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Social economy statistics in the EU

State of the art, gaps and barriers

Thematic discussion paper

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Directorate-General for Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
2025

Table of Contents

1. Introduction 2
2. Setting the scene: statistics as a pillar of the social economy 3
2.1. Why are statistics essential for the social economy? 3
2.2. What data should be collected for the social economy? 5
2.3. Which methods can be used to collect data? 6
2.4. Who should collect the data? 7
3. Statistics on the social economy: state of play and challenges 7
3.1. Overview of the current data landscape 7
3.2. Barriers to the development of statistics on the social economy 9
3.2.1. Political and institutional barriers 9
3.2.2. Technical barriers 9
3.2.3. Training barriers 11
3.2.4. Financial barriers 11
4. Conclusion 12
References 14

1. Introduction

The social economy in Europe has deep historical roots. From the nineteenth century onwards, the first mutual aid organisations and workers' cooperatives emerged in response to the economic and social hardships caused by the Industrial Revolution (CIRIEC, 2012). At the same time, agricultural and credit cooperatives spread in an attempt to alleviate rural poverty and support small urban craft and commercial activities. The second half of the nineteenth century also saw the emergence of other ideas in response to these social and economic pressures, such as social Catholicism, inaugurated by Rerum Novarum, alongside associative initiatives linked to the pursuit of social justice and the improvement of living and working conditions for the poorest segments of the population (Duroselle, 1974).

Despite the growth of cooperatives, mutuals and associations across Europe, the concept of the social economy has historically gained broader diffusion only within specific geographical contexts, particularly in francophone countries, Spain and Portugal. The long tradition of collaboration among these entities in these countries fostered a shared sense of identity and thus a stronger recognition of the concept of the social economy compared to other regions (Demoustier et al., 2006; CIRIEC, 2013). Moreover, the use of the term has not been constant over time. Although it originated in the nineteenth century, it largely fell into disuse after the Second World War, only re-emerging in France in the 1970s when cooperatives, mutuals and associations established the *Conseil des Entreprises, Employeurs et Groupements de l'Economie Sociale* (CNLAMCA) (EESC, 2017).

Today, the attention on the social economy is linked to the ongoing transition phase, characterised by growing interest in organisational forms that can reconcile economic development with social cohesion and ensuring an equal and just transition (Borzaga et al., 2017). This renewed interest stems from a series of events—including the economic crisis, the pandemic, the energy crisis, and the resurgence of geopolitical tensions—that, since the late 2010s, have made it necessary to reconsider the ways in which the instruments traditionally provided by markets and private initiative can be realigned with collective objectives of sustainability and social cohesion, which have always been central to the European model of development.

This growing attention is reflected in recent EU initiatives that aim to recognise and promote organisations occupying a space between the public sector, with which they share social and environmental goals, and the private, for-profit sector, with which they share private ownership structures and, to some extent, entrepreneurial logic (Borzaga & Salvatori, 2024).

The process began with the launch of the Social Business Initiative in 2011, which laid the groundwork for EU action to support social enterprises (European Commission, 2011). It was later strengthened by the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Commission, 2017), which strengthens many of the core principles and objectives underlying the social economy. More recently, this commitment has gained further momentum through two major policy developments: the European Action Plan for the Social Economy (European Commission, 2021a) and the Council Recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions (Council of the European Union, 2023), which together provide a clearer strategic vision and stronger institutional support for the social economy across Member States.

According to the definition set out in the Action Plan,

> '*the social economy encompasses entities which share the following main principles and common features: the primacy of people as well as social and/or environmental purposes over profit; the reinvestment of most profits and surpluses to carry out*

> *activities in the interest of members/users ('collective interest') or society at large ('general interest'); and democratic and/or participatory governance'* (European Commission, 2021a).

This definition does not correspond to a single legal form but instead encompasses a set of principles that allow cooperatives, mutuals, associations and foundations to be grouped together. Despite their diversity, these organisations converge around the purposes for which they are established and the ways in which they are governed and managed. In addition to these four categories, social enterprises must be considered a transversal dynamic that has emerged within the social economy. This dynamic often evolves from traditional cooperatives beyond their mutualist purpose or consolidates the productive orientation of associations providing goods and services to vulnerable groups or communities at large (European Commission, 2024).

