense of community. Despite their important contribution to the public good, public benefit-oriented enterprises often face obstacles rather than support. For example, a company's non-profit status alone could be a reason to be excluded from economic support programmes. The strategy contains 70 practical measures to make full use of the existing diverse potential of these companies for social and ecological change.

In its coalition agreement, the German government agreed to develop a national strategy to strengthen socially responsible enterprises and social innovations. The strategy, which has now been presented, formulates the most important goals and measures in seven guidelines and eleven fields of action. The aim is to improve framework conditions and strengthen support to mobilise social and economic forces to address current social challenges. These include, for example:

- Inequalities in access to debt capital are to be reduced for public benefit enterprises.
- Current venture capital instruments focus strongly on rapid growth and the sale (exit) of company shares.
- Mezzanine instruments are often more suitable for the financing of non-profit enterprises. This is why, for example, efforts are being made to open the INVEST grant to mezzanine financing as well.
- Start-up financing proves to be a challenge for most founders. Support programmes such as EXIST now take greater account of sustainability criteria. Women, who are particularly likely to start up with a focus on the common good, receive special support through EXIST Women.

Measures for cooperatives

Cooperatives are of particular importance from the perspective of the strategy for the common good orientation of the economy. Therefore, numerous measures are being addressed to support cooperative start-ups:

- An enabling legal framework makes it easier for cooperatives to contribute to the transformation. For this reason, cooperative law is to be adapted to advancing digitisation, and the conditions for digital self-financing via Crowdinvesting are to be improved. There was also an expert discussion on this at the Federal Ministry of Justice on 13 September.
- Company takeovers by employees and joint initiatives by employees and trade unions to this end are seen as attractive instruments for preserving jobs and for company succession. Converting existing companies into cooperatives could prove to be an interesting solution for their long-term existence, especially for companies oriented toward the common good. For this reason, targeted incentives are to be created for this purpose and possible obstacles are to be removed.
- The federal government is supporting the development of housing cooperatives with a subsidy programme for the acquisition of cooperative shares. The new support programme is intended to provide a tangible incentive, particularly for the founding of new housing cooperatives, but also to tap potential for the expansion of housing cooperatives' portfolios or the implementation of construction, refurbishment and modernisation measures.

Two other current initiatives should be mentioned here:

- Social Economy Berlin – Building a common ecosystem for Social Entrepreneurship and Social Solidarity Economy in Berlin (https://socialeconomy.berlin/): SEB is a pilot project of Social Entrepreneurship Netzwerk Deutschland (SEND e.V.) and

Technologie-Netzwerk Berlin (TechNet e.V.), supported by the Berlin Senate Department for Economy, Energy and Enterprises, implemented in the period 2020-2023. It sees itself as a platform for the social economy in Berlin and organises events, arranges contacts, supports the founding or further development of social enterprises and provides information on all aspects of the social economy. SEB advocates the improvement of the framework conditions for social enterprises and organises exchanges between politics, administration, economic development and social economy enterprises.

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- Based on this pilot project, there is currently a (still informal) initiative to establish a nationwide platform for the social economy. This was founded at the Federal Assembly of the Cooperative Economy in Germany on 24 June 2023. The Federal Assembly marked the conclusion of the long-standing interdisciplinary research project *Teilgabe* (https://www.teilgabe.net/) on the potential of the civic economy (Blome-Drees et al. 2021).

The developments outlined show that the social economy sector in Germany is currently at an important stage of development. There is reason to believe that the potential of the social economy will become more prominent in public awareness, receive the appropriate recognition and support, and thus become more widespread.

2. Competences, skills and training that are needed to support the social economy ecosystem

The baSE project has conducted an online survey at the national level to identify the need for skills in four themes: green transition, digitalisation, inclusiveness and operational work in the social economy. Here we present and discuss the survey results for Germany. The overall methodology for this survey is explained in section 5 of the global report.

a. Statistical description of the national sample

In Germany, the survey was answered by 75 people who work within the social economy ecosystem. As there are more than 650,000 social economy and non-profit organisations in Germany, the sample is therefore small. This chapter will describe the sample and will put it into the complex context of the social economy in Germany. It is still necessary to mention that a common understanding of the social economy as a sector does not exist in Germany (see section 1). It is therefore difficult to compare data on the concept of the social economy, as statistical populations differ between the European and German social economy ecosystem definitions, and it is not easy to integrate them. Nonetheless, all relevant statistics that are available for the German social economy

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are given in appendix 1 of this report.

Most respondents identify as male (61%). The age structure consists of a relatively high share of older people, with people older than 50 years making up 59% of the sample. Compared to the average of the German working population above the age of 45 years of 53%, the sample is representative of that age group while younger people (15 to 49/44 years) are slightly underrepresented (41% to 47% within the workforce) (Demografieportal 2023).

Most of the respondents have a higher education degree. 88% have at least a bachelor's degree, with 81% having at least a master's degree or higher. Compared to the general population above the age of 15, this is highly overrepresented. Only about 18.5% of the population above 15 years of age have a bachelor's degree or higher. On the other hand, 46.5% of the population have a secondary vocational/technical education, but only 10.5% of the participants of this survey have it (destatis 2023a).

This observation is closely correlated with the fact that most (50%) of the respondents are working in leading and managerial positions within their SEOs, while 30% work in social economy federations, networks and consultancies. Only 17% of respondents work at an SEO in a position that is non-managerial. The sample is therefore not representative as it overrepresents managers and supporters. A comparison to actual sector data is not possible, as there is no aggregated data on the social economy ecosystem in Germany. Our survey found a high share of 30% volunteer workers[3] in the SEOs represented, which raises the difficulty of comparing the survey's findings with available employee data within Germany and other European ecosystems that have different employment structures. The underrepresentation of practitioners and non-managerial personnel in our sample is mostly explained by the observation that despite our efforts, the survey was not disseminated within the targeted organisations and often remained at the managerial level.

Most of the survey participants are working in cooperatives (59%), followed by associations (20%) and others (16%). The names of the participating organisations show that the legal entities represented also include several for-profit limited liability companies (GmbH), foundations and public bodies. Compared to the sector data shown in appendix 1, cooperatives are overrepresented in our sample, as associations usually represent the biggest share of SEO in the German social economy ecosystem by number (up to 95%).

The distribution of the age of the organisations is heavily focused on older organisations. 72% of the organisations within the survey are older than 10 years, and only 13% are younger than three years. In contrast, the median year of foundations of cooperatives in Germany is 2010, which means that half of the cooperatives in Germany are younger than 13 years. Non-profit companies and foundations have also rather recent median foundation ages, 2005 and 2002 respectively (Priemer et al. 2017, p.10). It therefore seems that the organisations in our sample are on average older than those within the overall population.

3 9,131 people in total are associated with SEOs, of whom 6,469 are paid employees and 2,662 are volunteers.

The size of the organisations based on the number of employed people within the survey varies a lot. Overall, 89% of organisations that participated had 50 employees or fewer, with 75% having 10 employees or fewer. In the overall economy only 38.7% of companies have fewer than 50 employees (destatis 2023b). Existing data on the social economy suggests that in 2022 only 6% of all associations, cooperatives and non-profit companies had more than 50 employees (Schubert et al. 2023, p. 20). This means that in this survey and in the context of the social economy, bigger companies are slightly overrepresented, and small companies (<50 employees) are well represented.

When it comes to the number of workers, no data are available for associations only, while the over 7,000 cooperatives in Germany employed an average of 130 employees, and all SE organisations regularly employed around 3 million people in 2018 (DGRV 2023, p. 3). Considering that there are around 650,000 non-profit organisations in Germany this comes down to an unweighted average of 4.6 employees per organisation. This is closer to the median of the survey, and it shows the relevance of volunteer work, as nearly 70% of organisations have only volunteers working for them, while just over 3% only use paid employees. The remaining 24% make use of a hybrid model, where there are volunteers and employees present at the same time (Schubert et al. 2023, p. 19). In our sample the shares represent 13%, 0% and 87% respectively. The obvious shift in both statistical populations is due to the project's focus on organisations that regularly employ people.

