

Social Economy Europe contribution to the 2026 UN Secretary-General report on Social and Solidarity Economy

1. Introduction

Social Economy Europe (SEE), as the most representative body of the social economy ecosystem at European Level, welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the implementation of UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/79/213 on *Promoting the social and solidarity economy for sustainable development*. This contribution is therefore focused on developments, achievements, challenges and recommendations from the perspective of the social economy ecosystem at European Union level, and not at any specific Member State. **The international recognition of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) is a major step forward** in acknowledging economic models that combine entrepreneurial activity with the pursuit of collective or general interest, democratic and/or participatory governance, autonomy, solidarity, and the primacy of people and social purpose over capital.

The adoption of successive **United Nations resolutions on SSE has been instrumental** in consolidating a shared global understanding of the contribution of the SSE to sustainable development, decent work, social justice, local economic development, environmental protection, democratic participation and social cohesion. Resolution A/RES/79/213 builds on the 2023 UN Resolution¹ and the 2022 ILO² Resolution on decent work and SSE, and explicitly recognises the role of SSE entities in advancing the 2030 Agenda, mobilising those furthest behind, strengthening communities, and promoting inclusive and sustainable economies.

¹ **United Nations General Assembly (2023)**, *Promoting the social and solidarity economy for sustainable development*, Resolution A/RES/77/281, adopted on 18 April 2023. Available at: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/77/281>

² **International Labour Organization**, *Resolution concerning decent work and the social and solidarity economy*, International Labour Conference, 110th Session, Geneva, 2022. Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/Resolution%20concerning%20decent%20work%20and%20SSE.pdf>

These resolutions are essential not only because they provide political recognition, but also because they encourage **Member States, UN entities, development banks and other stakeholders** to move from recognition to implementation. The call for inputs to the Secretary-General's report rightly focuses on measures adopted, results, evidence of impact, challenges, good practices and actionable recommendations since 1 July 2024.

2. Developments and achievements at European level

Since July 2024, the European Union has continued to strengthen its policy framework for the social economy. A major milestone was the publication, on 30 March 2026, of the **European Commission's mid-term review of the Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP)**³. The review confirms that **the social economy has become an integral part of Europe's economy and society, with more than 4.3 million entities providing at least 11.5 million jobs, around 6.3% of total EU employment.**

The mid-term review is particularly important because it renews the Commission's vision for the social economy up to 2030 and identifies new actions to improve framework conditions, access to finance, skills, visibility and data, among other fields. It is also accompanied by a new progress tracker⁴, which increases transparency on the implementation of SEAP actions and shows the state of implementation of the different commitments under the Action Plan.

The review includes several new commitments of direct relevance to the implementation of Resolution A/RES/79/213. These include a future **stocktaking report on the implementation of the 2023 Council Recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions**⁵– expected to be published in 2028 –, a **toolkit to support regional and local social economy policies**, support for **workers' buy-outs**, and stronger sectoral approaches in areas such as **energy, housing, democracy, digitalisation, tourism and circular economy**. The Commission also reports that, **by the end of 2025, 21 EU Member States had either adopted or were preparing national or regional strategies for the social economy**, showing the concrete impact of the Council Recommendation at national level.

³ **European Commission (2026)**, *Mid-term review of the Action Plan for the Social Economy: main achievements and way forward*, COM(2026) 138 final, 30 March 2026. Available at: [43df873a-0776-4f94-9269-c1c175940375_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip26_001)

⁴ **European Commission**, *Social Economy Action Plan: progress tracker*, EU Social Economy Gateway, last updated 27 March 2026. Available at: https://social-economy-gateway.ec.europa.eu/social-economy-action-plan-progress-tracker_en

⁵ **Council of the European Union**, *Council Recommendation of 27 November 2023 on developing social economy framework conditions*, C/2023/1344, OJ C, 29 November 2023. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C_202301344

The period covered by this call has also been marked by **important institutional developments**. The **renewal of the European Parliament Intergroup** on Social Economy and Services of General Interest, co-chaired by MEPs Maravillas Abadía, Irene Tinagli and Ignazio Marino, has reinforced political support within the European Parliament. The **appointment by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen of Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu** with responsibility for the social economy in her mission letter has also strengthened the visibility of the file within the European Commission. In parallel, the **relaunch of the Luxembourg Declaration Monitoring Committee** has reactivated an informal but highly relevant forum for **coordination among EU Member States** supporting the social economy at EU level. This relaunch has been made possible thanks, among others, to the close commitment of Spain and France as co-presidencies of the Committee, together with all the other EU Member States that are part of it.

