



**Social Good Accelerator
European Network for People, Planet and Social Tech**

Focused Policy paper
Digital transformation of the social economy
Making the Social Economy
a collaborative digital ecosystem creating 'commons
in the context of the open consultation
of the European Commission on its Action Plan for the Social Economy
(EU action plan for social economy, N°12743)

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Introductory remarks: background and reasons

The Social Economy, a heterogeneous sector but united by common values and models, is a potential lever for European recovery and societal transition.

At the European Union level, in 2017, the social economy represents 13.6 million salaried jobs or 6.3% of the European wage bill in nearly 2.8 million organisations, but also 82.8 million volunteers¹. Disparities are noticeable within this union, with national legislations more or less advanced. The concept of social economy is especially widely recognised and developed in Belgium, Spain, France, Luxembourg and Portugal². It is therefore in the EU15, which includes mostly countries in the west and south of the continent, that ⅓ of the population is invested in a social economy organisation. In total, 232 million Europeans are members of cooperatives, mutuals or similar structures³. In addition to public actors, who have a key role in the full recognition of the role of the social economy, private organisations initiated by committed citizens, employees and entrepreneurs offer "[services of general interest](#)"⁴. This is one of the pillars of the European social model and the social market economy. Beyond that, they are now proposing solutions to concretely converge towards the 17 sustainable development goals set by the UN, a sine qua non condition for maintaining our economies, our democracies and our social cohesion by 2030.

Within the social economy, as in other sectors, the digital transformation of our society and economy has created a small, two-speed revolution. Some organisations have created or seized new opportunities offered by technological innovation, and have created alternative digital ecosystems based on the "commons" or "[digital cooperative platform](#)" models.

Communauté productive	Linux	Mozilla	GNU	Wikipédia	Wordpress
Coalition entrepreneuriale	Ex.: Linux Professional Institute, Canonical	Ex.: Mozilla Corporation	Ex.: Red Hat, Endless, SUSE	Ex.: Wikia Company	Ex.: Automatic Company
Association à bénéfice social	Linux Foundation	Mozilla Foundation	Free Software Foundation	Wikimedia Foundation	Wordpress Foundation

These ecosystems have consciously adopted non-profit models that Michel Bauwens and Vasilis Kostakis⁵ call "social benefit associations" (this is the case of foundations such as Mozilla, Wikipedia, or the Peer2Peer Foundation, or associations that manage citizen databases such as OpenStreetMap or OpenFoodFact) or with limited profitability (this is the case of the L'Oréal Foundation and the L'Oréal Foundation), or the Peer2Peer Foundation, or associations that manage citizen databases such as OpenStreetMap or OpenFoodFact) or with limited profitability (this is the case of [Licoornes](#), digital

¹ *Recent Evolutions of the Social Economy in the European*, European Economic and Social Committee, 2017.

² Ibid.

³ José Luis Monzón, Rafael Chaves (eds). *Recent developments in the social economy in the European Union* CIRIEC, 2016. CES/CSS/12/2016/23406.

⁴ Union European Economic and Social Committee: Services of general interest (SGIs) are one of the pillars of the European social model and a social market economy. They include areas such as housing, water and energy supply, waste and sewage disposal, transport, health, social services, youth and family, culture and communication within society, in particular broadcasting, internet and telephony. SGIs enable citizens to lead a dignified life and guarantee the right of all people to access essential goods and services. As guarantors of justice, social cohesion and social inclusion, they contribute to the equal treatment of all citizens of the Union.

⁵ Michel Bauwens, Vasilis Kostakis *MANIFESTO FOR A TRUE COLLABORATIVE ECONOMY Towards a society of the commons*, Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation, 2017, 112 p.

cooperatives that offer responsible digital services with a citizen co-financing model and/or self-management of platform activities).

Others, more numerous, have come up against almost insurmountable walls, even though they serve every day the people who are furthest from employment, education, the fight against inequalities, etc., thus guaranteeing the founding principles of solidarity and social cohesion of the European Union. The traditional "SMEs" of the social economy have received very little support both in terms of digital transition (upgrading their management tools, for example) and the digital transformation of their models, which is similar to what is known as "digital social innovation", and which consists of rethinking its modes of production, service design or organisation in the light of digital opportunities, both in terms of the economic model and the final benefit for the user. However, they carry within them the seeds of the emergence of a new social, digital and collaborative economy. Their heritage already includes democratic conditions and the culture of value sharing. They still lack, most of the time, the digital culture and skills of the 21st century.⁶

The European Action Plan for the Social Economy: a chance to build a digital European model of solidarity, resilience and prosperity.

The roadmap of the new European Commission, as soon as it was presented by its President Ursula von der Leyen⁷, was ambitious, both from the point of view of the "technological upgrading" of the continent in the face of the powers of the United States and China and from the point of view of the societal and ecological transition. In 2019, she already affirmed the desire to strengthen the social dimension of Europe in a context where "climate, digital and geopolitical changes are already having a profound impact on the lives of Europeans". The health crisis linked to the global Covid 19 epidemic has only strengthened the prerogatives of the new Commission, now in charge of the European Recovery Plan, while highlighting the importance of the Care economy and accelerating the digital practices of citizens and businesses, almost at a forced pace. In the process, new vulnerabilities have emerged: the explosion of poverty and unemployment, particularly among the youngest members of society, and cyber-security flaws that make real European digital sovereignty more necessary than ever...

It is in this particular context that the European Commissioner for Employment and Social Rights, Mr Nicolas Schmidt (former Minister for Social Economy of Luxembourg), has been entrusted, in his mission statement⁸, with an Action Plan for the Social Economy, in co-construction with the key actors of the sector and the other Directorates General of the Commission. This action plan will be designed and presented through various European consultations and events, in particular the European Summit in Mannheim on 26-27 May 2021, before being proposed for final consultation and presentation in November. The roadmap is subject to public consultation until 26 April 2021 and we are part of the response to this consultation.