Against the backdrop of institutional recognition of the role that social economy organisations can play, the Council Recommendation of 27 November 2023 on developing social economy framework conditions acknowledges the fragmented state of the current statistics on the social economy. This is also supported by studies conducted in recent years that have confirmed the necessity of expanding the range and territorial coverage of data, as well as highlighting the ongoing challenges associated with data collection and statistical production on the social economy (European Commission, 2024).

Against this background, the purpose of this paper is to evaluate the current situation, identify existing data gaps, and address the challenges associated with achieving harmonised, comparable, and policy-relevant statistics. It is intended to inform the discussion at the first webinar in a series of mutual learning workshops on social economy data and statistics, organised by ICF under a framework service contract with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL).

2. Setting the scene: statistics as a pillar of the social economy

2.1. Why are statistics essential for the social economy?

Statistics on the social economy are a strategic tool that can be used to raise the profile of the sector, gain recognition for it and provide it with support, while also guiding public policies and ensuring the effective use of public resources. Against this backdrop, statistics on the size and characteristics of the social economy can highlight its significance as an economic and social actor, providing clear evidence and narratives that can strengthen its legitimacy among policymakers and society at large (Chaves-Avila, 2021).

Beyond visibility and recognition, statistics are essential for assessing performance and measuring contributions to broader socio-economic objectives, such as, for example, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Statistics demonstrate the sector's resilience in times of crisis, its counter-cyclical function in sustaining economic activity, its contribution to job creation and retention compared with the for-profit sector, and its role in combating inequality and social exclusion (Chaves-Avila, 2021).

This evidence demonstrates the added value of the social economy and highlights the need for targeted public policies to support its development. The Council Recommendation supports this view, stating that:

> '*accurate data and statistics is key to improving the understanding of social economy business models and making evidence-based policy decisions'* and that '*by making available essential statistics on the size, workforce, development and challenges of the social economy, the strategies and measures put in place would be more efficient and adjusted to the different situations in the sector* ' (Council of the European Union, 2023).

Several international organisations also highlight the central role of statistics in public policy processes. In this regard, The United Nations Statistical Division states that:

> '*official statistics should be a cornerstone of a modern society by providing an unbiased and accurate picture of the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation and development in a country. To an increasing degree, high quality and comparable statistics are also important for analysis and decision-making at the international and global level'* (United Nations, 2025, p. 40).

Similarly, the OECD underlines that:

> '*statistics are a fundamental input for individual and collective decision-making, both at national and international levels*' (OECD, 2005, p. 3).

Moreover, the World Bank emphasises that statistics are crucial at every stage of the policy cycle: from identifying and diagnosing issues, to deciding whether they should be included in the policy agenda; from defining objectives and selecting the most appropriate tools, to evaluating implementation and outcomes. For policymakers, statistics are indispensable for assessing needs and monitoring progress. For social economy stakeholders, statistics are a powerful tool for demonstrating the importance of the field:

> '*Why do statistics matter? Put simply, they are the evidence on which policies are built. They help to identify needs, set goals, and monitor progress. Without good statistics, the development process is blind - policymakers cannot learn from their mistakes, and the public cannot hold them accountable.'* (World Bank, 2000, p. VII).

In this regard, sector-specific data (e.g. from the healthcare, education, culture and social services sectors) is particularly valuable. They allow policymakers to understand the unique contributions, challenges and dynamics of the social economy within each sector. It also enables them to build a stronger case for increased support for the social economy and to design more targeted and effective policies. At the same time, they emphasise the diversity of the social economy and demonstrate its relevance to many areas of economic and social life, thereby reinforcing its legitimacy as a transversal policy area.

The value of data extends beyond this macro perspective to the micro level as well. While aggregated statistics are crucial for policymaking and raising awareness of the social economy as a whole, they are equally important at an organisational level for guiding internal management and strategic decision-making. Reliable data helps organisations identify their strengths and weaknesses, monitor their performance and adapt to emerging needs. Reliable data also enhances transparency and credibility, which are key factors for attracting funders, investors, and partners, as well as improving access to resources and collaboration opportunities.

