



The social economy and the future of work

Some figures

The European social economy provides:

- over 13.6 million paid jobs in the EU
- equivalent to about 6.3% of the working population of the EU-28
- employment of a workforce of over 19.1 million
- more than 82.8 million volunteers, equivalent to 5.5 million full-time workers
- more than 232 million members of cooperatives, mutuals and similar entities

People before profit

The 'social economy' covers over **2.8 million organisations in the EU**, including cooperatives, mutuals, associations, foundations and social enterprises. They are active in a variety of sectors including but not limited to agriculture, manufacturing industries, social services and banking.

Social economy actors prioritise generating a social and societal impact through their economic activities. The social economy creates employment, supports social cohesion, strengthens social security policies, promotes regional and rural development, stimulates environmental and consumer protection.

It is a value-based economy serving the social and economic needs of members, other target groups and society in general. The social economy principles are solidarity, responsibility and mutuality. The social economy actors are dynamic entrepreneurs that involve their members and employees in the decision making process. Profit is used for social and sustainable purposes. This can be a reinvestment in the organisation or allocation towards members, employees or community projects.

Some important activities

- Social and economic integration of disadvantaged people (such as work integration and sheltered employment)
- Social services (for example, health care, education, training and housing)
- Other public services (e.g. community transport, childcare and maintenance of public spaces)
- Strengthening democracy, civil rights and digital participation
- Environmental activities (such as circular economy and renewable energy)
- Any other economic activity that delivers a social added value

Social economy and the European Pillar of Social Rights

The European Pillar of Social Rights is about delivering more effective rights for citizens. The social economy sector in Europe is a key partner for the Pillar's three main themes:

Access to the labour market

Did you know that the social economy...

- not only provides a fair share of employment (6,3% of working population in the EU countries) but also showed resilience during the economic crisis while keeping employment figures stable
- is a frontrunner in employment opportunities for a broad range of target groups such as migrants, refugees, people with disabilities, long-term unemployed, NEETS , etc
- faces less delocalisation through local anchored activities involving local stakeholders

Fair employment and working conditions

Did you know that the social economy...

- applies the principle of 'people before profit'
- actors put this into practice with social or societal objectives and by reinvesting profits back into services for their members, the organisation or society
- is an example of respecting its human capital, for example through equal treatment in the workplace, appropriate working conditions, promotion of fair pay ratios and safeguarding well-being at work

In between jobs: supporting transition

Did you know that the social economy...

- creates new quality jobs, not only in labour-intensive sectors but also in new technologies and digitalisation, ranging from start-ups to large companies
- has dynamic business models and its pioneering work in social innovation helps to meet tomorrow's socio-economic challenges, such as the ageing population, migration and digitalisation
- increases security for its members and society by providing a variety of social services and protection

In conclusion, the social economy sector is a clear example of how to create social impact and social added value. Not only that, the sector does so in combination with economic activities and with respect for European citizens and their social rights.

Want to find out more?

Check out our website: ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/social-economy_en

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