Although the **Commission Expert Group on the Social Economy and Social Enterprises (GECES)** predates the period covered by this call, its renewal and its work over the last two years deserve to be highlighted. GECES has remained an essential platform for coordination between the European Commission, Member States, experts and the social economy ecosystem. It has contributed to **structured dialogue, peer learning, the exchange of good practices and the co-design of public policies** supporting the social economy at European level.

These institutional developments have **reinforced dialogue** between the social economy ecosystem and EU institutions, including through **GECES, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, the European Parliament Intergroup, exchanges with relevant Commission services and EU Member States**. They also demonstrate a renewed European commitment to the implementation of the social economy agenda and to a more **structured dialogue** between public authorities and the social economy ecosystem.

Several events have contributed to promoting the social economy in Europe and internationally. The **first European Social Economy Summit⁶**, co-organised by Social Economy Europe (SEE), CEPES – the umbrella organisation of the social economy in Spain – and Ucomur, the representative organisation of worker cooperatives and the social economy in the Region of Murcia. The event was supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy of the Government of Spain, the Government of the Region of Murcia, and the City Council of Murcia. Celebrated in the City of Murcia in the context of Murcia as Spanish Capital of the Social Economy, brought together representatives of EU institutions, Member States, social economy networks, academia and stakeholders from across Europe. The Summit included a European conference on the implementation of the SEAP with keynote speakers such as Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu, Spanish Second Vice-President and

⁶ **Social Economy Europe (2025)**, *European Social Economy Week 2025*. Available at: <https://www.socialeconomy.eu.org/social-economy-week/#>

Minister of Labour and Social Economy Yolanda Díaz, and the interventions of Romanian Minister Petre-Florin Manole and Fernando López Miras, President of the Region of Murcia. It also hosted an event of the European Parliament Intergroup on Social Economy and Services of General Interest, a meeting of the Luxembourg Declaration Monitoring Committee, a meeting of representative social economy networks, and a dedicated exchange on research and innovation in the social economy ecosystem. This broad mobilisation illustrates the importance of organisation and cooperation among social economy actors at all levels, as well as the value of institutional support from public administrations at local, regional, national and European level.

The Summit also hosted the **third edition of the European Social Economy Awards**⁷, which helped showcase the diversity, innovation and impact of social economy initiatives across Europe. The Awards contributed to increasing the visibility of concrete practices and to recognising excellence within the ecosystem.

Another important development has been the **recognition of social economy housing models in the European Affordable Housing Plan**⁸. The Plan recognises that supporting **non-profit or limited-profit housing providers**, including **cooperative housing and community land trusts**, can help address price volatility by keeping prices affordable over the long term. It also acknowledges that such providers face barriers to scaling up, including lack of legal recognition and difficulties accessing finance. This recognition is highly relevant for the implementation of Resolution A/RES/79/213, as housing is one of the key areas where social economy entities can deliver long-term, community-rooted and inclusive solutions.

The **evidence base** has also improved significantly. The European Commission's 2024 *Benchmarking the socio-economic performance of the EU social economy* study⁹ provides important data on the size, structure and socio-economic contribution of the social economy in the EU. In addition, the joint OECD/European Union report *Social Economy in Europe: Contributing to Competitiveness and Prosperity*¹⁰ represents a major contribution to the international evidence base and highlights the

⁷ **Social Economy Europe (2025)**, *Recap: 2025 edition of the Social Economy Awards*, 18 September 2025. Available at: <https://www.socialeconomy.eu.org/2025/09/17/recap-2025-edition-of-the-social-economy-awards/>

⁸ **European Commission (2025)**, *The European Affordable Housing Plan*, COM(2025) 1025 final, Strasbourg, 16 December 2025. Available at: https://housing.ec.europa.eu/document/download/756915b5-d1b1-4bde-ac82-03532d2d3d90_en?filename=0.pdf

⁹ **European Commission**: European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency, Euricse, CIRIEC and Spatial Foresight, *Benchmarking the socio-economic performance of the EU social economy – Improving the socio-economic knowledge of the proximity and social economy ecosystem*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2826/880860>

¹⁰ **European Commission**: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Social economy in Europe – Contributing to competitiveness and prosperity*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/3357450>

social economy's contribution to competitiveness, prosperity, care, housing, employment, territorial development and resilience. **The cooperation between the OECD and the EU in this area is a good practice** of international and regional policy cooperation.

Finally, the number of public consultations and calls launched by the European Commission that recognise or include the social economy has increased. This reflects a **gradual mainstreaming of the social economy into broader European policy debates**, including, public procurement, state aid, affordable housing, access to finance, regional development, democracy and the fight against poverty.

