# SUMMARY REPORT ON RISE WORKSHOPS

## GAPS AND BARRIERS CO-DEFINITION WITH SEOS

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# INTRODUCTION

This document is part of the work carried out in **WP2 – Learning Content**. One of the key objectives of this WP is to **identify and better define the gaps and barriers faced by Social Economy Organisations (SEOs) staff when participating in Engaged Research (ER)**. This has been achieved through a series of workshops, implemented in the countries of each RISE partner, ensuring that these gaps are co-defined collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders.

Science For Change was responsible for the methodological design of the sessions, as well as for providing comprehensive training to the project partners. A total of 19th workshops were held across the partner countries: Ireland, Germany, Belgium, and Spain. Each partner implemented between 4 and 6 workshops, primarily engaging SEOs, while also including a smaller number of stakeholders from academia, policy and the private sector. However, the main focus remained on actively involving SEOs. Across all workshops, a total of 93 stakeholders participated, of whom 68% were SEOs, while 32% came from other sectors.

This first phase serves as the foundation for the second objective of WP2: to co-create a learner's programme for SEO staff in ER that addresses the identified gaps and barriers, ensuring that the training content is shaped by these insights. By identifying and analyzing the barriers SEOs face when conducting ER, this phase directly informs the development of the training program, ensuring it effectively addresses the specific challenges faced by SEO staff and enhances their ability to participate in ER.

The aim of this document is to provide an **overview of the main gaps and barriers that were repeatedly observed across the workshops**. It explains these challenges in detail and offers recommendations on which of the training modules could include additional instruction to address the identified gaps.

# WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

**O1.** Enable participants to reflect on how their organisations are positioned in relation to the competencies required for participating ER and identify strengths and areas for improvement, particularly concerning technical skills.

**O2.** Identify and better define the main gaps in knowledge within their organisations that hinder effective participation in ER and understand the key challenges faced when engaging in this type of research.

# METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the workshops was structured around a **Competency Framework for Engaged Research**, which was co-created with all project partners. Initially, existing models from the literature were reviewed, and SFC developed a tailored proposal to best meet the needs of the RISE project. This framework was then refined and validated collaboratively with all partners to ensure its relevance and applicability.

The competency framework was organised into three key dimensions: personal, relational, and technical competencies. To facilitate reflection and help participants understand the flow of the scientific process, the technical competencies were organised according to the different phases of the research process. This structure allowed participants to identify the competencies required at each phase and reflect on how their organisation stood in relation to these competencies. Additionally, personal and relational competencies were presented as transversal elements, as they are essential throughout the entire research process. This approach enabled participants to clearly identify the specific competency requirements at each stage of the research process, which proved especially beneficial for those who were not previously familiar with the nuances of the scientific research methodology.

Science For Change was responsible for the methodological design of the sessions, as well as for providing comprehensive training to the project partners.

This training enabled them to effectively implement and facilitate the workshops in their respective countries, supported by detailed guidelines and materials to ensure a consistent approach across all locations and proper reporting of the workshop results.

For both the development of the competency framework and the implementation of the workshops, the Miro platform was used. This digital tool facilitated collaborative work among all participants, allowing for seamless communication, real-time feedback, and efficient organisation of ideas throughout the process. The use of Miro played a key role in structuring and visualising the competencies, thus ensuring that everyone could engage actively and contribute effectively.

# OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

The following table provides an overview of key characteristics of the organisations that participated in the workshops.

| COUNTRY | |
| --- | --- |
| Ireland | 27.96% |
| Spain | 26.88% |
| Belgium | 8.60% |
| Italy | 7.53% |
| Germany | 3.23% |
| Other countries | 25.80% |
| **PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE IN RESEARCH PROJECTS** | |
| Yes, as lead organisation | 45.20% |
| Yes, as participant organisation | 38.70% |
| No | 16.10% |

| TYPE OF STAKEHOLDER | |
|---|---|
| SEOs | 68.18% |
| Research / Academia | 22.73% |
| Social Enterprise | 7.95% |
| State Office | 1.14% |
| **AREAS OF ACTIVITY** | |
| Health and Wellbeing | 24.74% |
| Social Inclusion and Equality | 21.65% |
| Education & Training | 17.53% |
| Multiple | 15.46% |
| Environment and Sustainability | 12.37% |
| Public Policy and Governance | 7.22% |
| Technology | 3.09% |
| Economic Development and Innovation | 3.09% |
| Infrastructure and Urban Development | 2.06% |
| Civil Society Development, Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Philanthropic Activity, Good Governance | 1.03% |
| Social entrepreneurship | 1.03% |
| Third Sector Enabling Organization | 1.03% |
| Transversal activities | 1.03% |
| **NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES IN THE ORGANISATION** | |
| 1-5 employees | 32.99% |
| 6-20 employees | 31.96% |
| 51-100 employees | 12.37% |
| +100 employees | 12.37% |
| 21-50 employees | 10.31% |

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# WORKSHOPS MAIN INSIGHTS

The following sections present the main insights gathered across all the workshops. The first part includes general observations that emerged throughout the sessions, followed by a deeper exploration of the recurring challenges faced by SEOs for conducting ER.