⁶ See the 6 categories of innovation of the French Public Innovation Bank, which includes social innovation, The New Generation Innovation, BPI France, 2014:

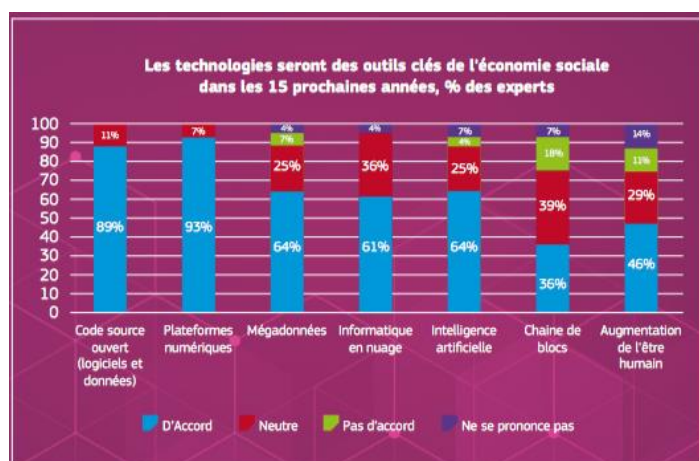
<https://www.bpifrance.fr/content/download/16655/216799/file/innovation%20nouvelle%20g%C3%A9n%C3%A9ration.pdf>

⁷ Roadmap A more ambitious Union My programme for Europe By the candidate for the Presidency of the European Commission Ms Ursula von der Leyen, Political orientation for the next Commission https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_fr.pdf

⁸ Mission Statement of the European Commissioner for Employment and Social Rights, Nicolas Schmidt, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/sites/comm-cwt2019/files/commissioner_mission_letters/president-elect_von_der_leyens_mission_letter_to_nicolas_schmit_fr.pdf

The digital transformation of the European Social Economy, which is at the heart of our association's mission, falls under the competence of DG Grow (Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs), as well as DG EMPL for the skills part, among others. This Policy Paper, proposed as a complementary Focus Guide to that of Social Economy Europe, aims to provide recommendations from our collective work with our members and stakeholders.

The study *EASME/COSME/024/2017 "New technologies and digitalisation: opportunities and challenges for the social economy and social enterprises"*⁹, cited in the European Commission's Roadmap consultation, provides a good overview of the challenges and opportunities that new technologies present for SSE organisations. It focuses on the study of 26 social economy organisations that effectively use innovative digital technologies. It discusses the benefits of organisational efficiency through the automation of internal and external functions, an issue reinforced by the comparative weakness of human and financial resources of these organisations compared to traditional companies. In particular, it highlights the opportunities represented by the tool platforms that promote the networking and cooperation that characterise the Social Economy models.



By seizing its new tools, the Social Economy would be consolidated. In terms of the economy and the regulation of platforms (an important dimension of the European Digital Services Act), social economy organisations - and in particular the cooperative platform model - would have a real role to play as a counterweight by proposing alternative models that respect individual and worker rights. The study shows that the two most popular technologies are free software and digital platforms.

In 2018, the [Social Good Accelerator EU](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/fr/agenda/our-events/events/nouvelles-technologies-et-numerisation-opportunités-et-defis-pour-leconomie-sociale-et-lentreprise-sociale#downloads), also conducted a study, not cited by the European Commission although it was presented to it in January 2020, by interviewing leaders of Small and Medium sized organisations in the Social Economy. This approach is complementary and focused not on the "best in class" of the digital social economy but on the needs and expectations of grassroots organisations, which make up the bulk of the European social economy. The methodology consisted of a robust literature review on the needs and barriers of these organisations regarding their digital transformation.

We have thus been able to establish many convergences with the issues of the TPEs of the classic economy, but have highlighted three specific and additional obstacles for the TPOs of the Social Economy, which converge for the 218 organisations questioned in 12 countries:

- a) **A problem of resources and unequal access to public aid and private funding.** The economic models of the social economy rarely allow for the surpluses needed for structural investment and support for change. At the same time, public policies to support VSEs and SMEs in their digital transformation or public aid for digital innovation are not "designed" for social economy organisations. This is both a problem of vocabulary (public players talk about "companies" whereas many Social Economy organisations have other statuses) and a problem

⁹ <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/fr/agenda/our-events/events/nouvelles-technologies-et-numerisation-opportunités-et-defis-pour-leconomie-sociale-et-lentreprise-sociale#downloads>

of the inadequacy of public solutions to the specific economic models of these organisations (non-profit or limited profit-making).

- b) **A cultural problem coupled with a supply problem.** Social economy organisations are very much rooted in the values and human-centred models that motivate them. These values sometimes seem incompatible with those of the producers of products and services in the digital economy. There is therefore a very strong "cultural" barrier, coupled with a "generational" barrier, which can be explained in part by "prejudices", in part by the lack of clarity about the range of alternative products and services that are compatible with the values of the organisations (free, open source, truly collaborative) and truly accessible to neophytes (following the example of the new "No code" market).
- c) **A problem of access to appropriate basic and professional skills.** To date, digital technology represents a real opportunity for Social Economy organisations, but also for their volunteers and beneficiaries, particularly in the context of the recovery plans following the health crisis. At the time of our study, the public budgets or public orders allocated to Social Economy organisations to a) increase the digital literacy skills of their managers, employees and volunteers b) integrate new digital professions into their organisations c) offer programmes to reintegrate people into employment through training in digital professions (upskilling) were largely insufficient compared to the challenges. This shortcoming and delay has a direct impact on the audiences/users of these organisations. ... The European Commission's Pact for Skills represents a great opportunity by aiming both at the promotion of lifelong learning for everyone and at the anticipation of the skills required in the labour market. Furthermore, micro-qualifications, on which the European institutions are currently working with stakeholders, can be an effective response to the lack of harmonisation at European level of the qualifications acquired.

In addition to the EASME/COSME study commissioned by DG Grow, we launched two consultations to propose collective responses on the needs and expectations of social economy organisations on the European Commission's Data and AI Strategy. This initiative has highlighted that the current development of the European Commission's Digital Strategy overlooks the role and potential of civil society and Social Economy actors, particularly in their ability to propose alternatives that respect social and civic rights, especially on the management of open data made available to operators with high social or environmental utility and on the potential of AI for the Social Economy.

For a "digital permaculture" (generative ecosystem based on the Social and Digital Economy): consolidate and deploy "Social Tech".

The [Social Good Accelerator](#) wishes to strengthen and spread the concept of Social Tech, at the crossroads of the librist models (citizen tech) and the economic and democratic models of the Social and Solidarity Economy.

Social tech, according to [Wikipedia](#) and journalist Chrystèle Bazin¹⁰, is the use of technology for social, societal and citizen action, such as: acting on inequalities, weaving new solidarities, or producing social innovation. By mobilising technological capacities, social tech promises everyone the ability to act in the service of the general interest.