The SEOs represented in this sample show a wide range of sectors of activities. The sectors of Energy and Social Action were chosen most often, with 20 organisations working each of them (see appendix 2). These are closely followed by Business Services (19) and Education and Research (18). This outcome may be due to the focus of the baSE project on the energy and care sub-sectors during the first phases of the project, but is not well reflected in the overall distribution of sectors within the German SE.

Since in Germany most associations are present within the areas of sports, culture and education, over 50% of non-profit organisations are working in these three contexts. Social action and energy together account for fewer than 10% of organisations. For cooperatives alone, most of them are concerned with housing (26%), agricultural trade (24%), commercial retail and services (20%), energy (12.5%), banking (10.5%) and other (7%). Most of these are underrepresented in the survey sample (see appendix 2).

In conclusion, the sample is non-representative in some areas, especially when it comes to the overall size of the sample, the level of education, the share of non-managerial personnel and the legal form of organisations. This does not mean that we cannot use our sample to analyse the survey given the resulting limitations, but that there is an even higher degree of certainty for some of the well-established sub-populations that are a result of our sample structure. Missing aspects of the overall statistical population of the social economy in Germany can be addressed by looking at the results from our previously conducted focus groups.

b. Regarding the green transition

Managers and supporters

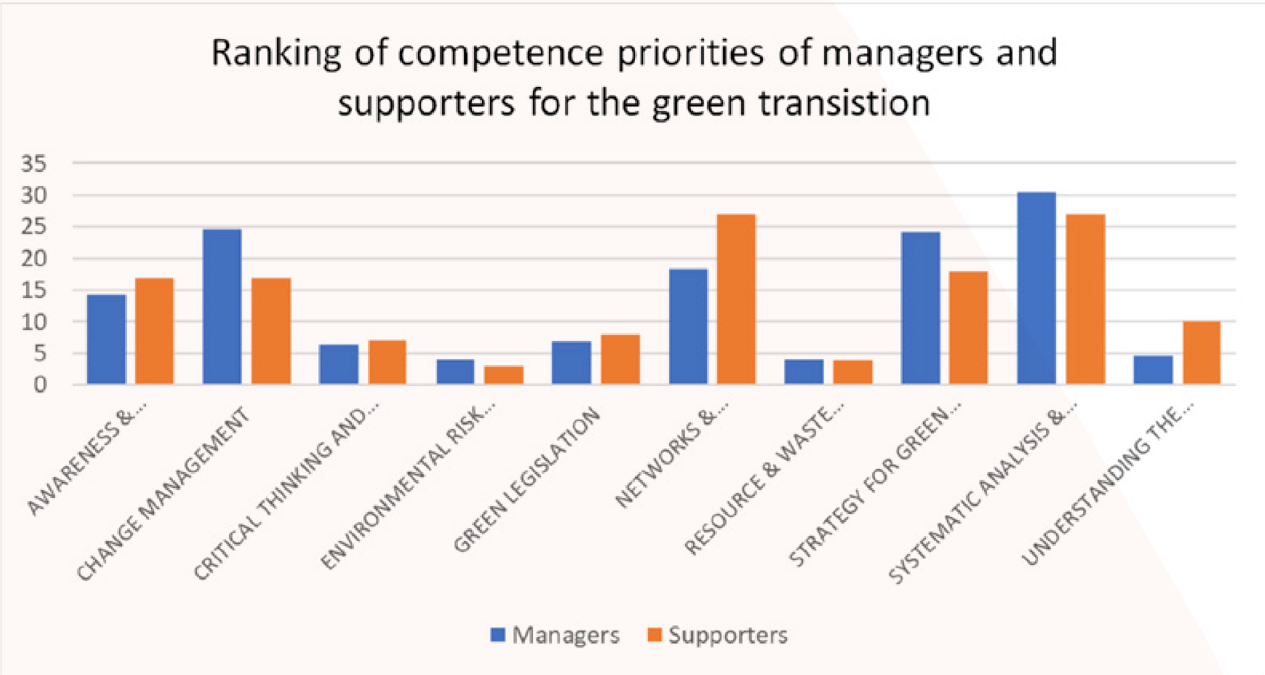

Figure 1: Ranking of competence priorities of managers and supporters from the German social economy for the green transition. Source: baSE survey 2023

Based on the survey, we can provide information on the competences that are needed in the green transition. In this section we will present the result for managers and supporters. As the number of survey participants in the role of practitioners was relatively small, their responses to the individual topics are presented in a summary section at the end of this chapter.

Regarding the green transition, the SE managers surveyed (n = 40) indicated competences with a strategic orientation as priorities. These include SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS AND DECISION-MAKING in first place, CHANGE MANAGEMENT in second place, closely followed by STRATEGY FOR THE GREEN TRANSITION in third place. On the other hand, competencies that are more aimed at understanding the basics of the green transition or include concrete operational aspects, are found in the lower ranks (e.g. UNDERSTANDING THE GREEN TRANSITION, ENVIRONMENTAL RISK ANALYSIS and RESOURCE AND WASTE MANAGEMENT). In the middle of the ranking are meta-competences such as NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION, AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT and CRITICAL THINKING AND SELF-REFLECTION as well as competences in legal foundations for the green transition (GREEN LEGISLATION).

This information largely corresponds to the selection of the supporters (n = 23). Here, too, the top priorities are strategic competences whereas in the lower range you mainly find operational competences.

The fact that NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION was chosen as a top priority by the supporters corresponds with the discussion in the focus group. Here, supporters mentioned that regarding the green transition it is important to have skills in communication, negotiation and moderation to exchange ideas and “make best practices more visible” (FG Care).

The agreement between managers and supporters in giving top ranking to the competence SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS AND DECISION-MAKING testifies to the importance that both roles attribute to a complex understanding of the green transition, and to the fact that they see a need for competences that take account of both environmental and social challenges and economic challenges. This information can be correlated with the discussion in the focus group, where representatives of the SE care sector did not label the green transition as an explicit strategic goal of their organisations but as an underlying challenge as well as one of the ideas of their everyday life. Therefore, a strategic competence that aligns different goals is very much needed.

On the other hand, the importance of competences that were hardly prioritised by the participants in the survey, such as RESOURCE AND WASTE MANAGEMENT, was stressed in the focus group, although only regarding the housing sector, including competences in planning sustainable building projects.

In another section of the survey, respondents were also asked if they knew any training that already offers education related to their top 3 priorities. Regarding the question about the need for training for the highest ranked competences by both supporters and managers regarding the green transition, most of them stated that they were either not aware of any training or that it was not available. One exception is the training offered for the competence NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION. Here, the same number of respondents stated that training exists and that they do not know of any on offer.