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

- The group was diverse in terms of both location and organisational size, which fostered a dynamic exchange of experiences and revealed that the challenges were quite similar.

- Greater confidence was expressed in personal and relational competencies than in technical ones.

- In many SEOs, research is not effectively integrated into the organisation's strategic planning process, limiting its impact and sustainability.

- Some organisations had prior experience with ER, leading to different starting points in the discussions. While some roles were specifically dedicated to research, the majority were not, and there were varying levels of expertise and confidence. Organisations in the health sector seemed to have the most extensive experience with research.

- Most SEOs do not have an established connection with researchers.

- Smaller SEOs often lack the resources to engage in research and do not have dedicated research departments. For those that do conduct research, they typically outsource it or hire external researchers or PhD students for specific projects. Without clear pathways for professional development or specialization in research areas, many rely on the expertise of their staff to provide data and preliminary analyses on the ground.

- SEOs face specific challenges in integrating research into their activities. It is often viewed as separate from their immediate needs rather than a

strategic investment. The lack of a strong research culture limits their ability to apply research effectively. Despite some efforts, there is no systematic approach for incorporating research findings into their processes, products, and services. This is largely due to limited human and financial resources, along with a general lack of awareness of available funding programs.

- It is essential that organisations and beneficiary/target groups feel respected by researchers and that their opinions are valued. This competency, which was not included in the framework, has been referred to as "Empowerment" or "Feeling Confident".

- Smaller, voluntary-based organisations frequently lack the capacity to engage in or lead research projects due to limited funding and human resources.

- The daily demands of the SEOs activities leave little room for internal collaboration and strategic development, leading to an environment where immediate tasks overshadow long-term planning.

# GAPS AND BARRIERS

This section outlines in detail the challenges and knowledge gaps identified during the workshops. These have been organised according to the key topics that pose the greatest difficulties for participating in ER.

For each topic, the main challenges are explained in detail. Following this, suggestions are provided on which module of the training program could offer more instruction to address the mentioned challenges.

## BARRIERS TO COLLABORATION BETWEEN SEOS AND ACADEMIA

- The primary challenge in the relationship between SEOs and researchers lies in aligning the needs and objectives of SEOs with those of researchers. SEOs, with their on-the-ground experience, can provide valuable insights into local realities. However, researchers need to be more receptive to these

perspectives while ensuring that research methodology and data quality are maintained.

- Both SEOs and the academic sector struggle to fully understand each other, often feeling they "speak different languages" and having difficulty grasping each other's perspectives. This gap in understanding hinders effective collaboration.

- Both SEOs and the academic sector face challenges in establishing connections with potential collaborators, primarily due to a lack of awareness of relevant networks, portals, and platforms that facilitate these interactions.

- It was suggested that creating networks specifically for research collaboration would help facilitate entry into research for SEOs, particularly for those who have not yet participated in ER.

- A collaborative approach requires time, so for convenience, SEOs often partner with familiar contacts or existing networks. Many SEOs tend to collaborate primarily within their own sector rather than engaging with the academic sector, as they feel more comfortable in familiar territory rather than navigating new partnerships.

- There is a disconnection in the relationship, with SEOs and their beneficiaries/service users feeling exploited. SEOs have expressed concerns that their beneficiaries are often treated as "test subjects" in research collaborations. This disconnection is also reflected in the perception of roles, as SEOs are frequently excluded from the full research process. This often happens because many SEOs lack a strong understanding of the scientific research process, which leaves them outside certain conversations and decision-making due to their lack of knowledge and familiarity with the specific language used in research. As a result, research is often viewed as disempowering and exploitative, with SEOs seen as facilitators rather than active participants.

- Universities were criticised for operating in silos and adopting a conservative approach, which hinders cross-collaboration and interdisciplinary work with other research institutes or SEOs. This "ivory

tower" mentality prevents active engagement with communities and limits potential partnerships.

- A general reluctance to collaborate exists within research institutions, compounded by practical issues related to data collection. These include incomplete data gathering practices and a lack of willingness to share information due to concerns over trust and protectionism.

- In some collaborative research projects, researchers were perceived as being more interested in extracting data from SEOs without offering sufficient value or co-creating the research process.