3. Ongoing work

Several important files are currently under discussion at EU level and are directly relevant to the implementation of Resolution A/RES/79/213. They are **key opportunities** for the social economy, as they could provide important legal, financial and policy tools long requested by the ecosystem. However, they remain under negotiation or preparation, **and their final outcomes are not guaranteed**. SEE therefore stresses the importance of ensuring that the social economy is fully taken into account in these policies and underlines the relevance of international recognition for these advancements.

First, work is ongoing on adapted frameworks and legal recognition. The **European Cross-Border Associations Directive** remains a key initiative to remove barriers faced by associations operating across borders in the Single Market. Its adoption would be highly relevant for civil society and social economy actors, particularly associations, by improving **legal certainty** and enabling cross-border activities. This file was at risk of disappearing from the EC workplan because of lack of agreement at Council level, however some member states want to put it back on the agenda.

Second, the ongoing revision of the **General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER)** related to State Aid is important to ensure public authorities can better finance social economy entities, including social enterprises, work integration social enterprises and providers of social services. The Commission's mid-term review explicitly refers to the need to clarify State aid rules and make it simpler for public authorities to finance the social economy beyond de minimis aid. SEE in collaboration with other networks, is working for the revision to include the European-level definition of the social economy (as defined in the Council Recommendation), increase and adapt aid intensity for social economy entities in key areas such as SMEs, access to finance, social objectives and territorial development, and mainstream the social economy across the Regulation. This is needed to ensure that provisions on start-ups, young enterprises, financial intermediaries, undertakings in difficulty, disadvantaged workers and workers with disabilities are adapted to the specific features of social economy entities. The revision should also simplify rules and remove

unnecessary barriers, including restrictive time limitations for aid linked to disadvantaged workers and workers with disabilities. However, at the time of this contribution, the closest reference to social economy is “social enterprise” but not as defined in the Council recommendation rather (that definition doesn’t include democratic governance of enterprises), which is a preoccupying for social economy actors, and understood as a set back. However the negotiations are still ongoing.

Third, the **revision of the EU Public Procurement Directives** offers an important opportunity to strengthen socially responsible public procurement, reserved contracts, social clauses and access to public markets for social economy entities. In particular, the revision should reinforce the use of the best price-quality ratio through the **Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT)** criteria, ensuring that public procurement contributes more effectively to social, environmental and territorial objectives. After a consultation process the Commission will publish by the end of the first half of 2026 a draft revision that hopefully will reflect the contributions of the Social Economy ecosystem.

Likewise, the European Commission has very recently adopted the **EU Anti-Poverty Strategy**. SEE welcomes this long-awaited initiative and notes that the Strategy explicitly recognises that the social economy and microfinance “have a specific role to play in providing work and self-employment opportunities for persons experiencing poverty”. At the same time, SEE considers that the overall recognition and strategic positioning of the social economy in the Strategy remains limited, especially given its broader contribution to preventing and fighting poverty, delivering essential services, supporting vulnerable groups, creating pathways into decent employment, promoting social inclusion and strengthening community-based responses. SEE therefore looks forward to continuing its dialogue with the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council, the EESC, the Committee of the Regions and relevant stakeholders to deepen the role of the social economy in the implementation of the Strategy and in future EU anti-poverty policies.

Finally, the negotiations on the **next Multiannual Financial Framework** are also of strategic importance. **Ensuring access to EU funds** for social economy actors, including through national and regional partnership plans, ESF+, cohesion policy instruments and the future European Competitiveness Fund, will be essential to move from recognition to implementation. At the time being the mention of social economy is very limited in the MFF and there is no specific earmarking for social economy. The EU social challenges are growing, the EU social ‘envelope’ is smaller (given inflation) with loser objectives and no clear balance indicators between fund for investing in people or social infrastructure. The InvestEU social window (which provides guarantees and supports investment for social finance intermediaries such as microcredit, ethical and cooperative banks, which are the financial intermediaries that support the most social and solidarity actors) has disappeared. SEE is pleading for its reinstalment as it has been instrumental for the ecosystem. This ensures that the

InvestEU instrument remain accessible to social economy entities and adapted to their business models, governance structures and financing needs. A clear throwback in the current MFF negotiations, is the fact that there is no explicit support for social economy in the new European Competitiveness Fund, which underlines that the ecosystem is no longer recognised as a key industrial ecosystem of the EU market and industrial policy, as it was when the Social Economy Action Plan was adopted and still up until 2024.