c. Regarding digitalisation

Managers and supporters

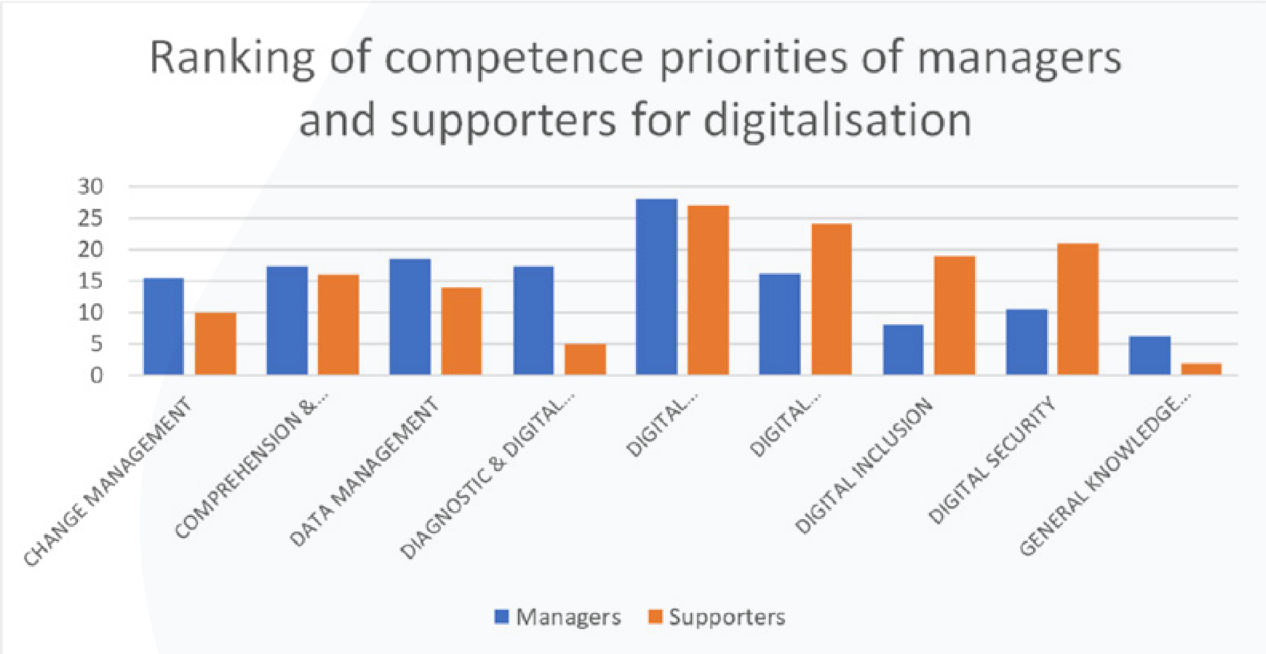

Figure 2: Ranking of competence priorities of managers and supporters from the German social economy for digitalisation. Source: baSE survey 2023

In the field of digitisation, both the managers (n = 37) and supporters (n = 23) questioned gave the highest priority to the competence DIGITAL COLLABORATION. In the case of the managers, this is also far ahead of the other competences. With the goal of effectively shaping digital collaboration within the organisations, this competence is about knowledge of suitable digital tools and technologies as well as interpersonal skills that are necessary, for example, in the context of shifting meetings to the digital world. This information also corresponds with statements from the focus groups, in which the growing importance of online meeting tools was emphasised.

In second place, the managers selected the competence DIAGNOSIS & DIGITAL STRATEGY. This involves a comprehensive analysis of various aspects, such as the market, the social mission of the organisation and user needs, and bundling them into a digital strategy. From the supporters' point of view, however, this competence plays a less important role and is ranked far behind in penultimate place. For them, the competence of DIGITAL COMMUNICATION is particularly relevant, i.e. the creation and dissemination of digital content to build a solid online presence (social networks, etc.), to promote products, services and values and to build lasting relationships with members or users.

A striking similarity between the statements of the managers and supporters is that the competence GENERAL KNOWLEDGE OF IT OPERATIONS was hardly selected by them (in both cases this competence is found in the last place). This competence implies general knowledge of the functioning of the existing digital instruments (software and hardware). The statements of the survey participants do not correspond with the statements from the focus groups, in which the importance of the creation of digital tools, especially of e-learning platforms, was emphasised. This need for competence was argued against the background of the urgent need for knowledge management in and between SEOs. In addition, the focus groups participants emphasised the importance of competence in DATA MANAGEMENT. This was confirmed by the managers in the survey, where it was ranked as the second most important competence. This competence is about managing the organisation's data, using it strategically, as well as ensuring its protection in compliance with legal regulations. The competence COMPREHENSION & BASIC USE OF DIGITALS TOOLS & THE INTERNET, which includes basic knowledge in the use of digital technologies (e-mail, internet), is listed in fourth place in the managers' priority list and in fifth place in the supporters' priority list.

It is interesting that the competence CHANGE MANAGEMENT is in third last place for both groups. This is the competence of strategically implementing digital change in one's own organisation and promoting acceptance of digital change among employees. The competence DIGITAL INCLUSION was prioritised by supporters as the fourth most important competence. This refers to the promotion of barrier-free ways of using digital tools and technologies. Managers, on the other hand, hardly prioritised this competence.

Regarding the question about the need for training for the highest ranked competences by both supporters and managers regarding digitisation, most of them stated that they were either not aware of any training or that it was not available.

d. Regarding inclusiveness

Managers and supporters

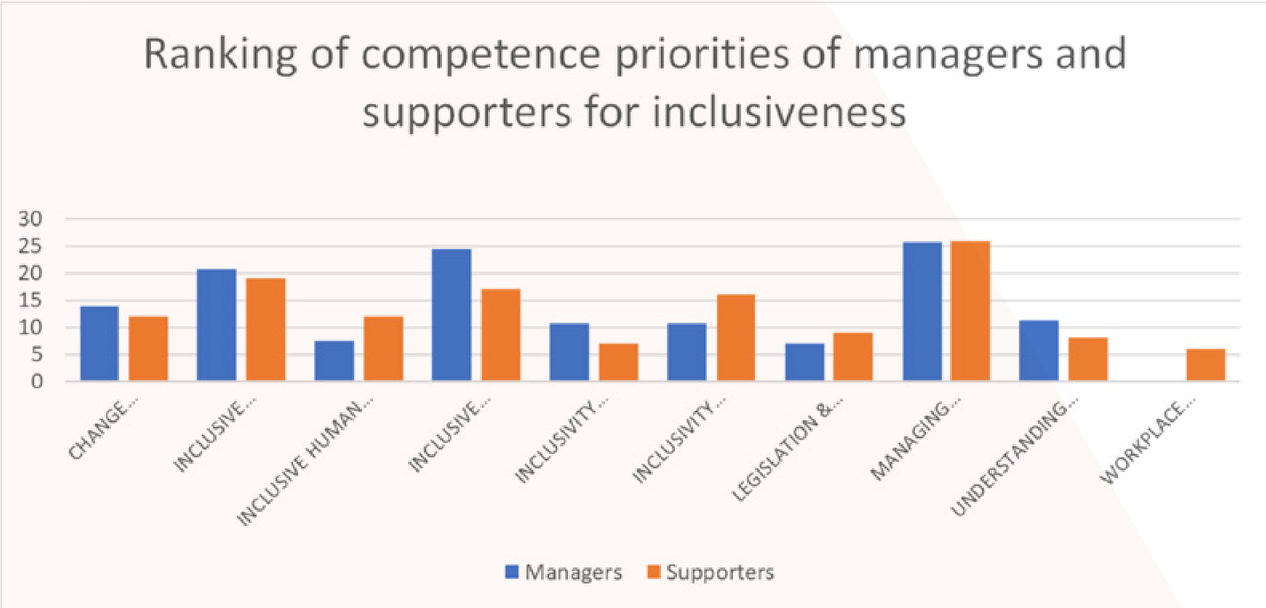

Figure 3: Ranking of competence priorities of managers and supporters from the German social economy for Inclusivity. Source: baSE survey 2023

For the topic Inclusiveness, there were n = 35 responses from managers and n = 22 responses from supporters. The competence MANAGING DIVERSITY, i.e. the ability to deal with diversity in a group, e.g. in the case of conflicts, and to adapt organisational practices, accordingly, is given the highest priority by both managers and supporters, as is INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP. Thus, both groups see a high need for competence in this strategic area. The need for communication competences (INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION), which enable a respectful linguistic approach to inclusion based on a critical reflection of one's own stereotypes and prejudices, is also rated highly by both groups.