- In the research sector, collaboration between entities working in similar fields is sometimes seen as competition, creating barriers to partnership. SEOs also expressed uncertainty about how to align their interests with those of other stakeholders, making negotiations more challenging.

- There is a disconnection in both timelines and funding between researchers and SEOs. Researchers typically work with long-term timelines, which do not align with the short-term, project-based funding that most organisations rely on. While academia often benefits from unlimited or long-term funding, SEOs face challenges in sustaining projects due to their reliance on year-to-year or project-specific funding, making it difficult to maintain engagement and continuity once a project ends. Additionally, SEOs believe there is a lack of follow-up after research, with participants not receiving results or being unaware of the outputs after giving their time.

Some of these challenges could be addressed through Module 1 of the training program.

## MOBILISE RESOURCES

- A key challenge highlighted by most participants is the difficulty in securing funding, which requires a thorough understanding of both local and international funding bodies and platforms. This represents a significant knowledge gap for many SEOs and researchers.

- Many participants expressed discomfort or unfamiliarity with the funding process. Even when funding is secured, projects are often tied to a single grant, with no guarantee of sustainability once the funding cycle ends.

These challenges could be addressed through Module 1 of the training program.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

- Balancing scientific rigor with the interests of all stakeholders is a key challenge when defining project scope and research questions collaboratively.

- Framing research questions that are specific enough to be relevant for practitioners, yet general enough to be meaningful for research, remains a common challenge.

- More structured and inclusive co-design methods are necessary to ensure equitable input from all stakeholders and shared ownership of the project's objectives. SEOs pointed out that it is crucial to include citizens and relevant stakeholders from the start to actively contribute to the design process.

- A lack of interconnection between researchers, SEOs, and other stakeholders often results in a fragmented approach, where each focuses on achieving individual project objectives rather than seeing the bigger picture and fostering interconnectivity.

- The lack of involvement of all relevant stakeholders in project design often leads to misalignments between the expectations of academia and SEOs. This misalignment may have an ethical impact on the SEOs' beneficiaries.

- There is a lack of clear communication of research objectives and goals, both within project teams and when engaging stakeholders. A better framework for communication and clear mutual responsibilities would help resolve this issue.

- There is a need for clearer communication of research objectives and goals within project teams and with stakeholders. Establishing clear frameworks

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for communication and defining mutual responsibilities would help address this gap.

These challenges could be addressed through Module 2 of the training program.

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- One of the main challenges identified is the difficulty in identifying and connecting with the right stakeholders who can contribute to or benefit from the research. There is often a lack of awareness about who the relevant stakeholders are and how to effectively engage them throughout the research process.

- A key challenge is developing tailored communication and engagement strategies for different stakeholders. There is a clear need for training on how to design and implement these strategies effectively to ensure long-term engagement, maintain meaningful collaboration, and ensure that all stakeholders feel valued throughout the research process.

- Many organisations struggle with retaining participants and keeping them engaged in the long term. This challenge extends not only to external stakeholders but also to staff within the organisation. The difficulty in maintaining engagement is often attributed to unsustainable working conditions and the lack of follow-up once the project ends.

- Both SEOs and researchers pointed out the need for a more strategic approach to stakeholder engagement. It is essential to define clear roles and expectations from the outset, along with continuous engagement even after the research project concludes.

These challenges could be addressed through Module 2 and 5 of the training program through including a section of engagement strategies for example.

## DATA MANAGEMENT

- For SEOs with no prior experience in research, data management emerged as a significant concern. Participants highlighted the need for guidance on how to organise, systematise, and analyse data, particularly with the aid of digital tools. While they recognise the potential value of their data in driving

meaningful impact, they feel they lack the necessary skills to use it effectively.

- Many SEOs in the social sector struggle with data collection and analysis due to limited internal capacity and a lack of proper tools. This affects their ability to generate reliable data and evaluate projects effectively.

- Differences in data collection standards and methodologies make it difficult for SEOs to produce consistent and generalisable research, hindering their ability to align findings with research goals.

These challenges could be addressed through Module 2 or 5 of the training program.

## IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- The inability to manage data properly limits SEOs' capacity to assess the impact of their initiatives accurately. Without structured and reliable data, organisations struggle to evaluate the outcomes of their projects, making it difficult to demonstrate the effectiveness of their work and make informed decisions for future projects.
- Due to challenges in data management, SEOs struggle to conduct thorough evaluations of their projects. Without clear and accessible data, it is difficult to assess whether projects are meeting their objectives, limiting their ability to learn and improve for future initiatives.

These challenges could be addressed through Module 3 of the training program.

## RESEARCH EVALUATION

- Most projects lack follow-up or dedicated time for long-term evaluation, which hinders comprehensive impact assessments and the ability to reflect on lessons learned.

