

# THE SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

## KEY ELEMENTS FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA: A COMMON ROADMAP FOR ACTION



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# INTRODUCTION

On December 11th, 2024, REAS Red de Redes organized a webinar to analyze the role of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in the European context, explore key challenges and opportunities, and identify strategies for strengthening SSE in EU policies. The event gathered representatives from Social Economy Europe, SOLIDAR, RIPESS Europe, and other key European SSE networks to discuss advocacy strategies, institutional recognition, and policy actions needed for a just transition and economic transformation.

This document presents the main conclusions and recommendations drawn from the panel discussions and participant contributions, providing a strategic roadmap for action to ensure SSE remains central in European policies.

## 1. The Social and Solidarity Economy in the new European Context

The webinar emphasized that the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) must be positioned as a transformative force in the European economic and social landscape. Panelists and participants identified the urgent need to strengthen SSE's role in addressing global challenges such as climate change, digitalization, and social inequalities.

A key contribution was made by Sarah De Heusch (Social Economy Europe), who provided a detailed explanation of the institutional procedures related to the renewal of the Social Economy Intergroup in the European Parliament and the appointment of a European Commissioner for Social Economy. She highlighted the strategic importance of the Intergroup as a political tool for ensuring that SSE remains high on the EU legislative agenda and securing direct engagement with policymakers. She also stressed that while the title "Social Economy" was not explicitly included in the new Commissioner's mission letter, Social Economy Europe has been at the forefront of advocacy efforts to ensure that SSE-related policies and initiatives remain a priority for the European Commission.

Additionally, the discussion highlighted:

- The need for better regulation, stronger funding mechanisms, and institutional recognition to fully integrate SSE into EU strategies.
- The protagonist role played by Social Economy Europe in advocating for the continuity of the European Social Economy Action Plan, the Intergroup's renewal, and SSE's inclusion in key EU policies.
- The importance of building a unified voice among SSE actors to push for systemic change at the European level.

## 2. Social and Solidarity Economy as a Driver of Social and Economic Transformation.

Carlos Roldán (SOLIDAR) highlighted that SSE is a fundamental pillar for reducing inequalities and fostering inclusive employment, emphasizing its role in:

- Providing economic alternatives that prioritize people, communities, and sustainability over profit maximization.
- Promoting decent work through cooperatives, mutuals, and social enterprises.
- Advocating for a fair legislative framework to ensure that SSE is recognized as equal in importance to the public and private sectors.

Meanwhile, Jason Nardi (RIPESS Europe) raised concerns about unfair competition from global financial powers, arguing that SSE actors need a level playing field to compete against extractive economic models.

### Key policy recommendations:

- Strengthen synergies between SSE networks, public institutions, and social movements to reinforce their collective impact.
- Advocate for dedicated EU funding for SSE enterprises and initiatives, particularly in the areas of social services, essential services, and education.

### 3. The Need for a “Liberation Economy” vs. the Expansion of a War Economy

A key concern raised during the discussion was the growing shift toward a "war economy" in EU policies. Jason Nardi (RIPESS Europe) argued for an alternative model—a "liberation economy"—that prioritizes social and environmental investments over military expansion.

- Panelists expressed concern over the EU’s increased defense spending and its impact on SSE funding opportunities.
- There was a consensus on the need for advocacy efforts to counteract the militarization of the economy and prioritize investments in care, sustainability, and social justice.

#### Strategic action points

- Advocate for redirecting public investment toward social and environmental initiatives instead of defense spending.
- Push for an economic model based on care, grassroots empowerment, and democratic ownership of resources.

## 4. Strengthening Grassroots Initiatives and Economic Resilience

Jason Nardi (RIPESS Europe) emphasized that grassroots SSE initiatives need to become more self-reliant and less dependent on public funds, particularly in light of economic crises and political shifts.

### Key challenges:

- Lack of access to financing for SSE enterprises, particularly for small and medium-sized cooperatives.
- The need to involve young people in SSE initiatives and promote new leadership models based on sociocracy, feminism, and distributed governance.

### Recommended actions:

- Develop strategies for diversifying SSE financing to ensure long-term economic sustainability.
- Foster leadership development programs that engage youth and underrepresented groups in the SSE movement.
- Strengthen cooperation between SSE actors, unions, commons networks, and other progressive forces to advocate for SSE-friendly policies.

## 5. Circular Economy, Energy Transition, and Financial Inclusion

The webinar also included contributions from experts on circular economy, energy transition, and ethical finance, identifying key challenges and opportunities for SSE in these areas.

## Circular Economy

Simone Schirru (RREUSE) emphasized the need for:

- EU policies to recognize reuse and repair activities as critical components of the circular economy.
- Stronger governance mechanisms for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes to ensure SSE actors have a seat at the decision-making table.
- Funding mechanisms that integrate both social inclusion and circular economy objectives, particularly in the textile sector.

## Energy Transition

Chris Vrettos (REScoop.eu) outlined key barriers for SSE actors in the renewable energy sector:

- Limited access to EU funding due to bureaucratic obstacles and lack of financial knowledge among traditional banks.
- Financial barriers preventing vulnerable communities from participating in energy cooperatives.

Proposed policy actions:

- Leverage the Social Climate Fund and Just Transition Fund to support community-led energy initiatives.
- Ensure priority grid access for energy communities in all EU regions.

## Financial Inclusion and Ethical Finance

Jordi Ibáñez (Fundación Finanzas Éticas, FEBEA) called for:

- Greater transparency and accessibility of EU funding programs for ethical finance actors.
- Regulation of the financial sector to ensure alignment with social and environmental sustainability goals.

## 6. Next Steps and Collective Actions

Following the discussions, participants identified key advocacy and strategic actions moving forward:

- Continue pushing for the renewal of the Social Economy Intergroup in the European Parliament.
- Advocate for the integration of SSE principles across EU policies.
- Strengthen collaboration among SSE networks for policy influence.
- Develop financial strategies that ensure SSE actors are less dependent on public funding.

## 7. Conclusion: Toward a Stronger Social and Solidarity Economy in Europe

- The webinar reaffirmed that SSE is not just an economic model—it is a transformative movement that must play a central role in shaping Europe's future. As global crises, political shifts, and economic uncertainties persist, SSE offers a resilient, inclusive, and democratic alternative.
- Moving forward, REAS and its partners commit to strengthening SSE advocacy, fostering strategic alliances, and ensuring that the social economy is recognized as a key pillar of economic and social transformation in Europe.