The competence INCLUSIVE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT is rated relatively low in relevance by the managers. Thus, a competence concerning the promotion of the participation of people with diverse characteristics in the organisations is given relatively little importance in the survey, whereas in the focus groups this was assessed as an important competence by the representatives of the care sector. Here, INCLUSIVE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT was discussed to counter the shortage of skilled workers by opening to new groups of potential workers. The importance of this competence was also stressed by the focus group, with representatives of energy cooperatives prioritising the integration of groups with different socio-demographic characteristics in the board work but also as members:

"*We are an elite group after all. It is still a bubble in which we find ourselves – we have the potential* *to include and address people with a migration background and young people with the democratic means of the legal form of a cooperative."*

Regarding the question about the need for training for the highest ranked competences by both supporters and managers regarding inclusiveness, most of them stated that they were either not aware of any training or that it was not available.

e. Regarding the social economy

Managers and supporters

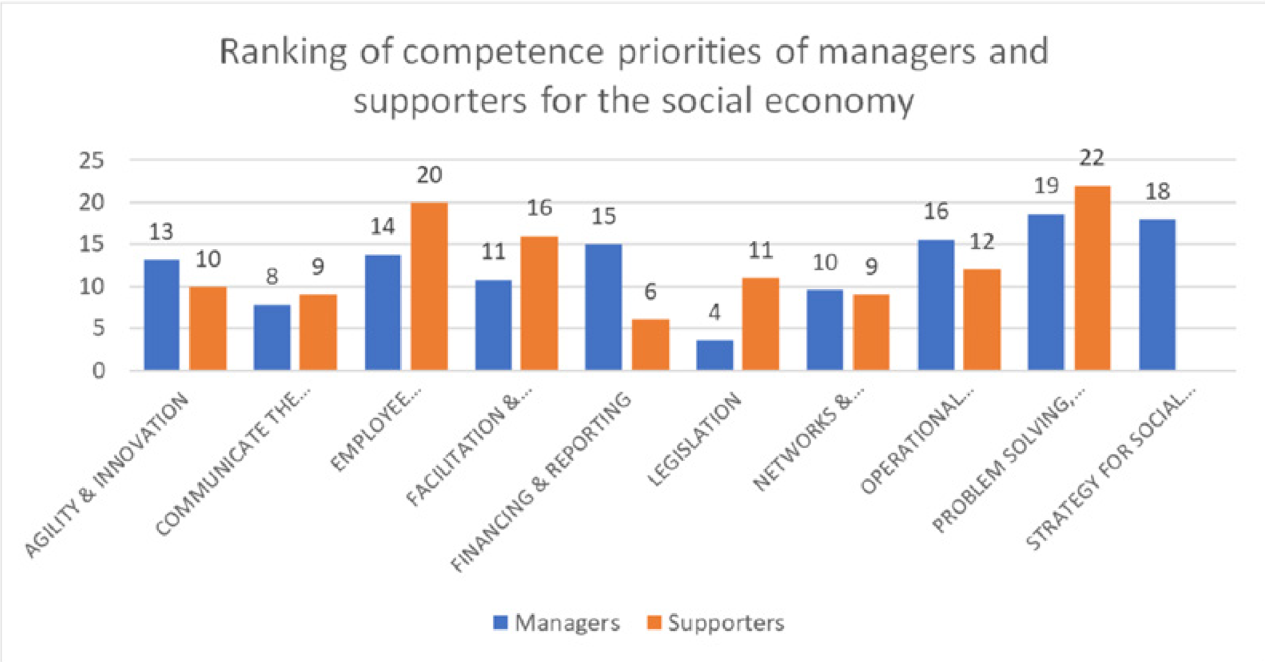

Figure 4 Ranking of competence priorities of managers and supporters from the German Social Economy for the social economy. Source: baSE survey 2023

In the section on day-to-day challenges in the social economy (managers: n = 35; supporters: n = 21), the two groups rank the competence STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL ECONOMY ORGANISATIONS as the highest and second highest priority respectively. This is above all necessary to reconcile social and economic goals. This connects to statements from the focus groups, in which ensuring the economic viability of SEOs while meeting social goals was mentioned as a major challenge:

"[…] *It doesn't mean that SEOs don't have to be profitable. The difference is simply between economic viability on the one hand and pure economism – profit-making and acquisitiveness – on the other."*

In addition, the managers rate the competence requirements for PROBLEM-SOLVING, THREAT AND OPPORTUNITY ANALYSIS as well as OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT, i.e. classic management competences, as particularly high. The supporters, on the other hand, prioritised these competences less highly. Instead, they rated the competence FACILITATION & STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS as very important. In this they agree with the focus group participants, who rated the challenge of dealing with the various interest groups – members, volunteers, board members and also other actors such as communities – as particularly complex in the context of the social economy. It is therefore surprising that the managers do not consider this competence to be particularly important. Another important competence in this context, NETWORKS & COLLABORATION, was emphasised as particularly important by focus group participants due to the need for the creation of collective structures (such as umbrella organisations). However, this competence was hardly prioritised in the survey by either supporters or managers.

In terms of the question about the need for training for the highest ranked competences by both supporters and managers regarding day-to-day challenges, most of them stated that they were not aware of any training.

Practitioners

Regarding the responses of practitioners, it should be noted that only 12 people participated in this role in the survey (see section 2a). Thus, only trends in competence needs can be identified for this position. However, by comparing the answers of the practitioners with those of the managers and supporters questioned regarding their own field, one would get a good notion of what skill areas seem to be important in social economy organisations in general. For the area of the green transition (n = 12), the ability to COMMUNICATE AND RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT GREEN TRANSITION was rated as particularly important. Following this, respondents selected the competence UNDERSTANDING THE LINKS AND INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE SOCIAL ECONOMY AND THE GREEN TRANSITION. As managers and supporters also chose a competence that highlights the complementary character of ecological and societal goals (see section 2b), this can be taken as a sign that this competence is needed at various organisational levels.

For the topic of digitisation (n = 12), the practitioners surveyed selected the competences COMMUNICATING DIGITALLY, DEVELOPING AN AGILE ATTITUDE and COLLABORATING DIGITALLY as priorities. So, important overlaps can be seen in the comparison with the answers of the managers and supporters. For inclusiveness (n = 10), practitioners chose the competencies COLLABORATION WITH A DIVERSIFIED GROUP, UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY and COMMUNICATING IN AN INCLUSIVE WAY. The last competence was also given importance by both managers and supporters.

The competences KNOWLEDGE OF & ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE SOCIAL ECONOMY, COLLABORATING & PARTICIPATING and PROBLEM-SOLVING, THREAT AND OPPORTUNITY ANALYSIS were chosen for the day-to-day challenges (n = 10). Together with the answers of the managers in this field (see section 2d), this gives a hint that the special challenge of social economy organisations, which consists in reconciliating economic goals on the one hand with social/ecological goals on the other hand, simultaneously including democratic participation of all members, needs to be addressed by special competences.

f. Correlating the survey results with the inventory of training

In order to get an overview of the existing training in the social economy regarding the green transition, digitalisation, inclusiveness and day-to-day challenges, we compiled an inventory of the training offered by the most important education providers. Even though many of these topics are tackled by training, they mostly do not address the special needs of the social economy and/or are very time-consuming and expensive. Especially for small SEOs this is a barrier to participating in training.

3. Recommendations

The non-existence of a common sectoral understanding has been discussed for years in Germany at a wide variety of levels and possible solutions can be found in numerous lists of demands. With the National Strategy for Public Benefit Oriented Enterprises and Social Innovation of September 2023, a foundation now seems to have been laid and targeted support measures can be built in the future. This has the potential to permanently alter the understanding of the social economy in Germany and is a substantial part of the following recommendations.

a. Addressed to national institutions

Based on the extended research (focus groups and survey) conducted within this project, the following steps are recommended to support a recognisable identification and strengthening of a social economy sector in Germany:

1. Establish common institutions, collect and transfer knowledge
2. Support and facilitate training, education and sectoral cooperation
3. Promote and coordinate sector-specific training

Establish common institutions, collect and transfer knowledge

During the desk research and the focus groups it became obvious that to increase the visibility of and the degree of cooperation within the social economy sector, there is a need for the development of a common understanding of what the social economy is and what it stands for. The recommendation would be to create a federal framework that provides a definition and an effective degree of institutional structures for this sector (e.g. state secretary, (by-)laws on the social economy, chamber of commerce, public federation) in accordance with an EU-wide understanding of the social economy ecosystem. This would also help to facilitate communication between existing groups and institutions which are often separated by legal organisational forms right now, which indirectly prevents a common sectoral understanding from arising.