In this sense, impact measurement and statistical evidence are complementary: while the latter demonstrates the overall economic and social weight of the social economy, the former captures how individual organisations create, assess and communicate progress toward their specific missions. Moreover, when statistics become comparable across sectors and territories, they facilitate mutual learning and the exchange of good practices, strengthening cooperation within the social economy and contributing to a shared sense of identity (Chaves-Avila, 2021).

2.2. What data should be collected for the social economy?

To obtain a comprehensive statistical picture of the social economy, reliable data on the number of entities, their overall economic value and the people involved should be collected, alongside information on how the social economy is distributed across sectors, regions and organisational forms. In this regard, one option highlighted by the Council Recommendation is for Member States to expand their national accounting systems through 'satellite accounts', which provide supplementary data on the social economy (Council of the European Union, 2023). This approach allows the social economy to be distinguished from conventional enterprises and analysed more effectively, making it possible to highlight more clearly its economic contribution, namely the actual value generated through production, employment, and capital accumulation.

However, such an approach brings to light three key points for reflection. First, while traditional economic indicators are useful for analysing the social economy in comparison with other enterprises, as recognised in ILO work on statistics for cooperatives and the social economy, it is also important to engage with ongoing debates on measurement, since conventional metrics often fail to capture the full economic value generated by the sector (ILO, 2017).

Second, the concept of economic contribution is frequently confused with that of economic impact. Economic contribution refers to observable values in national accounts, such as production, employment, capital, wages, profits, and taxes. Economic impact, by contrast, encompasses broader ripple effects, including indirect, induced, and counterfactual effects (Rousselière et al., 2020). Contribution is measured through accounting data, whereas impact relies on more complex modelling tools such as input-output or general equilibrium analysis (Rousselière et al., 2020). Clarifying this distinction is essential to ensure robust evidence and to avoid overestimating results, while also recognising the complementary importance of both dimensions in understanding the role of the social economy.

A third point relates to the people engaged in social economy organisations. Here, the focus cannot be limited to paid employment alone. Volunteering and membership represent an important share of participation, providing essential labour and reflecting levels of public involvement in social economy activities (OECD, 2024). Moreover, beyond these indicators, data on the size of employment should be complemented with evidence on job creation, working conditions, job quality and equity.

Taken together, these considerations point to the need for data not only on the size and scope of the social economy, but also on its qualitative dimensions, such as its contribution across different economic sectors and regions, its specific role in achieving public policy goals and SDG targets, and its countercyclical capacity in times of crisis (Chaves-Avila, 2021). Furthermore, such data must also reflect the broader, non-monetary dimensions of the social economy, its capacity to generate positive externalities, social innovation, and collective resources. In this respect, both the GECES Expert Group (2016) and the OECD (2021) have emphasised the importance of systematic approaches to impact measurement in order to capture the quantitative and qualitative performance aspects. Adopting these perspectives can ultimately contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the social economy's role in advancing inclusive and sustainable development.

2.3. Which methods can be used to collect data?

As outlined in the preceding paragraphs, data on the social economy can be collected for various purposes and can cover multiple dimensions. However, as previously noted, a fundamental starting point lies in creating a statistical representation of its size, characteristics, and economic contributions. Various methodological approaches can be used for this purpose.

As mentioned in the 2023 Council Recommendation, one approach is to set up satellite accounts for the social economy. These accounts are an extension of the national accounts, providing additional information on a specific field of activity — in this case, the social economy — while remaining consistent with the overall accounting framework (European Commission et al., 2025).

Beyond satellite accounts, other official statistical sources may be used.

Business censuses and statistical business registers[1] can provide information on the number of active entities, their territorial distribution and fields of activity. Sometimes, they can also provide basic data on employment and economic performance. This is particularly relevant to social economy families with an entrepreneurial orientation that are classified as enterprises (i.e. cooperatives). Similarly, censuses and registers of non-profit institutions can provide equivalent information on associations and foundations, thereby supplementing the aforementioned sources.