¹⁰ "Social-tech": digital for social innovation - Digital Society Forum" [archive], on *Digital Society Forum* (accessed 22 August 2017)

Social Tech is therefore made up of technological models that rely on the stakeholders and infrastructures of the social and solidarity economy to offer systems with a high social and environmental impact. The pooling of infrastructures allows for a reduction in operating costs, the value generated is redistributed equitably to stakeholders and the infrastructure is governed democratically. Models have multiplied in Europe and worldwide and are ready to be scaled up.

The Social and Solidarity Economy must move into the digital age: it is a question of preserving our intangible social heritage, which is at the heart of the European model and cohesion, but also of accelerating the social and ecological transition. The fashion for "social business" would tend to let the "natural" process of Schumpeterian destruction-creation take place, where organisations left on the side of the road of digital transformation would be replaced "naturally" by new "social start-ups" with a hybrid economic model. But another way is possible and would allow to preserve the jobs and know-how of social action: that of the digital "upcycling" of the social economy, which we consider essential for the survival of the European social and solidarity ecosystem. Like all economic actors, SSE actors must lead a profound change in their organisation, integrate a culture of innovation at all levels, and upgrade their teams. But they must be given the means to do so. It is time for SSE to seize Tech not as an end, but as a means to improve, sustain and strengthen its models, its jobs, its influence and its impact on the final beneficiaries.

In order to "encapacitate" the social and solidarity economy in the digital world, it is necessary to draw knowledge from the technological market models, share it, digest it and finally transform it into commons oriented towards the social and environmental impact.

In the long term, in order to generate all the value resulting from the crossroads between the social economy and the digital economy, and to encourage its start-up, it is necessary to reconsider the production of value not only economically but also socially and environmentally (measured in terms of collective savings) in order to be able to put in place a system of remuneration for citizen value. This is a necessary condition for 'trans investment' (D. Kleiner and B. Gottfried, 2016). This means overhauling national accounting systems to include this value. Civil society would become productive through the participation of citizens in the collaborative creation of collective value. Before this new accounting system and these 'commons' can be generalised, they must be prototyped at European level, by creating centres of competitiveness around Services of General Interest (SGI) and Common Goods (water management, sustainable food, energy, digital, postal and telecom networks, etc.).

To this end, we support the proposals of Michel Bauwens and Vassilis Kostakis in their "*Manifesto for a true collaborative economy*" (2018). As they recommend, in order to move from a 'micro-economic' existence to a 'macro-economic' assertion, the prototyping of citizen and generative solutions of the collaborative economy requires an 'institutionalisation' (both in terms of relaxing or opening up regulatory frameworks to allow experimentation and in terms of financial guarantee) of three categories of systems, whose co-dependence and identification constitute the conditions for scaling up:

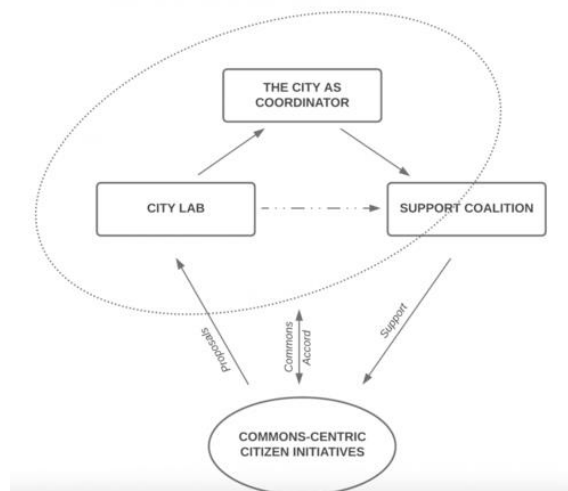
- **A "productive community"**, including non-personal data providers, to organise the generation of products, services and knowledge (civil society): these models are already found in Wikipedia, Openstreetmap, Open Food facts in terms of data generation and moderation of this data
- **An "entrepreneurial coalition": managing and valuing professionals**, who generate profits and remunerated value (generative production) to create and manage value (workers) on a cooperative and solidarity-based model for the allocation of financial and physical resources. An ecosystem of start-ups that would redistribute part of the value generated to the community and the infrastructure in a cooperative mode would constitute a virtuous economic model.

- Finally, a legal infrastructure is needed, the "social benefit association", to protect and govern the commons in a democratic manner and in a logic of limited profitability or non profitability, supported by a "partner state".

Figure 5: The relation between state, economy and civil society under a P2P model.



Figure 3: Public-commons cooperation protocols. Source: Bauwens & Onzia (2017)



[Link to Paper wiki P2P Foundation \(mutualisation Urban provisioning Systems\)](#)

[Link to Paper wiki P2P Foundation \(Bologna model\)](#)

Thus, in the technological sector, we would find a diversity of actors and modalities of mutualisation and partnerships for the common good around digital services of general interest. This sub-sector would operate according to the well-tried rules of the Social and Solidarity Economy:

- primacy of the person and the corporate purpose over capital,
- voluntary and open membership,
- democratic control by the members
- defence and application of the principles of solidarity and responsibility,
- management autonomy and independence from public authorities,
- The majority of surpluses are used to achieve objectives that promote sustainable development and serve the interests of members and the general public.

In order to make this digital Social Solidarity Economy in Europe a leading sector for the ecological and societal transition of the Union, its digital transformation must be considerably accelerated in the coming years, by acting on three aspects:

1. **Resources & infrastructure: building capacity and cooperation for a digital and collaborative social economy**
2. **Supply and socio-economic models: valorisation and development of new models of 'commons' at the heart of the recovery plan**
3. **Skills: digital acculturation and new social and solidarity digital professions in Europe**

1. RESOURCES & INFRASTRUCTURE STRAND: BUILDING CAPACITY AND COOPERATION FOR A DIGITAL AND COLLABORATIVE SOCIAL ECONOMY

References

- [European definition of "Service of General Interest"](#) ¹¹
- Proposal for a European Foundation Statute ¹²
- [European Cluster Policy](#) - European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP), managed by DG GROW

Our proposals:

