

MESMER+

Mapping European Social Economy: Employment, Social Dialogue and the European Pillar of Social Rights

Project nr. 101052222

3^d European Event

28 February 2024

From 9.15 to 13.00

Venue:

Center for Social Enterprises

bul. Macedonia bb, Skopje

ZOOM

Summary

The third European event of the [Mesmer+](#) project provided, not only an opportunity to discuss research results and the policy context, but also to discuss the EU-level objectives, such as the European Commission's Social Economy Action Plan (December 2021) and the European Pillar of Social Rights. A special focus of the event was sharing policy recommendations based on the country reports and formulating policy recommendations to EU level policymakers.

The hybrid event brought together representatives of co-partners, associated organizations, external experts of the Mesmer+ project and invited guests from North Macedonia, all together approximately 25 participants. Klimentina Ilijevski (Executive director, Association "PUBLIC", North Macedonia) and Melinda Kelemen (Project manager, DIESIS Network, Belgium) welcomed the participants and opened the event. Ms. Ilijevski emphasized the importance of social economy in the EU integration processes of Western Balkans as an inclusive and sustainable model.

During the first session "Social Economy and Social Dialogue in 9 Countries", Anne Guisset a Senior Researcher, HIVA-KU Leuven (Belgium) represented the main research findings from the MESMER + project. The session explored the inclusiveness of social dialogue institutions towards social economy players and how these players are making their voices heard within national industrial relations systems. The presentation highlighted issues like misalignments in social dialogue inclusiveness, challenges in transitioning to structured interest organizations, and the need for resources, cooperation, and expertise to facilitate the participation of social economy entities in policy discussions. It also addressed the challenges social economy entities face in embracing

the employer role and recommended more structured and empowered organizations to enhance dialogue and representation.

The major focus of the presentation was to assess the current state and provide recommendations on social economy entities in embracing their employer role. The research has identified the following **challenges in embracing employer role**:

- Absence of representation of social economy employers' organisations in social dialogue.
- Struggles in reconciling social values with managerial responsibilities.
- Addressing conflicts like wage disputes and volunteer compensation.

It has also identified the following complication in taking up employer role:

- Risk of being overlooked and neglected in consultation processes.
- Exclusion from legislative consultations leads to oversight in laws.

At the end, the following recommendations were provided:

- Structured and empowered social economy employers' organizations facilitate fluid dialogue with unions.
- Enhancing the role of social economy employers as democratic employers is recommended.
- Diversified representation enriches discourse within social dialogue system.

The second session "Social Economy European and International level", started with a video message from *Simel Esim, Programme Manager, ILO/UNTFSSSE*. She confirmed the pivotal role that the International Labour Organization (ILO) played in the promotion and support of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) as a means to advance decent work, inclusivity, and social justice globally. These efforts are directed towards creating sustainable and resilient business models that emphasize worker rights, social security, and the formalization of the informal economy. The ILO's work in the SSE space reflects a commitment to leveraging cooperative models for economic empowerment, particularly in response to global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where it has highlighted the role of worker cooperatives in the cultural and entertainment sectors and their advocacy for government support measures.

The ILO defines the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) as encompassing enterprises, organizations, and other entities that are engaged in economic, social, and environmental activities to serve the collective and/or general interest. These entities are characterized by principles such as voluntary cooperation and mutual aid, democratic and/or participatory governance, autonomy and independence. This broad definition reflects the ILO's

commitment to promoting forms of economic organization that prioritize social objectives and mutual support, contributing to the advancement of decent work, social inclusion, and sustainable development globally.

Simel Esim was followed by *Miia Rossi-Gray (Policy Officer, Social Economy, DG EMPL, European Commission – online)*. She reviewed the European Commission's actions, highlighting the Social Economy Action Plan and the transition pathway for the proximity and social economy ecosystem. The European Commission's Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP) outlines a comprehensive strategy to enhance the role of the social economy in Europe's broader socio-economic landscape by 2030. The SEAP prioritizes creating favorable conditions for the social economy, enhancing access to finance, and increasing the sector's visibility and recognition. Key financial support and initiatives under SEAP include:

1. **InvestEU Programme:** Launching new financial products to mobilize private financing targeted at the needs of social enterprises at various development stages.
2. **Support for Local and Regional Partnerships:** Initiating projects under the Single Market Programme to encourage partnerships between social economy entities and mainstream businesses, fostering a 'buy social' market.
3. **Capacity Building and Access to Finance:** Improving access to finance for social entrepreneurs, particularly in the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership, and Southern Neighborhood, by supporting grassroots initiatives and financial intermediaries developing products tailored to social economy entities.