Enterprise-level surveys specifically designed for social economy organisations offer the advantage of providing a comprehensive and coherent framework of information. They also make it possible to collect a broader and more detailed range of data than censuses or administrative registers can provide. For example, when considering the economic value generated by the social economy, the recent study commissioned by the European Commission (2024) has highlighted the challenges of reconstructing this value (both in terms of revenues and added value) due to the fragmented nature of available data across Member States. The difficulty is even greater when seeking reliable sources on the economic value of associations, foundations, and other non-profit institutions, as such information is rarely captured in statistical registers or administrative records due to the fact that these entities are not usually required to file financial statements. In this context, conducting a dedicated sample survey targeting social economy organisations could provide an effective way of estimating their economic contribution.

All enterprise-based data collection methods face limitations when it comes to capturing volunteering and membership. Such variables are rarely included in statistical registers or censuses, and enterprise-level surveys risk double-counting, as individuals may volunteer for or be members of more than one organisation. As a result, the number of people involved in social economy activities may be overestimated. To overcome these limitations, household surveys can play a crucial complementary role. For example, the EU survey on income and living conditions (EU-SILC)[2] interviews a representative sample of the population in each Member State and includes questions on participation in formal and informal voluntary activities. Combining enterprise-level data with household-level evidence therefore provides a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the true scale and scope of participation in the social economy.

[1] According to the European Business Statistics Methodological Manual for Statistical Business Registers (European Union, 2021b), all EU Member States maintain business registers for statistical purposes, used to coordinate surveys, analyse the business population and its dynamics, integrate administrative data, and define statistical units.

[2] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-union-statistics-on-income-and-living-conditions

2.4. Who should collect the data?

According to Bouchard and Salathé-Beaulieu (2021), five categories of actors are generally engaged in collecting data on the social economy: national statistical offices (NSOs), government departments and agencies, umbrella organisations, universities and research centres, and development agencies or other non-state entities.

As Chaves-Avila (2021) points out, NSOs are the most authoritative source, given their commitment to impartiality, transparency and comparability at an international level. However, they have so far shown limited interest in developing social economy statistics, and the outputs are not always adapted to the needs of data users. Government departments and agencies often collect data on specific subsectors or policy areas and possess in-depth knowledge of the social economy. However, their methods and scope are rarely suitable for comprehensive or international comparison. Umbrella organisations tend to produce their own statistics, drawing on their proximity to grassroots entities. However, they face challenges regarding resources, methodological rigour and potential bias. Universities and research centres contribute expertise and neutrality but lack systematic access to administrative data and the authority to ensure broad participation in surveys. Finally, development agencies and other non-state actors sometimes invest in social economy statistics to assess and justify their interventions. However, their focus is typically narrow and fails to capture the sector as a whole.

The evidence therefore suggests that statistics on the social economy should be produced through a participatory process involving all these actors. They can contribute by combining statistical and scientific rigour with in-depth sectoral knowledge and awareness of data needs.

Nevertheless, the primary responsibility for collecting data on the social economy should rest with NSOs, within the framework of the European Statistical System and in close cooperation with Eurostat. These institutions guarantee methodological soundness, international comparability, and impartiality in line with established statistical standards. At the same time, the contribution of other stakeholders is vital in order to fill information gaps, capture sector-specific dimensions and highlight aspects that are often overlooked in official statistics, such as volunteering, membership and non-monetary impacts.

3. Statistics on the social economy in the EU: state of play and challenges

3.1. Overview of the current data landscape

Although the social economy has gained recognition at the European level, its understanding and institutional framework vary considerably between Member States, reflecting the diverse historical and institutional traditions that have shaped its development across Europe. In countries such as France, Belgium, Portugal and Spain, where cooperation between associations, cooperatives and mutual organisations has a long history, the social economy is widely recognised and firmly embedded in policy and practice. In contrast, in many other countries, the concept remains largely confined to academic debate or is limited to specific policy circles (European Commission, 2024).

When it comes to social enterprises, the picture is even more complex. In some countries, social enterprises are fully integrated into the broader social economy, whereas in others

they are viewed as a distinct or parallel domain. In most Member States, one of the two concepts tends to prevail, while only a few countries show consistent recognition and use of both terms among policymakers, researchers, and civil society organisations (European Commission, 2024).