- Launch an ambitious European programme to better **measure the impact of "social tech" compared to "classic tech", to be able to integrate ESG considerations in terms of the cost to public finances and the impact on well-being and democratic balances.** To do this, it is also necessary to be able to measure the long-term impact of the digital transition in terms of effectiveness and efficiency for organisations and their socio-economic models, as well as the impact of the digitisation of their services of general interest in terms of the public economy (e.g.: better reintegration of the public into employment, lower school failure rate, savings in public health or assistance to individuals, etc.)
- **Create public and/or public/private funding frameworks, adapted to the business models of Social Economy organisations,** to support the development of skills and infrastructure of "peer-to-peer" ecosystems (digital commons) between SSE and digital economy organisations, conditioned to an open, democratic and cooperative functioning where distributed value rewards the generation of value for the community and the management of the common infrastructure
- **In order to scale up and facilitate funding, strengthen European regulations to finally create European legal statutes for the SSE, in particular by bringing to fruition the aborted projects for a European mutual society statute and a European foundation statute,** to be brought closer to the governance infrastructure mentioned by Michel Bauwens and Vasilis Kostakis as an "association for social benefit" (role played today by the Mozilla Foundation, the Wikimedia Foundation, the OPen Street Maps associations, etc.)
- **Capitalise on the potential savings generated by the pooling of resources authorised by the "Commons" to reinvest in "Social Tech" via a European Foundation.** Thus, the Commission could promote projects, joint investments and incentives for cooperation in technologies between the SSE, innovative SMEs and public authorities: creation of "commons", open

¹¹ *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - White Paper on services of general interest /* COM/2004/0374 final */*

¹² *Opinion of the European Social and Economic Committee on the proposal for a European Foundation Statute of the European Commission, INT/645-EESC-2012-1211*

databases, shared technological services with a strong social and/or environmental utility;

- **To provide a digital infrastructure for providers of Digital Services of General Interest (Digital SIG), thus shared between public authorities and private actors of the Social and Solidarity Economy:**
 - ◆ create joint public/ESS data and code management bodies of general interest, with conditionality of access,
 - ◆ structuring and managing general interest databases open under an "enhanced reciprocity licence" to public and private general interest organisations. The cooperative model with public membership (La Mednum, APTIC in France) seems adequate to manage this type of infrastructure,
 - ◆ to provide public interest actors with support services and professionals in order to be able to appropriate and use "Digital GIS "*.

- **Invest in multi-stakeholder¹³ digital social innovation clusters**, both at territorial level on the model of the Territorial Competitiveness Clusters (PTCE), but also at European level (Clusters and Cities Network /CLUSNET model), associating Researchers-Universities, Social Economy Organisations and start-ups, especially in the fields of artificial intelligence, management of data of general interest, employment and digital education; Generally speaking, involve the social economy more in public-private partnerships and in research programmes.

- **Introduce a principle of equity in terms of access to public aid and investment for non-profit or limited profit organisations**, as long as they produce a positive "SROI¹⁴" that cannot be directly measured in monetary returns for investors (conditional on the measurement of the technological impact on the efficiency of the organisations and their services of general interest for the final beneficiaries);

- **Promote trials and experiments of ethical and sustainable practices with co-financing and risk sharing between public actors/market actors/SSE actors**, based on the model of Social Impact Contracts¹⁵.

- **Strongly encourage, through a system of conditional co-financing for example, European and national public orders, to give priority to "socially responsible" technological applications:** respect for workers' and citizens' rights, environmental responsibility, open code, accessibility, fair sharing of value... This has been possible since 2014, with the reforms on public procurement which allow public authorities to integrate certain social clauses in the award procedures and in the mandates (European Parliament, 2017).

- **Finally, ensure that social economy organisations are represented, in line with their weight in the economy, in all governance bodies in digital areas at European level.** For example, the social economy should be involved in European data governance mechanisms.

¹³ Definition Digital Social Innovation

¹⁴ SROI definition

¹⁵ [See Jacques Delors Europe Institute note: European Recovery Plan: Time for Green and Social Bonds, July 2020](#)

2. SUPPLY SIDE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC MODELS: VALORISATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF NEW MODELS OF "COMMONS" AT THE HEART OF THE RECOVERY PLAN

a) Scaling up existing models to accelerate the societal and environmental transition, in particular platform cooperativism¹⁶.

References :

- [Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act \(2020\) packages as part of the European Commission's "Europe for the Digital Age" strategic axis](#): new rules for digital platforms applicable throughout the EU to create a safer and more open digital space.
- [European Commission's proposal for a regulation on platform workers, March 2021](#)

While on the regulatory side, the Digital Services Act aims to regulate the operation of platforms in the EU, restoring legal certainty and increased transparency by targeting platforms that reach more than 10% of the population (45 million users), now considered systemic in nature (VLOPs - very large online platforms).

As shown in the various studies mentioned above, the Social Solidarity Economy, and in particular the platform cooperative movements, are in favour of using platforms to offer workers, citizens and consumers alternatives, and must seize the new opportunities that are opening up and establish themselves as responsible, sustainable and fair alternative operators in areas related to essential needs (food, personal care, transport, communication, etc.) and the circular economy. For example, in France, the unicorn movement proposes alternative cooperative platforms in the fields of mobility (Mobicoop, Railcoop), energy (Enercoop), telecommunications (Telecoop, Scopelec), risk pooling for platform "deliverers" (Cyclocoop)...

Our proposals:

- **Create a database for "responsible digital purchasing"** that references European digital solution providers from the Social Economy (a work we have started with the Social Good Accelerator and the Social Tech Atlas programme).
- **To better promote standards (technological protocols, ethical charter, economic models) resulting from non-profit (or limited profit) technological models.**
- As recommended in the EASME/COSME study *"New technologies and digitalisation: opportunities and challenges for the social economy and social enterprises"*¹⁷, quoted above, **transform local governments into managers of economic communities around the transition (Bologna model):**
 - ◆ Reference: the "sustainability empowerment platforms", managed by local authorities to connect citizens and companies. This is the action taken by the Italian

¹⁶ See the global platform cooperativism movement, *Platform.coop*: Cooperative platforms are businesses that use a website, mobile application or protocol to sell goods or services. They are based on democratic decision-making and shared ownership of the platform by workers and users.

¹⁷ <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/fr/agenda/our-events/events/nouvelles-technologies-et-numerisation-opportunités-et-defis-pour-leconomie-sociale-et-lentreprise-sociale#downloads>

city of Bologna, "co-Bologna, the city in common", by initiating a process of evaluation and negotiation between states and citizens, a "public-common partnership", for the care and redevelopment of districts. In addition to these virtual platforms, physical spaces for collective creation, "open source third places", should be developed to complement the collective spaces that are currently too expensive to constitute creative spaces for citizens. Finally, public authorities could form assemblies of the commons bringing together citizens, and chambers of the commons bringing together ethical businesses. Reference cases already exist in the cities of Ghent, Brest, Lille and Chicago.