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With the help of these institutions, an important step is to make many examples of successful SEOs and their respective business models as well-known as possible. Appropriate specific funding of research projects, especially in the application-oriented field, is essential for this. This would also be an inspiration for citizens who want to get involved locally and are looking for suitable models to implement their ideas.

With the National Strategy, the federal government has already made a commitment to promoting SEOs but refrains from using the social economy sector as a reference. This strategy must now be “translated” for all levels of politics and administration. To this end, training for employees in the public administration is essential, but also the support of political parties, associations and other intermediaries. A prerequisite for this is broad public relations work. Also, it may prove necessary to implement permanent contact persons for SEOs in the various authorities and administrative levels.

Support and facilitate training, education and sectoral cooperation

Our research found that the German social economy is formed of a great majority small organisations which also make use of a high degree of volunteer work. While the demand for training is recognised by a lot of organisations, the necessary capacities on their level are minimal. This is even more the case as there are a lot of non- and low-profit organisations which do not have the economic capacity to train people during work hours or pay for courses. Financial support schemes, at federal or regional level, for vocational training and professionalisation of employees and volunteers in small or newly founded non-profit cooperatives, companies and associations, could therefore be helpful to increase the rate and degree of training in the sector.

It is therefore recommended that vocational training providers and SEO federations communicate about curricula and standards for the certification of training for the sector, so that learned inputs can be used effectively throughout the social economy. The findings and training concepts of the base project should be used to work on in-demand curricula and training inputs.

Promote and coordinate sector-specific training

Finally, it is recommended to establish ways to promote and facilitate learning and training in the social economy and to create institutions or branches of existing institutions that can do so and understand the unique but diverse characteristics of the German ecosystem.

This diversity in fields of action should be recognised and effectively dealt with. For example, SEOs in the cultural sector have completely different consulting needs than energy communities or co-operatives, village or local stores, community housing projects, solidarity farms, senior citizens’ cooperatives or neighbourhood associations. Supporters of the social economy must therefore be trained and further educated in specific sectors and legal forms (cf. Bayer et al. 2021, pp. 79ff.).

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b. Addressed to EU institutions

Due to the ongoing process in Germany of streamlining definitions and understandings on the social economy, the recommendations for EU institutions are difficult to make. In general, it would be helpful for EU institutions to define and communicate the advantages of a sectoral understanding in tackling some of the recent and future global challenges. The social economy is understood to create economic welfare as well as social inclusion and resilience by using subsidiary resources within their proximity.

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Appendix 1 – Importance of social economy in Germany

a. Share of social economy in the national economy

	2018	2023	Method
National population of working age	In 2018, there were 51.8 million people of working age between 20 and 66 in Germany. By 2035, the working-age population will shrink by around 4 to 6 million to 45.8 to 47.4 million.	By contrast, there was little change in the group of people of working age from 15 to 64 inclusive. They still made up the largest share of the population in 2021, at 64%.	German Federal Statistical Office[4]
% of social economy in the whole national economy **in terms of employment**	According to a study by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the gross value added of the social economy in Germany amounted to 165 billion euros or 7% of the overall economic value added in 2012. In the same year, 4.4 million people were employed in this sector, or 11% of the total workforce.	s. 2018	Ehrentraut et al. (2014)
% of social economy in the whole national economy **in terms of number of organisations**	640,531 civil organisations	656.888 (2022)	Society in Fig-ures Trend Report 2023 (Schubert et al. 2023)

4 https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2019/06/PD19_242_12411.html https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Bevoelkerungsvorausberechnung/_inhalt.html

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Increase rate of social economy	In 2022, there were 656,888 civil society organisations in Germany. That is around 18,000 more organisations than at the time of ZiviZ's last comprehensive stocktaking in 2016. However, fewer new associations are being founded every year. At the same time, there is growth in non-profit corporations, whose number grew by 27% between 2016 and 2022. In 2022, there were 656,888 civic organisations in Germany. This is the result of association, trade and cooperative register selections as well as the foundation statistics of the Federal Association of German Foundations. Registered associations account for the largest share of these organisations. In 2022, according to the register of associations, there were 615,759, or 93.7% of all organisations. Since ZiviZ's last comprehensive population survey in 2016, the number of associations in Germany has increased moderately by 2% from 603,886 to 615,759. Worth noting is the pronounced founding dynamic of nonprofit corporations. A total of 14,540 nonprofit corporations were identified via the April 2022 commercial register cull, including 12,611 gGmbHs, 1,878 gUGs and 51 gAGs. The 2016 commercial register cull still showed a figure of 11,440 nonprofit corporations. This represents a growth of 27% between 2016 and 2022. A similar founding dynamic can also be observed among public benefit cooperatives. According to the Cooperative Register's cull, these include 284 cooperatives with recognised non-profit status, 966 energy cooperatives, and another 647 community-oriented cooperatives (such as village stores, cinemas, breweries, community centres, or multi-generation houses). In recent years, it can be observed that the share of community-oriented cooperatives, which increasingly take over tasks of local services of general interest, is increasing in comparison to cooperatives with a primarily economic orientation. Schubert et al. (2023, p.6)

b. Proportion of organisation type in the social economy ecosystem

	2018	2023	Method
% of Nonprofit Associations	95% (cooperatives included)	94%	Society in Figures Trend Report 2023
% of Foundations	4%		Society in Figures Trend Report 2023
% of Mutualities	Counted in “others”	Counted in “others”	
% of Social Enterprises	Counted in “others”	Counted in “others”	
% of others	1%		
Total	100%	100%	Society in Figures Trend Report 2023

c. Sectors best represented in social economy eco-system

The graph refers to the cited source “Society in figures trend report” from 2023 (Schubert et al. 2023). The included forms of organisation are those from the table on p. 3.