- There is a lack of structured impact assessment and post-research self-reflection, preventing SEOs from leveraging findings effectively for future initiatives.

- SEOs often lack formal evaluation processes, making it challenging to assess outcomes, identify areas for improvement, and implement continuous learning throughout the project.

These challenges could be addressed through Module 2 of the training program.

## SUSTAINABILITY

- One of the biggest challenges identified by participants is the post-project phase, where ensuring sustainability beyond the project end date becomes difficult. Securing necessary resources, such as time and funding, is often challenging, and this lack of continuity impacts long-term outcomes.

- There is a general lack of long-term thinking in many research projects. Research is often conducted for research's sake, with its findings rarely being exploited for further dissemination, policy initiatives, or to improve conditions on the ground where SEOs operate.

- Funding is typically project-based, and once the project concludes, so does the funding. This short-term funding model limits the potential for sustained impact and ongoing collaboration after the research ends.

These challenges could be addressed through Module 3 or 5 of the training program.

## ADVOCACY ACTIONS AND POLICY IMPACT

- One of the main difficulties identified is the gap between scientific research and its application in policy, particularly in increasing visibility, networking, and raising awareness to make research findings more relevant and accessible for policy implementation.

- Achieving policy impact is inherently challenging due to external political factors such as shifting agendas, changes in leadership, and political cycles. These dynamics, which are beyond the control of researchers and advocacy groups, can disrupt long-term engagement and affect whether and how research is considered by policymakers.

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- SEOs and researchers mentioned difficulties in developing advocacy campaigns and effectively communicating research outcomes to different stakeholders.

- Framing research problems in a way that ensures they are relevant to policy discussions is essential. Without a clear policy focus, research may fail to make an impact or align with the current policy agenda.

- To improve advocacy processes, a more developed capacity for reliable data collection and analysis is essential in the social economy sector. Currently, data is often unreliable or poorly structured, making it difficult to effectively advocate for policy changes. Structured research and high-quality data are crucial for writing policy papers and ensuring advocacy efforts are grounded in solid evidence.

- Many researchers and SEOs focus primarily on their own research or practical field and often overlook the possibility of taking their research results forward into the policy arena. Raising awareness about the potential for advocacy and demonstrating its tangible impact is essential for creating more strategic and impactful actions.

These challenges could be addressed through Module 3 of the training program.

## COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS

- A lack of focus on science communication was highlighted as a critical gap. It is important to improve not only how researchers and SEOs communicate with stakeholders during the research but also how they share research findings after the project concludes, ensuring sustained relevance and engagement.

- There is a challenge in leveraging research outputs beyond immediate collaborators and participants. Despite some dissemination efforts, reaching a wider audience remains difficult, limiting the broader impact of engaged research.

- Research outputs are often too academic and inaccessible to wider audiences, making it difficult to communicate findings effectively. A lack of digestible materials hinders advocacy efforts, as academics and

policymakers use different language. While SEOs tend to be more skilled in this area, collaboration between researchers and SEOs remains essential to bridge this gap.

- Disseminating and communicating results showed significant variation among participants. While some organizations lack the expertise and resources, others feel comfortable communicating their work but struggle to reach specific stakeholder groups.

These challenges could be addressed through Module 5 of the training program.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- A key ethical challenge is ensuring that participants, especially from vulnerable communities, are not exploited. This involves balancing the pressures of time constraints, underfunding, and understaffing, while ensuring that the research process remains inclusive, fair, and does not coerce participants.

- Both researchers and SEOs need clear guidelines on how to engage communities in a respectful and ethical manner, making sure their contributions are valued and not taken advantage of. There is a need for clear strategies to ensure that research is both inclusive and maintains ethical standards.

- There is a need for clearer guidelines and practices on how to ensure the ethical management of data in ER. This includes ensuring high-quality data is collected, properly stored, and used responsibly, respecting both participants' rights and the integrity of the research process.

These challenges could be addressed through Module 4 of the training program.

# CONCLUSIONS

SEOs face significant challenges in integrating research into their activities due to limited resources, insufficient knowledge of funding schemes, lack of dedicated research staff, and a disconnection from academia and the research process. There is often a misalignment between the goals of researchers and SEOs. Additionally, communication barriers exist due to the formal language of research, which often excludes SEOs, and the interactions between academia and SEOs being one-sided.Furthermore, ethical concerns, such as the exploitation of communities, and the lack of follow-up on research outcomes further limit the effectiveness of research within SEOs.

Given these challenges, it is crucial that the training program incorporates specific content and guidance on these key areas, ensuring that SEOs are equipped with the necessary tools to address the identified gaps. By integrating training on these topics, the program can better support SEOs in effectively conducting ER.