→ **Propose a financing and development plan for participatory finance at European level for alternative digital models from the SSE** (economic model, targeting of vulnerable groups, digital services of general interest) that contribute to the respect of social and labour rights (see the [committee's proposal on platform workers](#)), as well as a sovereign and equitable alternative to "gatekeepers" (see [Digital Services Act](#))

◆ **Create a European Solidarity Investment Fund for Social Tech with national windows.** This fund could be replenished by citizens, local authorities and States via philanthropy, solidarity savings and citizen investment. In doing so, develop the frameworks and means of solidarity finance operators, in particular through solidarity savings and Social Impact Contracts, in order to offer a real alternative to the investment funds that finance the actors of the digital economy.

◆ **Promote the participatory financing of communities generating "Digital Commons for the SDGs" through Blockchain, with a European start-up.** Blockchain is based on the storage of data of all kinds. Blockchain is defined by Blockchain France as "a technology for storing and transmitting information, which is transparent, secure, and operates without a central control body". Thus, more horizontal financing channels exist in a more disintermediated approach. Blockchain technology can be applied in this context, in particular thanks to its transparency. In a more specific SSE context, this technology could allow the use or creation of virtual currencies to finance "Social Tech" and the digital transformation of Social Economy organisations in a collaborative and citizen-oriented way, without going through a third-party platform. Rewarding systems (in particular skill/virtual currency exchanges) seem to us to be particularly interesting to explore and document. The governance of an organisation would be more decentralised and focused on users and beneficiaries.

- In this respect, the [CommonStack](#) (Spain) model is inspiring: it offers a collective and open library of digital commons models for governance, funding, capital allocation and impact measurement. aims to enable organisations to form platform cooperatives, co-own and co-manage shared funds as a commons, and to self-propel to achieve their goals despite insufficient donations, grants and pro-bono contributions. While the resource base is under construction, the site provides [guidelines for creating digital commons](#).
- Other examples of participatory financing based on this technology already exist, such as [Topl](#), [OSMOSE](#) or [Circles of Angels](#). Cooperative platforms have also been implemented using this technology. This is the case of [La'Zooz](#), [Ryديو](#), [Suncontract](#) or [Solshare](#), which aim to compete with other centralised platforms based on monopolistic and rentier objectives. Although these initiatives are currently few in number, they show that a reduction in intermediaries would also make it possible to use tech and data to create virtuous incentives.

→ **Finally, in terms of access to public funding, the European institutions should ensure that non-profit or limited profit organisations receive the same seed funding as "small market**

platforms" in terms of the [expansion of small online platforms in the EU](#) (see [Digital Services Act](#)).

- b) Develop the access of Social Economy and civil society organisations to certain areas of the European digital transformation, and in particular to the data and artificial intelligence markets as "services of general interest".

Indeed, it seems that in some areas of European technological development where the market alone cannot meet the challenges of general interest and sustainable development objectives, the potential added value of SSE organisations seems to be underestimated.

b.1) Creation, collection, structuring and management of data of general interest, combined with security of personal or general interest data.

References :

- [EU Data Strategy](#)
- [Social Good Accelerator position paper in response to the European Commission consultation](#)

This strategy has focused more on "industrial and commercial" data supposedly creating value than on data of general interest. The Social Solidarity Economy must guarantee the protection of personal data while supplying organisations working in areas of general interest with relevant data to enhance the efficiency of the sector (data driving, data collection, data analysis). It must also help to inform its audiences of the rights, tools and skills needed to retain full control of their data.

Many examples of "social start-ups" in the field of generating, exploiting and securing data of general interest have emerged in recent years.

Examples:

- In the field of sustainable food, [OpenFoodFacts](#) is a collaborative *online* and *mobile* project that aims to build a *free* and *open database* on food products marketed worldwide, to be used by start-ups to improve consumer information and access to healthy and sustainable food.
- In the field of employment, [Bayes Impact](#) (France, Belgium) uses unemployment insurance data to create AI solutions to offer "tailor-made", better adapted pathways to each job seeker. In Amsterdam, the social enterprise [SkillLab](#) helps jobseekers identify their skills and shows them how they can be put to good use in a new labour market through a mobile application and software based on artificial intelligence, the company.
- In the field of refugee crisis management and the rights of socially vulnerable people, [Reconnect \(France\)](#) or [Techfugees \(UK\)](#) propose solutions for the digitisation of essential documents of refugee people. Access to megadata generated by the public sector should be facilitated for all SSE actors and the creation of general interest data commons in Europe should be enabled.
- As we have seen with the Covid-19 crisis - see for example [Bayes Impact's BriserLaChaine.org experiment on contact case management](#) - citizen innovations from civil society and the Social Economy can emerge much more quickly in the event of a crisis than solutions from the public authorities, at a competitive cost: as an example, Bayes Impact's BrisonLachaine.org solution from Bayes Impact, developed in partnership with the French health insurance (CNAM) for only 30,000 euros, has made it possible to identify 1.5 million contact cases, compared with a budget of approximately one million contact cases identified for 6.5 million euros for the

StopCovid application developed by the French state in open source¹⁸.) Other examples include [CovidTracker](#), the first French website to track the evolution of the pandemic, and ViteMaDose, a system that allows users to find an appointment to be vaccinated in just two clicks, created by Guillaume Rozier, a 24-year-old data scientist¹⁹.e where France is struggling with its vaccination strategy

Our proposals to go beyond open data, in the service of the general interest:

- **Management and exploitation of a "semi-open" data shared between "Services of general interest" actors:** create a semi-free "Social Commons" licence with enhanced reciprocity, access to which would be conditional on end use and contribution, which all Social Economy actors could use to share their data or algorithms of general interest, or to retrieve public data useful for the creation of new digital services (Yuka model based on OpenFoodFacts).
- **Extend the legal exception based on the [notion of service of general interest in European law](#) to digital, and/or a European model of public actor-SSE agreement to allow SSE organisations that offer "Services of General Interest" to exploit the digital data of public actors to find solutions to social and environmental issues.** These exceptions would apply under strict commitment and conditions of compliance with the GDPR. It is often complex to define ex ante what constitutes data of general interest, and not all the data sets concerned are necessarily easy to open in open data (sensitive nature of the data, complexity of cleaning them, etc.). On the other hand, several of the most significant social innovations of recent years have been made possible by ad hoc partnerships with public authorities (Bob in France, a data exchange agreement with Pôle emploi on the career paths of job seekers; CovidTracker, with the French Ministry of Health, during a period of crisis when Covid data was not open data). Facilitating these partnerships via standard agreements would make it possible to increase the number of these successful collaborations, which can then benefit the entire ecosystem by being a first step towards more widespread publication in open data.

b.2) Artificial intelligence and machine learning, with all its general interest applications.