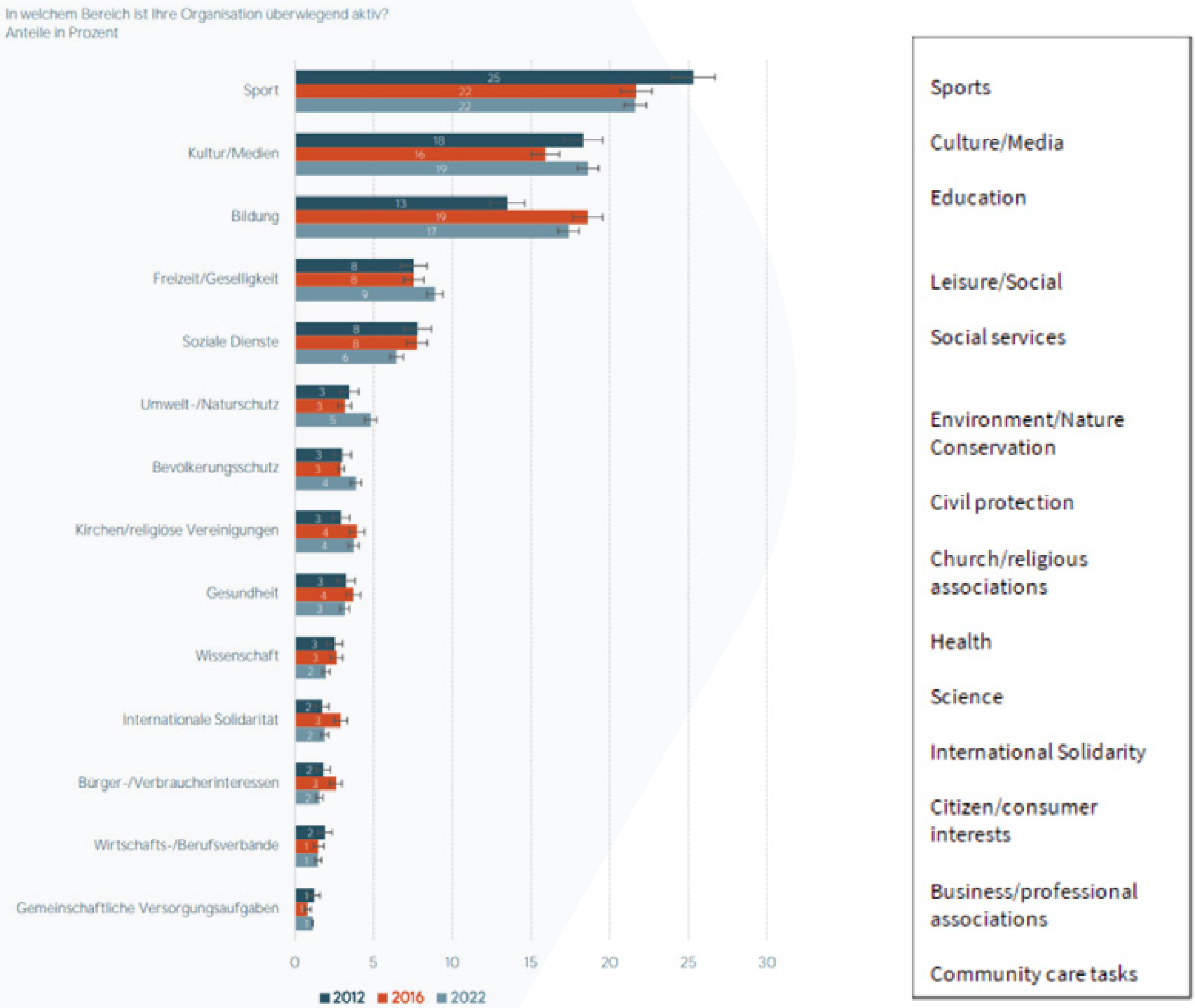


Figure 5: Society in Figures Trend Report 2023, p. 6

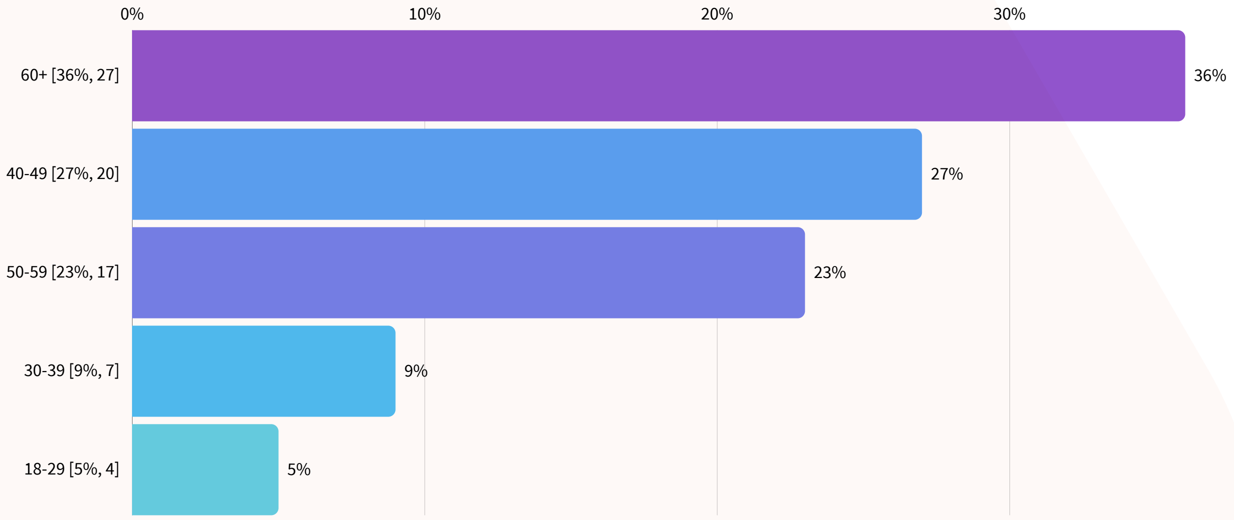
Appendix 2 – Survey report for Germany

a. General description of the statistical sample

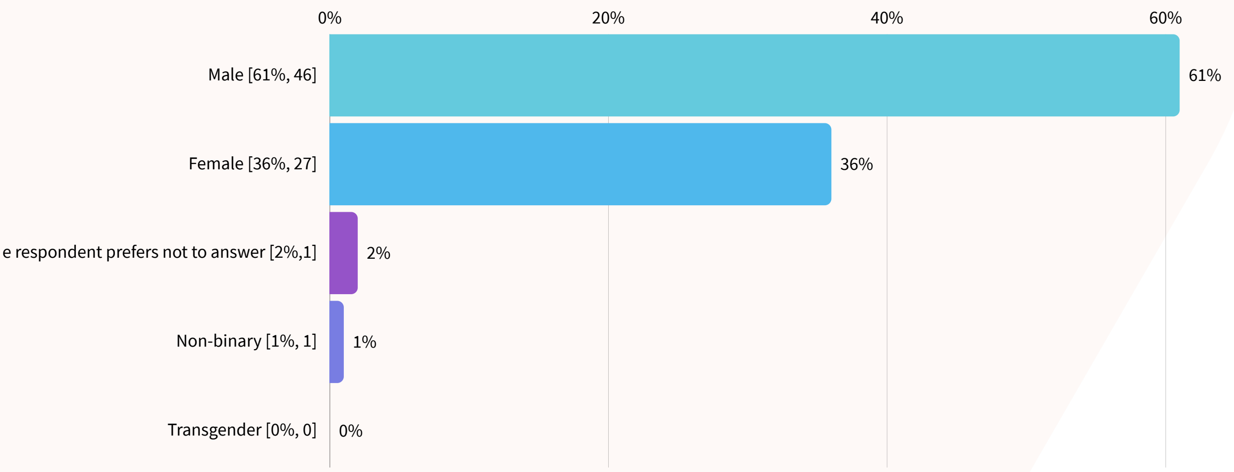
A. Total number of valid answers

75 respondents

B. Age distribution of respondents - 75 responses



C. Gender distribution of respondents - 75 responses



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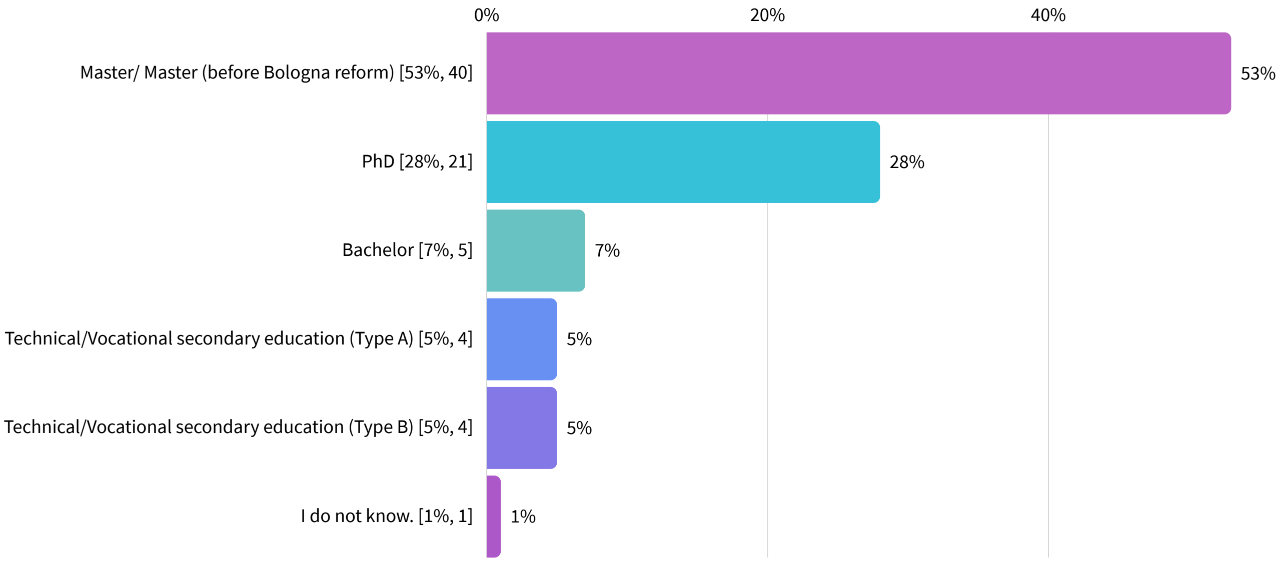
D. Level of education - 75 responses