More so, the pathway, introduced in November 2022, outlines 14 action areas aimed at reinforcing and making the social economy ecosystem more resilient amidst green and digital transitions. During this session, the newly launched web site “Social Economy Gateway” was presented, as a one stop shop for the social economy, that provides updated information on the concept of social economy, the social economy action plan, relevant EU funding programmes and the social economy ecosystems in the EU Member States

The presentation was concluded with a consensus on the critical role of the social economy in achieving inclusive and sustainable growth in the EU. The participants acknowledged the European Commission's initiatives as vital steps towards creating a more supportive environment for social economy entities, emphasizing the importance of continued support and development in this sector.

The session was continued with the presentation of *Vera Strobachova-Budway, Senior Economic Officer, Head of the Economic Governance Unit, OSCE*, who presented the key findings of the study “Green paper on social economy in the Western Balkans”. The Green Paper on Social Economy in the Western Balkans, produced under the OSCE's Young Developers and Entrepreneurs Advancing Startups (YDEAS) project, evaluates the social economy's landscape, identifying challenges, opportunities, and providing recommendations for its development. It emphasizes the importance of social and green enterprises for inclusive growth and the potential of the social economy to address economic, social, and environmental challenges in the Western Balkans. The

paper suggests strategies for enhancing social entrepreneurship, improving policy frameworks, and fostering cooperation among EU institutions, regional bodies, and local stakeholders to support the social economy sector.

The presentation was concluded with the key recommendations for national/regional players:

- ✓ Promote exchanges with EU member states on green and digital transition, circular economy, tax regimes for SEO etc, organize peer-learning events for policy makers and SEOs on the CE.
- ✓ Establish inter-ministerial committees and/or councils to ensure co-ordinated policy implementation across different government departments.
- ✓ Provide tax incentives for SEOs and public procurement prioritizing ESG criteria.
- ✓ Provide grants and financial instruments for green incentives.
- ✓ Within Green Agenda advocate for funds to attract investment in green projects and projects aimed at twin transitions.
- ✓ Invests in educational programs and skills building for the green economy; engage youth and support start up schemes for the SEs.

The findings of the presentation were supported by one of the contributors of the study for the Western Balkans, *Gianluca Pastorelli (Executive President, Diesis Network, Belgium)*. His presentation offered insights into supporting social economy growth through national policy support, showcasing good and bad examples from various countries. It emphasized the importance of a dedicated budget, stakeholder dialogue, and coordinated policy development, particularly highlighting Ireland's Department of Rural and Community Development's strategic role. Examples from Italy on promoting social and occupational inclusion through public contract codes and mutual learning initiatives across Europe for policy makers were also discussed. The role of energy communities in the clean energy transition were highlighted, illustrating their significance in democratic participation and governance for clean energy adoption.

This third session “**Understanding the social economy and its role in social dialogue. Experiences from North Macedonia**” through a moderated discussion between policy makers and representatives from the actors in the eco-system, provided insights in the state of development of the social economy in the country. Participants in the panel discussion were:

- *Aleksandra Loparska-Iloska, Policy Researcher, Association “PUBLIC” (North-Macedonia)*
- *Sofija Spasovska, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (North-Macedonia)*
- *Maja Papatolevska, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (North Macedonia)*

Aleksandra Loparska-Iloska, summarized that the social economy in North Macedonia is at a nascent stage, with potential for growth. Efforts are being made to foster a supportive environment for social enterprises, with initiatives aimed at enhancing legal frameworks, financial support, and capacity-building for stakeholders in the

sector. Collaboration between government, civil society, and international partners is key to advancing the social economy, addressing social challenges, and promoting sustainable economic development in North Macedonia. *Ms. Sofija Spasovska* provided more detailed insight in the state of policy development, such as the draft version of the Law on social enterprises currently in a governmental procedure, the Law on social welfare adopted in 2019 and the Law on public procurement also from 2019, that introduced the possibility for social procurement procedures. *Ms. Maja Papatolevska*, provided more insights on the social economy participation in social dialogue and concluded that so far, social enterprises in the country haven't been perceived as employer and as potential contributor towards the development of the social dialogue.