References :

- [EU AI Strategy \(2021-2027\)](#)
- [Social Good Accelerator position paper in response to the European Commission's consultation on its AI Strategy \(May 2020\)](#)

Our proposals:

- **Following on from the idea of a semi-free "Social Commons" licence, create an open AI base, with partial intellectual property protection reserved for providers of services of general interest:** access by use and open instructions, conditional on use as part of a "Digital Service of General Interest" and intended for public and private operators of general interest.

¹⁸ <https://www.maddyness.com/2020/12/03/cout-stopcovid-6-millions-deuros/>

¹⁹ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/sciences/guillaume-rozier-de-covidtracker-a-vitemadose-20210414>

- **The establishment of a European model of clusters or European Data/IA cooperation poles dedicated to the general interest**, integrating researchers in the humanities and actors of the Social Solidarity Economy.
- **The establishment of an independent, diverse and multidisciplinary body on AI of general interest** that would rate the democratic, social and environmental impact of algorithms and technologies on the basis of consumer/citizen feedback and tests (retro engineering) and propose a **European Label for socially and environmentally responsible AI**. This would make it possible to produce standards and investment criteria that put people back at the centre of AI production/design and aim to support the social and environmental transition
- **Finally, the Commission could launch a study on the opportunities of "non for profit" economic models with high social and environmental value, based on Data and AI for the actors of the Social Solidarity Economy.**

3. SKILLS COMPONENT: DIGITAL ACCULTURATION AND NEW SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY-BASED DIGITAL PROFESSIONS IN EUROPE.

Digital competence can be defined as "the safe and critical use of information society technologies (IST)" (EC, 2006: 7). An emblematic 21st century skill, it is essential for education, work, leisure and civic participation.

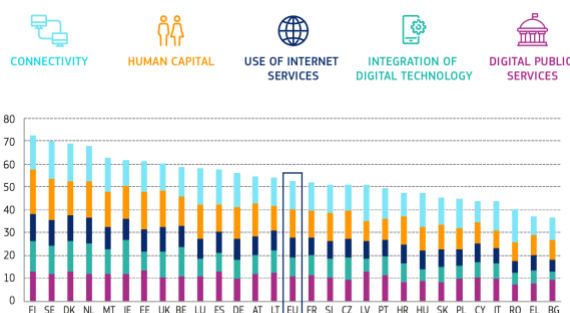
Considering that the organisations of the Social and Solidarity Economy, and in particular those operating in the fields of personal services, lifelong learning, professional integration, citizenship and the fight against inequalities and discrimination, represent as many "digital mediators" for the most fragile populations, on the fringes of the digital transition (as a reminder, 40% of Europeans have an insufficient level of digital skills and among those who have none, i.e. 22%, 42% are unemployed);

Considering that these organisations still receive little support in their organisational and service-related digital transformation, particularly in terms of upgrading the skills of their employees and volunteers, even though they are the private operators of the general interest and the guarantors of European social rights;

The European Action Plan for the Social Economy should include strong ambitions for the digital literacy of SSE actors in Europe.

References

- According to the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI)²⁰, while 85% of European citizens were already using the internet in 2019, before the COVID-19 crisis, only 58% had at least basic digital skills. In 2018, 9.1 million people were working as ICT specialists in the EU, +1.6 million in 4 years which does not fill the shortage of ICT specialists in the labour market. During 2018, 57% of companies that recruited or tried to recruit ICT specialists reported difficulties in filling these vacancies. This problem was experienced by 64% of large companies and 56% of SMEs, a figure that is likely to be even higher in SSE although it has never been assessed.
- 91% of the 218 European social utility organisations we surveyed in 2019 wanted to increase their internal skills in the digital field: the main obstacles were funding, the lack of human resources that could be mobilised, the lack of prior knowledge of the issues and opportunities (76%), the lack of places and mechanisms for meeting with organisations in the digital sector (66%)



²⁰ DESI 2020: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-economy-and-society-index-desi>

- Almost 28% of Europeans have low digital skills in 2019²¹. These are mostly those who suffer from other social fractures: cultural, territorial, economic, etc. The same people who make up the audiences of social and solidarity economy organisations. To date, the latter cannot fully play its role as a digital intermediary as it does in the fields of personal assistance, popular education or economic integration, because it cruelly lacks the means to upgrade the skills of its employees and volunteers.
- Human capital and skills are essential for technology adoption, innovation and international competitiveness. A massive plan for professional retraining in the new digital, care and ecological transition professions is needed over the next 10 years. In this context, the organisations of the social and solidarity economy will have a major role to play in terms of guidance, training and support for the return to employment with²² :
 - ~100M workers to be upgraded with 20% of their tasks to be automated or digitised in the next 10 years
 - ~20M displaced workers, with a corollary increase in higher unemployment rates as many displaced workers would not have the skills to find employment in the expanding occupations.

The European Union has already implemented several initiatives on the development of digital, social and environmental skills:

The [Skills Pact](#) is a model of shared commitment to skills development in Europe. In order to support a fair and resilient recovery and to realise the ambitions of the green and digital transitions as well as the EU strategies for industry and SMEs, the Commission invites public and private organisations to join forces and take concrete action to improve people's skills in Europe. The Pact is the first of the flagship actions of the European Skills Agenda and is firmly anchored in the European pillar of social rights.

[The European Skills Agenda](#) is a five-year plan to help people and businesses acquire and use more and better skills, strengthening sustainable competitiveness, as set out in the European Green Deal. It also aims to ensure social equity, putting into practice the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights: access to education, training and lifelong learning for all, everywhere in the EU building resilience to respond to crises, based on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.

- [Digital Skills & Jobs EU Commission Programme \(2021-2027\)](#)
- [Digital Skills & Jobs EU Commission Agenda \(2021-2027\)](#)
- [Digital Education Action Plan \(2021-2027\)](#)

In addition, two European reference systems already exist for e-skills:

- [DIGICOMP: the European Commission's reference framework for digital citizenship skills.](#) It includes 21 competences grouped in five competence areas. It aims to support European countries in the design of policies, measures, programmes and other schemes that promote the development of digital skills for all.
- [European e-Skills Framework: Professional e-Skills Repository 3.0:](#) The European Standard (EN) 16234-1 European e-Skills Framework (e-Skills) provides a reference of 41 competences as applied in the workplace of information and communication technologies (ICT), using a common language for competences, skills, knowledge and competence levels that can be understood across Europe. This reference is complemented by 7 cross-cutting aspects relevant to the performance of ICT work skills.