Differences in recognition across Member States are also reflected in the availability and quality of statistical information on the social economy.

At the European level, several initiatives have been undertaken in recent years to map its scope and key characteristics. The first comprehensive study, commissioned by the European Economic and Social Committee in 2012 (CIRIEC, 2012) and updated in 2017 (EECS, 2017), provided initial evidence on the size of social economy in the EU Member States. More recent estimates, presented in a 2024 publication, highlight the progress made in several Member States in developing statistics on the social economy since the 2012 and 2017 reports, while at the same time underscoring the continuing scarcity of official data and the difficulties involved in producing reliable and comparable figures (European Commission, 2024).

The European Commission has also commissioned studies to map national frameworks and estimate the number of social enterprises based on the definition set out in the Social Business Initiative (European Commission, 2011). These studies have highlighted the considerable challenges associated with such estimation efforts, primarily due to the lack of data and information on the three key dimensions (entrepreneurial, social and governance) of the social enterprise definition which are essential to producing accurate and reliable estimates (European Commission, 2020).

Further initiatives have been also launched to collect data and insights from umbrella organisations. One of these is the European Social Enterprise Monitor (ESEM), a biennial survey-based study of social enterprises across Europe coordinated by the Euclid Network and involving multiple national partners. Building on the 2020–21 and 2021–22 waves, the most recent edition (2023–24) of the survey was conducted in 31 countries, including 25 EU Member States, as well as several neighbouring countries (Gazeley & Bennet, 2025). A total of 4,800 social enterprises were surveyed, with 1,807 responses being deemed valid after data verification and cleaning. While the study is not representative of all social enterprises in Europe, the ESEM provides descriptive information on social enterprises and their ecosystems. It sheds light on the challenges, barriers and opportunities reported by respondents across Europe.

Although these initiatives have improved the overall understanding of the social economy at a European level, the availability and quality of data still varies significantly between countries.

Based on the national data currently available, the 27 EU Member States can be divided into two groups according to the extent and quality of their social economy statistics (European Commission, 2024). The first group includes Belgium (particularly Wallonia), France, Portugal and Spain, where systematic data on the social economy is regularly produced and disseminated. Luxembourg and Poland can also be placed in this group, as both countries have recently developed official statistical initiatives to capture the scope of the sector. In France, Portugal, Poland and Spain, the production of social economy statistics is mandatory under social economy laws or national development plans. Dedicated observatories (in Wallonia, France and Spain) and national statistical offices (in France, Luxembourg, Poland and Portugal) ensure the data is periodically updated and made public. Portugal, Luxembourg and Poland have also introduced satellite accounts on the social economy within their national statistical systems.

Of the countries that compile social economy satellite accounts, Portugal has the longest and most consolidated experience, whereas Poland has only published one edition to date.

Portugal's Social Economy Satellite Account is produced in partnership with Statistics Portugal (INE) and the António Sérgio Cooperative (CASES). Four editions have been published to date, covering the years 2010, 2013, 2016 and 2019–2020 (INE & CASES, 2023). Despite methodological challenges, the Portugal's Social Economy Satellite Account is one of the most advanced examples in Europe of integrating social economy data within the national accounting framework.

The remaining 21 Member States have no unified or systematic statistical framework for the social economy. Basic (and, in some cases, fragmented) information can be reconstructed by combining data from official statistics, administrative registers and umbrella organisations, drawing on sources that cover different components of the social economy. However, the quality of these sources differs, particularly in terms of coverage, accuracy and comparability.

3.2. Barriers to the development of statistics on the social economy

The development of statistics on the social economy faces several types of barriers — institutional, political, technical, financial, and educational — which often reinforce one another (Chaves, 2021).

3.2.1. Political and institutional barriers

As noted in the previous paragraph, the lack of recognition of the social economy and its contribution to society results in limited political interest and inadequate support for the development of statistics.

In this light, one of the main institutional obstacles is the absence of a clear regulatory framework. Without common definitions or standards, there is no designated authority responsible for coordinating and overseeing the collection of social economy data. This essentially reflects the degree to which the statistical process and the concept of the social economy are institutionalised.