4. Remaining challenges

Despite significant progress the adoption of the SEAP has provided, several challenges remain. First, in the EU, the social economy is no longer considered a key actor of the Single Market into mainstream economic, but only as – proud – social policy actors. In this context, the dismantling of the Social Economy and Social Entrepreneurship Unit within DG GROW, the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, represents a step backwards in EU institutional support for the social economy, especially as the SEAP implementation has relied on cooperation between DG EMPL and DG GROW.

Likewise, the negotiations on the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework are a major concern. Current perspectives point to growing social needs but more limited dedicated social investment. Inflation, energy prices and increasing pressure on households, communities and social services make adequate EU funding essential. If resources shrink while needs grow, social cohesion and trust in democratic institutions will only continue to weaken. In this context, the possible disappearing of a dedicated social window under InvestEU is particularly worrying, as it has been one of the most valued EU investment instruments for social economy actors.

Second, legal recognition, access to finance and access to public procurement remain uneven across Member States and regions. Many social economy entities continue to face administrative burdens, fragmented rules and a lack of adapted financial instruments.

Third, **data and statistics** remain insufficiently harmonised. While recent EU and OECD work has significantly improved the evidence base, more systematic data collection, including through national statistical systems and satellite accounts, is still needed.

Finally, **international context** is increasingly challenging. Cumulative crises, geopolitical tensions, growing social challenges, climate risks and pressure on multilateralism make the international recognition and support to the SSE more important than ever. In fact, given the recognised tangible and intangible added values of SSE (as recognized by the UN, ILO & EC), there should be more focus on SSE rather than less, as SSE helps solve the seeds of most of the global challenges

(strengthening democracy, fighting poverty and climate change, demographic challenges...). Therefore, **the role of the United Nations, the ILO, the OECD and particularly the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy remains essential to push a global agenda of peace and solidarity.** At global level too, in a context of rising protectionism, warfare, increasing inequalities, attacks to multilateralism and democracy, the social economy is losing momentum when all data proves social economy is part of the solution to these crises and the best ally of peace.

5. Recommendations

SEE recommends that the UN Secretary-General's report encourage Member States and international institutions to:

- support the development and implementation of national, regional and local **SSE strategies** with clear objectives, resources, governance mechanisms and monitoring tools;
- promote a **common understanding of SSE** based on internationally recognised principles, while respecting regional and national specificities;
- support the development of **legal frameworks** recognising SSE entities, including cooperatives, mutuals, associations, foundations, social enterprises and other entities operating according to SSE values and principles;
- support improved **visibility, data availability and statistical** recognition of the SSE, including through harmonised methodologies and satellite accounts;
- encourage the development of **adapted financial instruments**, including grants, guarantees, patient capital, blended finance and social investment mechanisms;
- encourage the use of **public procurement and fiscal frameworks** to support SSE models and their contribution to public interest objectives;
- promote the **integration of SSE into education, skills**, entrepreneurship and capacity-building programmes;
- promote **structured dialogue** with SSE actors in social and economic policymaking and implementation;
- Integrate social economy in economic and industrial policies to support an economy that supports territorial and community needs while keeping generated wealth in the territory

- encourage the **recognition of the role of SSE in key sectors** such as care, affordable housing, circular economy, energy, local development, sustainable and quality food, digitalisation and democratic participation;
- support **work with international and multilateral financial institutions to promote the social and solidarity economy** and develop financial mechanisms adapted to the diversity of SSE entities;
- maintain and **strengthen international cooperation on SSE through the UN system, the ILO, the OECD and particularly the UNFSSE.**
- Maintain the **ILO COOP branch** as it has gained the knowledge necessary to support the unique specificities and added values of the social and solidarity economy.

6. Conclusion

The period following the adoption of UN Resolution A/RES/79/213 has seen **important progress at European level**. The mid-term review of the Social Economy Action Plan, the implementation of the Council Recommendation, stronger evidence and new policy initiatives should have meant that the European social economy is moving from recognition towards implementation.

Yet the global political changes have shifted the EU and many MS priorities, while important work remains ongoing, and new challenges are emerging. Ensuring access to finance, adapted legal frameworks, visibility, reliable data, public procurement opportunities and **integration into mainstream economic policies** will be essential to unlock the full potential of the social economy.

Maintaining **the international momentum created by the UN and ILO resolutions is therefore crucial**. SEE strongly supports the continued work of the United Nations, the ILO and **the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy**, in cooperation with the European Union, the OECD and other international partners, to ensure that the social and solidarity economy remains central to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, decent work, democratic resilience and sustainable development.