²¹ Source: European DataLab, based on Eurostat [isoc_sk_dskl_ij], accessed on 20/04/2020. <https://www.european-datalab.com/les-multiples-formes-de-la-fracture-numerique-europeenne/#:~:text=It%20on%20survives%20that%20pr%C3%A8s,by%204%20in%202010>

²² Projections for EU + UK + Switzerland; before COVID-19 outbreak - Source: McKinsey Future of Work research

Our proposals

a) Better identify digital skills and training useful for the digital upgrading of SSE organisations.

- **A European reference framework of digital competences of general interest (an annex to the [European reference framework of E-skills](#) and/or a "digital mediation professionals" version in annex to the European reference framework of citizen e-competences Digicomp)**
 - ◆ Carry out a major field survey to identify and reference the Tech skills that social utility organisations need, in order to build a clear reference framework on which Tech actors could rely. In the long term, this would allow the European e-skills reference framework to be adapted to the needs and practical challenges of the European non-profit sector.
 - ◆ Integrate into the European e-skills reference frameworks all the skills related to the digital accessibility of websites, platforms and mobile applications (motor and sensory disabilities, socio-cultural accessibility, software eco-design, etc.), in application of the European directive on website accessibility (which came into force in December 2016),²³ extended to the private sector. In this context, the [B-WISE project](#) co-financed by the Erasmus+ programme is already underway and co-managed by one of SEE's members, ENSIE (European Network of Social Integration Enterprises). In particular, B-WISE aims to create a European strategy for sectoral cooperation on qualifications in social integration enterprises, also through an analysis of the qualifications required in the labour market in the different EU countries.

- **A European digital literacy programme designed by and for Social Solidarity Economy organisations,**
 - ◆ ***Continuous training of SSE employees and volunteers:*** first essential step to integrate the potential of digital technology in their strategy and skills development plan: Erasmus+, Mooc, exchanges, Learning expeditions, Wikipedia model for SSE continuous training with a base of online training, methodological references (adapted case studies) and references of open economic models. Rely on digital skills operators with social and solidarity economy models such as Simplon.co (France), FactoriaF5 (Spain), Bencode (Belgium), Molengeek (Belgium).
 - ◆ ***Initial training of future SSE employees and volunteers:*** create orientation and awareness-raising courses on Social Tech from secondary school onwards (using players such as [MobileSchool](#)).

- **Make "training vouchers" and other public support for digital transformation available to all SSE organisations,**
 - ◆ **Digital Pass model of the [SCIC APTIC](#), France :** This mediation should be systematised and could be the subject of an ambitious Pro Bono programme for Tech actors. This mediation must be systematised and could be the subject of an ambitious Pro Bono programme for Tech actors. Equal access to public policies supporting digital transformation should also be imposed. For example, in 2021 in France, the digital vouchers (Aide France Num) accessible to VSEs

²³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32016L2102&from=EN>

are not accessible to non-profit employing organisations (associations, foundations) or limited profit-making organisations (cooperatives)²⁴.

b) Upskilling & reskilling: new jobs, professional reintegration and business creation in the social and solidarity digital sector

→ Developing digital training and mediation professions within the SSE

- ◆ **Rely on the [Pact for Skills](#) and [ERASMUS Plus](#) by directing the funds and training available for the upskilling and digital reskilling of employees and entrepreneurs of the social economy**, in particular via public procurement, and the Insertion par l'Activité Economique companies. the upskilling and reskilling of employees and entrepreneurs of the social economy by supporting the whole of this ecosystem and the plural alliances between its actors, public authorities, vocational training centres etc. **Targeted training courses in "circular social economy" (Upskilling of unemployed people on specific trades for the digital transformation of the social economy)**
- ◆ Rely on training operators in the inclusion sector by making them change scales to train future digital professionals of the Social Economy: for example, UX/UI designer adapted to social environmental issues, inclusion and non-profit economic models
- ◆ Involve social economy actors in the process of developing the European Approach to micro-skills for lifelong learning and employability, thus recognising the pedagogical role of the sector, given the skills upgrading and re-skilling that takes place in the provision of training and capacity building activities within social enterprises.
- ◆ Propose **co-financing of training and recruitment by the States for new jobs and digital services of general interest, particularly in the area of digital inclusion**. In this respect, draw inspiration from the following models:
 - Grande École du Numérique: since its creation in 2016, 27,921 people have been trained in digital professions in France, 74% of whom had a "positive exit" within 3 months of completing their training²⁵ (see the evaluation)
 - [The French government's stimulus plan for digital inclusion](#), announced in November 2020, which aims to create 4,000 digital mediator positions throughout the country by covering the costs of training and partially covering the costs of hiring these mediators by private organisations.

→ Relying on SSE structures, in particular Insertion par l'Activité Economique, to develop "ESSNs" (Social Enterprises for Digital Services) and the professional digital skills available on the market (upskilling). The Action Plan for the Social Economy will therefore have to include an ambitious component for the creation of new digital professions and ESSNs in the fields of social inclusion and rights. These companies already exist (see in particular the [Simplon.co model and its European "subsidiaries"](#) or the [Tech Soup Europe "counters"](#), the digital inclusion companies, etc.), but there

²⁴ <https://www.economie.gouv.fr/plan-de-relance/profils/entreprises/aides-francenum-transformation-numerique>

²⁵ <https://www.rhmatin.com/formation/organisme-formation/grande-ecole-du-numerique-bonne-appreciation-en-2019-effort-a-poursuivre.html>

are not enough of them to meet the needs for continuous training and reintegration into the new digital professions that are constantly growing and evolving.

In the field of training and integration through economic activity :

- ◆ Upgrading all employees who perform or will perform digital public service tasks in the private sector
 - E.g.: *Upgrading of 2000 postal workers by simplon.co (fight against illiteracy): Simplon.co*
- ◆ Develop Upskilling in AEI companies (see Erasmus plus fund)
 - Grande École du Numérique model: since its creation in 2016, 27,921 people have been trained in digital professions in France, 74% of whom had a "positive exit" within 3 months of completing their training²⁶.