A clear legal framework that defines the scope and organisational forms of the social economy would greatly facilitate the production of reliable statistics. Conversely, countries without such regulation struggle to define the field and ensure consistent data collection. However, the adoption of such frameworks largely depends on political will.

Another issue is the lack of government strategies that explicitly instruct national statistical offices to collect social economy data and identify relevant indicators and sectors. In the absence of official directives, collaboration between statistical offices, universities and research institutions can help to address this issue, but the existence of such initiatives again depends on political commitment. European level recommendations remain non-binding and therefore have limited effect (Chaves-Avila, 2021; European Commission, 2024).

3.2.2. Technical barriers

Producing robust and comparable statistics on the social economy is a technically complex process. One of the initial challenges lies in defining the sector's boundaries and determining which statistical units should be considered in scope (Bouchard, 2023). Disagreements of a scientific, political, and social nature often hinder the development of a

shared understanding, both nationally and internationally, making cross-country comparisons difficult. Once these criteria have been defined, they should be formalised through statistical standards to ensure consistency across institutions (Chaves-Avila, 2021).

Within this context, the statistical definition of the social economy represents a central issue that is not new and on which international organisations are already working (ICLS, 2023). The key challenge is how to translate the institutional definition provided in the European Action Plan into a statistical definition that can be operationalised through observable and measurable criteria. Such criteria are essential to statistically delineate the boundaries of the social economy and determine which units should be considered in scope and which should be regarded as out of scope.

In recent years, efforts to conceptualise and operationalise the definition of the social economy have evolved along two main lines (ICLS, 2023). The first is the social economy approach proposed by CIRIEC in its Manual for Drawing up the Satellite Accounts of Cooperatives and Mutual Societies (CIRIEC, 2006). The second, more recent approach, is the Third or Social Economy framework introduced in the UN Handbook on Satellite Accounts for Non-profit Institutions and Related Institutions and Volunteer Work (UNSD, 2018) which has been recently incorporated into the 2025 edition of the System of National Accounts (2025 SNA, European Commission et a., 2025). While the CIRIEC manual complements the 2003 UN Handbook on Non-profit Institutions (UNSD, 2003) by focusing on the market-oriented units of the social economy (i.e. cooperatives and mutual societies), the 2018 UN Handbook extends the scope beyond nonprofit institutions to also include institutions with limited profit distribution with an approach that does not fully reflect to the European definition of the social economy.

According to the 2025 SNA, entities to be included in the thematic account on nonprofit institutions and related social economy entities should be private and institutionalised to some extent (although not necessarily legally registered or constituted) and not controlled by government. They must operate independently and involve voluntary participation. In addition, profit distribution must be limited — either fully, in the case of nonprofit institutions, or substantially (by more than 50%) for related institutions (2025 SNA, §31.16).

It should also be noted that the definition does not include specific governance criteria for the organisations covered by the thematic account. Consequently, the governance principle established in the SEAP definition may not be fully ensured, and the satellite account could include entities that do not necessarily operate according to democratic or participatory governance principles. Further clarification would be helpful on what should be considered as profit — for instance, whether patronage refunds distributed by cooperatives to their members, which do not represent returns on capital but are proportional to the transactions between the cooperative and its members, fall within this category under the current framework.

Another challenge lies in identifying and measuring useful variables to understand and monitor the social economy. As discussed in the previous section, it would be particularly valuable to obtain data on several variables, including those related to employment, volunteering, membership, job quality and equity, as well as broader indicators capturing the social economy's contribution to community well-being and a just and fair transition. Technical guidance on how to collect and process such data would be highly beneficial. Adopting the methodological standards and recommendations already set out in various international manuals could help to promote greater consistency and comparability in data collection efforts.

Another technical issue relates to statistical classifications. Recent European research (European Commission, 2024) shows that cooperatives and mutual societies are usually classified under the Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European

Community (NACE), while associations, foundations and other non-profit institutions are classified under the International Classification of Non-profit Organisations (ICNPO).

The NACE classification is used for economic statistics in the European Union. It represents the traditional sectors of the economy (agriculture, industry, and services) organised in a structure designed to capture the granularity of productive activities.