e. Categories of social economy organisations

Categories	Choice	Count
CEO, Senior Manager or Director of a social economy organisation	53.33%	40
Work in a social economy federation, a social economy network or a social economy consultancy	30.67%	23
Work in a social economy organisation in a role other than that of CEO, senior manager or director	16.00%	12
Total		75

f. Categories of social economy organisations

Field	Choice	Count
Cooperative	59%	44
Association (e.V.)	20%	15
Others	16%	12
Non-profit limited liability company	4%	3
I do not know	1%	1
Responsible ownership	0%	0
Mutual associations	0%	0
Total		75

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G. FormeDistribution of work integration social enterprises among the sample of organisations (according to the respondents[5]) - 75 Responses

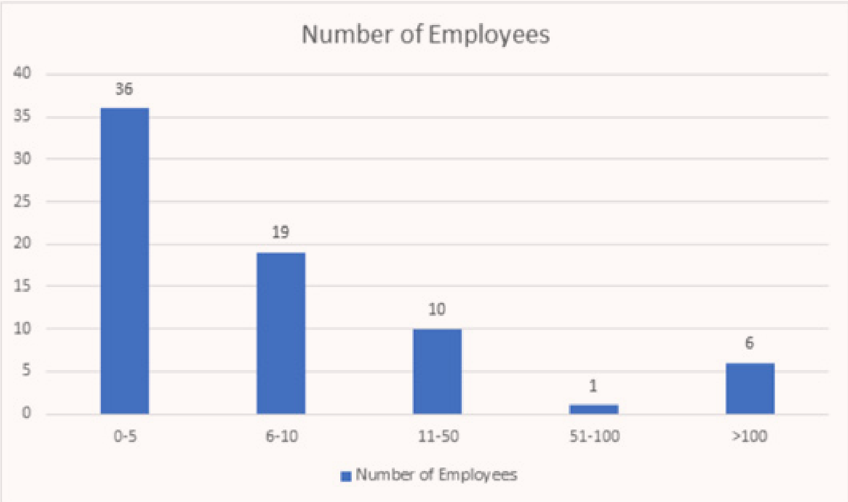
Field	Choice	Count
WISEs	17%	13
Not WISEs	64%	48
The respondent did not know	19%	14
		75

H. Distribution of organisation's age (according to the respondents[6])

Field	Choice	Count
Less than a year Between 1 and 3 years	1%	1
Between 4 and 10 years	12%	9
+ More than 10 years	15%	11
The respondent did not know	72%	54
Total		75

I. Distribution of organisations according to their sizes (according to the respondents[7], in terms of number of workers)

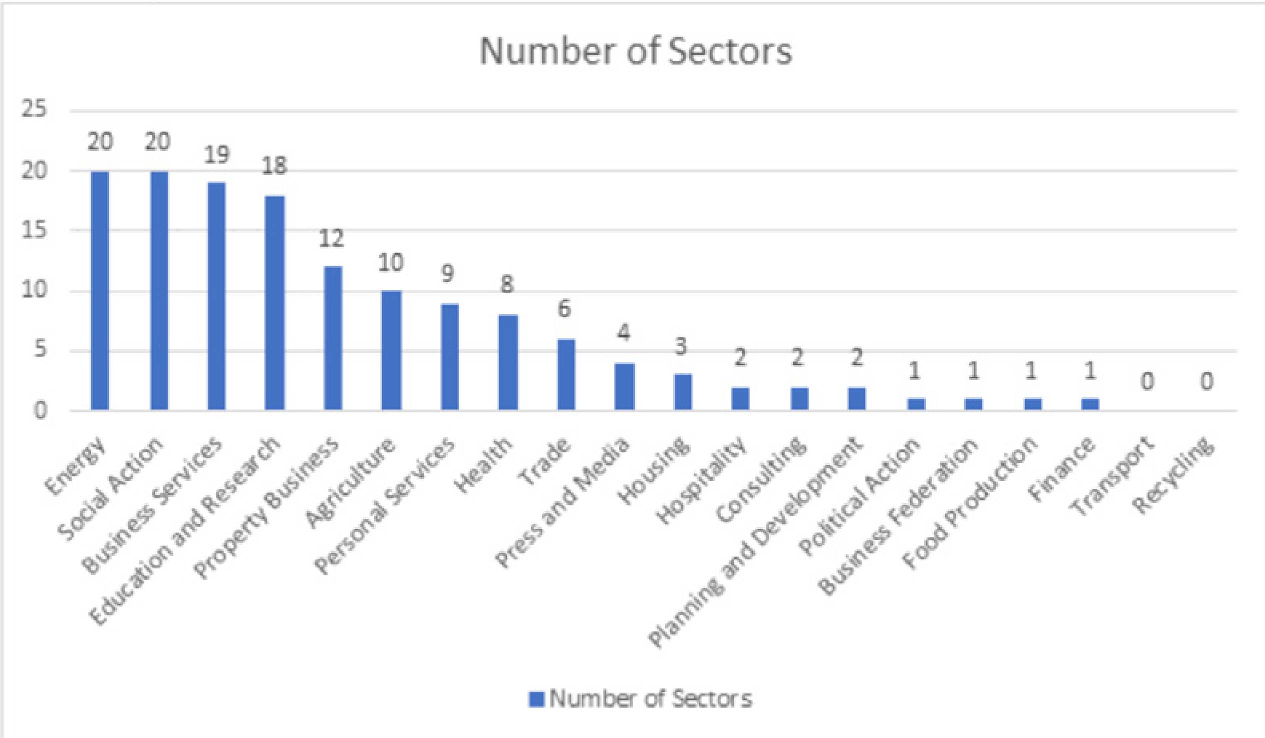
- Total number of employees : 6469,00
- Number of respondents : 73
- Mean : 88,62
- Median : 6
- Standard N-Deviation : 403,52



5, 6, 7 Each answer has been taken into account individually. It means that if three people have answered for one organisation, each of their answer is counted, and thus, the organisation is represented three times.

J. Distribution of organisations according to their sectors of activities (according to the respondents[8])

Number of respondents: 75



8 Each answer has been taken into account individually. It means that if three people have answered for one organisation, each of their answer is counted, and thus, the organisation is represented three times.