In the field of Production :

- ◆ Develop trades and ESSNs specialising in digital accessibility or UX/UI design for people who are far from education, employment and digital technology, or eco-design.
 - E.g.: [Commando UX \(French government's Design Gouv programme\)](#) to be duplicated as a common / digital service of general interest for European SSE organisations

→ Ensure that inclusion and diversity criteria are introduced in European policies that encourage the development of SSEs to foster the emergence of an "inclusive" generation of digital social entrepreneurs

As the European Commission and OECD (2019) report "The Missing entrepreneurs"²⁷ on inclusive entrepreneurship policies points out, there is a particular shortfall in the creation of such businesses among "discriminated" audiences, (such as women, migrants, young people) for whom the usual barriers to starting and growing a business are higher than average. The report also finds that these target groups are under-represented among digital entrepreneurs due to several factors such as the lack of digital entrepreneurship models and the lack of digital skills. It recommends that policymakers address these digital-specific barriers in parallel with the removal of traditional barriers to entrepreneurship, including by building digital and entrepreneurial skills and developing stronger networks.

c) Institutionalization of digital pro bono

→ A European framework for the "transfer" of competences between the traditional economy and the social economy ([PIX model](#)), framed by a logic of "commons" for the general interest

- ◆ Encourage the sharing of skills between employees of social utility organisations and technology companies through regulatory and tax incentives (Pro Bono, loan of employees, etc.) by developing aid for

²⁶ <https://www.rhmatin.com/formation/organisme-formation/grande-ecole-du-numerique-bonne-appreciation-en-2019-effort-a-poursuivre.html>

²⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8266&furtherPubs=yes>

innovation or reductions in social security contributions (Young Innovative Company model in France) could also be granted for a loan of labour linked to an R&D project involving a technology company and a social utility organisation.

- ◆ Linking the incentive scheme to a digital tool for monitoring and measuring impact (skills transfer) linked to the European / SSE e-skills reference systems;
- ◆ Experiment with a blockchain and virtual currency system linked to a system of "rewarding" time or skills transferred to organisations of general interest.

→ **Valuing the skills acquired through this sharing of skills among employees and volunteers.** Several experiments, particularly in France (such as the Volunteer Passport), have begun to value the skills acquired through volunteering. The Open Badges (a project developed by the Mozilla Foundation) represent a tremendous opportunity, in terms of potential for action and ethical consistency, to develop a "European Bono Tech" model. of "Pro Bono Tech" model.

THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THIS POSITION PAPER IS TO BE CARRIED OUT

The Social Good Accelerator has launched a consultation initiative tailored to its previous work and to more recent consultations such as

- **An online questionnaire**
- **A scientific research entitled "Cooperation between social utility and tech actors in Europe: issues, impacts, brakes and levers".**
- **A position paper on data strategy and another on artificial intelligence for the European Commission**

Who are we? Social Good Accelerator: European Network for People, Planet and Social Tech

The [Social Good Accelerator EU](#) is a European movement born in 2017 from an observation: the technological transition of social economy and civil society organisations, which work and innovate every day for the general interest, is not yet sufficiently taken into account by public authorities, companies and investors. Yet it is a sine qua non condition for European innovation and competitiveness centred on respect for the living world and social and climate justice. This technological transition, which leads to greater efficiency for profit-making players in the sector, but also to new safeguards, must be accelerated and placed at the heart of European transition strategies, to steer our models towards greater inclusion and collective well-being.

We advocate the development of Social Tech - that is, digital and technological solutions from social economy organisations - as the driving force behind a European digital model focused on the societal and environmental transition.

Our 65 members, including 39 organisations²⁸ in France, Belgium, Portugal, Estonia and Greece, are working together to create common ground around community animation, research and European lobbying in order to deploy the full potential and accessibility of Social Tech in Europe.

Partners in this contribution



Social Economy Europe is the voice of 2.8 million social economy enterprises and organisations in Europe. We are the reference point for the social economy at European level.

We are a strategic partner of the European institutions and have been leading the EU policy on the social

²⁸ ADMICAL, AI 4 Belgium, AEIDL, All Digital, Agence Phare, Animafac, AVISE, Bayes ImpactChangemakers Lab, ESS France, Emmaüs France, Fantastique Bazar, la FING, Fondation La France s'Engage, Hello Asso, Latitudes, La Med Num, microDON, Make Sense, OuiShare, Reconnect, Societality, Pour la Solidarité, Probono Lab, Fondation Devoteam, Groupe La Poste, SCOP G2C, Social Economy Europe, Social Entrepreneurs Agency, Societality, Wikimedia Foundation, Vizity, YOurmission...

economy. Created in November 2000 as CEP-CMAF - the European Standing Conference of Cooperatives, Mutual Societies, Associations and Foundations - with the aim of establishing a permanent dialogue between the social economy and the European institutions. In 2008, CEP-CMAF changed its name and officially became Social Economy Europe. Since its foundation, Social Economy Europe has been the secretariat of the Social Economy Intergroup of the European Parliament.

<https://www.socialeconomy.eu.org>

The European Network of Social Integration Enterprises (ENSIE) was officially created in Bruges (Belgium) on 11 May 2001. ENSIE aims to represent, maintain and develop networks and federations of work integration social enterprises in Europe.

<http://www.ensie.org/>



Founded by the Belgian economist Denis Stokkink in 2002, POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ - PLS is an independent European think & do tank committed to a sustainable Europe of solidarity. POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ works to defend and consolidate the European social model, a subtle balance between economic development and social justice.

<https://www.pourlasolidarite.eu/>



BAYES IMPACT

Bayes Impact is a [non-governmental organisation](#) created by [Paul Duan](#), Eric Liu and Pascal Corpet. It started its activities in the [United States](#) in 2014 and has been developing in Europe and more particularly in [France](#) since 2016.

Bayes Impact aims to use [data science](#) technologies, such as [artificial intelligence](#) and [big data](#), to address social issues.

As the [originator of the Citizen Public Service Pact](#), Bayes Impact builds citizen public services to create a more just and inclusive future for our societies.

<https://www.bayesimpact.org>

make sense
_learn _create _transform

Make Sense is an association created in August 2011 with the aim of promoting social entrepreneurship to the general public and professionals.

makesense was born in 2010 from a community of citizens who wanted to commit to a sustainable and inclusive society. Gradually, our movement has grown, reaching out to entrepreneurs and organisations. Because we all have a role to play in the transition.

makesense is more than 400 organisations (large groups, SMEs, institutions, NGOs) supported

- 8,000 entrepreneurial projects supported, 200,000 engaged citizens, 130 employees in 7 countries.

www.makesense.org