An Intervention by *Yuliya Simeonova*, ISTURET (Bulgaria) and *Weronika Chodacz*, external expert (Poland) was made, providing comparable experience from the countries they represented.

The fourth session “**Regional perspective – social economy and social dialogue**” was with the main objective to promote the newly established Western Balkans alliance. Through a moderated dialogue, *Igor Milosevic* (Program Developer, ADP-Zid, Montenegro) and *Bozina Stesevic* (Social economy program, ADP-Zid, Montenegro) introduced participants with the main objectives of the network, implemented initiatives and achieved results.

Activities of the platform are envisioned to follow those main pathways:

- Boosting cooperation among actors based on clustering and complementarity.
- Development of joint advocacy efforts.
- Foster collaborations between actors from different sectors (private, public,) to leverage diverse perspectives and resources.
- Facilitate collaborative research projects or innovation labs that explore new technologies, methodologies and approaches.
- Organise gatherings and conferences where actors can network, share insights and establish new connections.

The platform serves as an enabling space for the participants to explore and engage in possible cooperation opportunities in the field ranging from business cooperation, developing joint projects, seeking access to finance, and thus jointly stepping up towards potential funders.

The fifth and last session “**Humanization of workplaces. Challenges faced by social economy enterprises and traditional business sector in ensuring decent work in North Macedonia**” gathered experts from North Macedonia, involved in the development of the social innovation “social mentoring” that aims at activation of persons that face difficulties in the entrance of the open labour market. This program was born from the experience generated through the work integration social enterprise “Face to face” that provides work engagement for marginalized groups, since 2012. In the panel session, participation took the following panelist:

- *Klimentina Ilijevski (Inclusive Labour Market Expert/Executive Director, Association "PUBLIC", North Macedonia)*
- *Katerina Mojanchevska (Researcher - job crafting/job carving, North Macedonia)*
- *Maja Ravanska, Programme Manager (social enterprise "Face to face", North-Macedonia)*

Ms. Klimentina Ilijevski emphasized the importance of social mentoring in enhancing the skills, knowledge, and networks of social entrepreneurs. This process contributes significantly to the growth and sustainability of social enterprises, fostering a culture of learning, innovation, and collaboration within the social economy. More so, she shared that social enterprises play a pivotal role in democratizing and humanizing workplaces by fostering inclusive business models that prioritize employee well-being and community engagement over profit maximization. They implement democratic governance structures that allow employees to have a say in decision-making processes, thereby enhancing workplace democracy. Furthermore, these enterprises often focus on social and environmental missions, contributing to a more humane and ethical approach to business. By valuing social impact alongside economic performance, social enterprises create workplaces that respect individual contributions and promote social cohesion and equality.

During this session, *Ms. Katerina Mojanchevska* represented the results of a pilot programme on job carving, supported by the Erasmus+ programme. Within the frames of this initiative a job carving guidebook was developed, 6 social mentors were trained to act as inclusion mentors in companies and pilot-cased the process on 6 persons of vulnerable background. She also addressed the challenges in piloting this programme:

- Change requires **time** and **devotion**.
- The business sector **needs guidance in leading internal organisational change**.
- **Efficient preparation is needed for social mentors/carving consultants** to work with persons with disabilities (PwD) and fully recognise their worldview and capacities.
- **Parents of PwD should be sufficiently involved as partners/allies** in the job carving and work integration mentoring but capacities for self-efficiency of PwD needs to be accentuated.

Finally, the organisers and speakers briefly summarized the main conclusions of the discussions.

Prepared by Aleksandra Loparska-Iloska (Association "PUBLIC").