Appendix 3 – Priority skills by profile

a. Managers

Manager skill need for green transition	NB priority 1	Nb Priority 2	Nb Priority 3	After ponderation
SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS & DECISION MAKING	14	5	1	53
CHANGE MANAGEMENT	6	8	9	43
STRATEGY FOR GREEN TRANSITION	7	7	7	42
NETWORKS & COLLABORATION	3	9	5	32
AWARENESS & ENGAGEMENT	5	3	4	25
GREEN LEGISLATION	2	2	2	12
CRITICAL THINKING AND SELF-REFLECTION	1	1	6	11
UNDERSTANDING THE GREEN TRANSITION	0	3	2	8
ENVIRONMENTAL RISK ANALYSIS	0	2	3	7
RESOURCE & WASTE MANAGEMENT	2	0	1	7

Managers skill need for digitalization	NB Priority 1	NB Priority 2	NB Priority 3	After ponderation
DIGITAL COLLABORATION	10	5	5	45
DATA MANAGEMENT	4	6	6	30
DIAGNOSTIC & DIGITAL STRATEGY	4	6	4	28
COMPREHENSION & BASIC USE OF DIGITAL TOOLS & THE INTERNET	5	6	1	28
DIGITAL COMMUNICATION	5	3	5	26
CHANGE MANAGEMENT	3	5	6	25
DIGITAL SECURITY	3	2	4	17
DIGITAL INCLUSION	1	3	4	13
GENERAL KNOWLEDGE OF IT OPERATIONS	2	1	2	10

Managers skill need for Inclusivity	NB Priority 1	NB Priority 2	NB Priority 3	After ponderation
MANAGING DIVERSITY	10	5	1	41
INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP	5	7	10	39
INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION	6	6	3	33
CHANGE MANAGEMENT	3	2	9	22

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UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY	2	5	2	18
INCLUSIVITY ACTION PLAN	3	2	4	17
INCLUSIVITY TRAINING AND AWARENESS	4	2	1	17
INCLUSIVE HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT	1	4	1	12
LEGISLATION & ECOSYSTEM	1	2	4	11
WORKPLACE INCLUSIVITY	0	0	0	0

Managers skill need for SE day to day	NB Priority 1	NB Priority 2	NB Priority 3	After ponderation
PROBLEM SOLVING, THREAT AND OPPORTUNITY ANALYSIS	5	7	2	31
STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL ECONOMY ORGANISATIONS	7	3	3	30
OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT	6	1	6	26
FINANCING & REPORTING	4	3	7	25
EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT	4	3	5	23
AGILITY & INNOVATION	5	2	3	22
FACILITATION & STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS	2	4	4	18
NETWORKS & COLLABORATION	1	6	1	16
COMMUNICATE THE SOCIAL ECONOMY	1	4	2	13
LEGISLATION	0	2	2	6

b. Supporters

Manager skill need for green transition	NB priority 1	Nb Priority 2	Nb Priority 3	After ponderation
SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS & DECISION MAKING	6	3	3	27
NETWORKS & COLLABORATION	5	3	6	27
STRATEGY FOR GREEN TRANSITION	4	2	2	18
AWARENESS & ENGAGEMENT	2	3	5	17
CHANGE MANAGEMENT	1	5	4	17
UNDERSTANDING THE GREEN TRANSITION	2	2	0	10
GREEN LEGISLATION	1	2	1	8
CRITICAL THINKING AND SELF-REFLECTION	2	0	1	7
RESOURCE & WASTE MANAGEMENT	0	2	0	4
ENVIRONMENTAL RISK ANALYSIS	0	1	1	3

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Managers skill need for digitalization	NB Priority 1	NB Priority 2	NB Priority 3	After ponderation
DIGITAL COLLABORATION	7	3	0	27
DIGITAL COMMUNICATION	5	3	3	24
DIGITAL SECURITY	1	6	6	21
DIGITAL INCLUSION	3	3	4	19
COMPREHENSION & BASIC USE OF DIGITAL TOOLS & THE INTERNET	4	1	2	16
DATA MANAGEMENT	1	4	3	14
CHANGE MANAGEMENT	1	1	5	10
DIAGNOSTIC & DIGITAL STRATEGY	1	1	0	5
GENERAL KNOWLEDGE OF IT OPERATIONS	0	1	0	2

Managers skill need for Inclusivity	NB Priority 1	NB Priority 2	NB Priority 3	After ponderation
MANAGING DIVERSITY	6	3	2	26
INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION	4	3	1	19
INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP	3	2	4	17
INCLUSIVITY TRAINING AND AWARENESS	4	1	2	16
CHANGE MANAGEMENT	0	3	6	12
INCLUSIVE HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT	1	4	1	12
LEGISLATION & ECOSYSTEM	2	1	1	9
UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY	1	2	1	8
INCLUSIVITY ACTION PLAN	1	1	2	7
WORKPLACE INCLUSIVITY	0	2	2	6

Managers skill need for SE day to day	NB Priority 1	NB Priority 2	NB Priority 3	After ponderation
STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL ECONOMY ORGANISATIONS	4	5	0	22
FACILITATION & STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS	4	3	2	20
FINANCING & REPORTING	2	4	2	16
PROBLEM SOLVING, THREAT AND OPPORTUNITY ANALYSIS	2	1	4	12
AGILITY & INNOVATION	1	3	2	11
NETWORKS & COLLABORATION	2	2	1	11
COMMUNICATE THE SOCIAL ECONOMY	2	0	4	10
OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT	1	2	2	9
EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT	2	0	3	9
LEGISLATION	1	1	1	6

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c. Practitioners

Manager skill need for green transition	NB priority 1	Nb Priority 2	Nb Priority 3	After ponderation
BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE AND RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT GREEN TRANSITION	4	1	2	16
UNDERSTANDING THE LINKS AND INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE SOCIAL ECONOMY AND THE GREEN TRANSITION	0	4	4	12
CRITICAL THINKING	1	3	0	9
UNDERSTANDING THE GREEN TRANSITION	3	0	0	9
BE ABLE TO OBSERVE AND UNDERSTAND COMPLEX INTERACTIONS	1	0	4	7
KNOWING ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION	2	0	0	6
MANAGE RESOURCES & WASTE	1	0	1	4
ANALYSING ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS	0	2	0	4
MEASURING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT	0	1	1	3
BE ABLE TO ADOPT GREEN BEHAVIOUR	0	1	0	2

Managers skill need for digitalization	NB Priority 1	NB Priority 2	NB Priority 3	After ponderation
COMMUNICATING DIGITALLY	4	1	1	15
DEVELOPING AN AGILE ATTITUDE	2	4	0	14
COLLABORATING DIGITALLY	3	1	1	12
UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE OF DIGITAL INCLUSION	1	3	2	11
UNDERSTAND & USE BASIC DIGITAL TOOLS	2	1	1	9
UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING DIGITAL DATA	0	2	2	6
DIGITAL SECURITY	0	0	5	5
UNDERSTANDING AND USING THE INTERNET	0	0	0	0

Managers skill need for Inclusivity	NB Priority 1	NB Priority 2	NB Priority 3	After ponderation
COLLABORATING WITH A DIVERSIFIED GROUP	4	0	0	12
UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY	1	3	1	10

COMMUNICATING IN AN INCLUSIVE WAY	1	2	1	8
PARTICIPATING IN THE INCLUSIVITY OF THE WORKPLACE	1	1	3	8
PROMOTE INCLUSIVITY	1	0	4	7
EXERCISE EMPATHY	1	2	0	7
LEGISLATION & ECOSYSTEM	1	1	1	6
TAKING DIVERSITY INTO ACCOUNT	0	1	0	2

Managers skill need for SE day to day	NB Priority 1	NB Priority 2	NB Priority 3	After ponderation
KNOWLEDGE & ATTITUDE OF THE SOCIAL ECONOMY	3	1	0	11
COLLABORATE & PARTICIPATE	1	2	4	11
PROBLEM SOLVING, THREAT AND OPPORTUNITY ANALYSIS	2	1	1	9
UNDERSTANDING AND PARTICIPATING IN GOVERNANCE	0	2	3	7
NETWORKS & COLLABORATION	0	3	0	6
DEMONSTRATE AGILITY	2	0	0	6
FACILITATING & MANAGING RELATIONS WITH VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS	1	0	2	5
BE OPEN AND SENSITIVE TO INTER-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT	1	1	0	5

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