While this classification provides a comprehensive framework for analysing enterprises, it shows some limitations when applied to associations, foundations, and non-profit institutions more broadly. In particular, associations are often grouped under the category “Activities of Other Membership Organisations” (code 94.9 in NACE Rev. 2), due to the absence of more specific categories that could better reflect their activities. This reduces the informational value of the classification for such type of entities.

The ICNPO was developed by Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore, US) as part of a research project on non-profit institutions launched in the early 1990s and later adopted in the Handbook on Non-profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts (UNSD, 2003). This classification combines the criteria of activity sector and the social mission providing more detailed statistical information for associations, foundations, and other non-profit institutions. Nonetheless, the ICNPO does not fully cover all the economic sectors included in the NACE classification and therefore cannot be used comprehensively to classify cooperatives and mutual societies. Once the relevant variables and indicators have been identified, attention must turn to how data are collected and managed. Standardised methodologies are required to process these data and produce indicators that are comparable over time, across sectors and countries (or regions). Data can be obtained from censuses, administrative registers or surveys, but the quality of the data depends on its completeness, how regularly it is updated and how consistently it is organised. Inadequate data collection can lead to duplication, outdated records and unreliable statistics.

Finally, an additional technical challenge concerns the dissemination and accessibility of social economy statistics. Regularly making data available to a wide range of stakeholders and ensuring its visibility through the media can help raise awareness of the social economy’s role and contribution. Providing researchers with access to microdata, while respecting statistical confidentiality, would also facilitate more scientific analysis and strengthen the evidence base for policy.

3.2.3. Training barriers

Compiling statistics on the social economy requires technical and methodological expertise, as well as a thorough understanding of the sector. Without this knowledge, statistical outputs may not meet users' information needs. These challenges could be effectively addressed through a dual approach. Firstly, all relevant stakeholders, including researchers, umbrella organisations, policymakers and practitioners, should be involved in defining statistical frameworks and indicators that accurately reflect the information requirements of the social economy. Secondly, capacity-building and training opportunities should be provided for NSO statistical staff, and mutual learning initiatives should facilitate the exchange of experiences with NSOs that already produce social economy statistics. These efforts would strengthen statistical capacities, improve data quality, and ultimately foster a more coherent, evidence-based understanding of the social economy.

3.2.4. Financial barriers

Financial constraints underpin many of the barriers described above. In contexts with limited resources, staff shortages, weak expertise, and low political demand for data, national statistical offices often deprioritise the production of social economy statistics. Dedicated

financial support is therefore essential to overcome these structural limitations and enable the regular production of s robust statistics in the social economy.

4. Conclusion

Good statistics are a tool for making better decisions. They help policymakers to design targeted measures and monitor the implementation of public policies. For organisations within the social economy, access to solid data is equally important. It supports better management, helps to identify trends and needs, and strengthens transparency and accountability.

As this paper discusses, progress has been made, but the situation varies considerably between Member States. While a few countries have developed a statistical framework for the social economy, many others still rely on partial data on specific social economy families, whether from statistical or administrative sources.

Key challenges remain. In many Member States, there is no clear legal framework or mandate for collecting social economy data. Political attention and resources are limited. Methods and definitions are not aligned, which undermines comparability. Skills and funding are unevenly distributed, and statistics are not always released periodically, nor are they always easily accessible or appropriately disseminated. Therefore, several issues remain open and could guide the discussion during the upcoming webinar.

The first set of questions relates to the framework underlying social economy statistics. As previously mentioned, a shared statistical definition of the social economy is essential for producing comparable data across Europe. Meanwhile, robust statistics depend on access to reliable sources and consistent methods. This raises several points for reflection:

- How can the SEAP definition of the social economy be translated into operational and measurable criteria?
- Which data sources should be prioritised?
- What are the main difficulties in implementing a social economy satellite account?
- How can data be made more meaningful and accessible for policymakers, researchers and practitioners?

At the same time, producing reliable social economy statistics requires close cooperation between many different stakeholders in order to combine technical rigour with sector-specific knowledge. In this regard, further discussion could explore:

- What mechanisms could strengthen cooperation and coordination among national statistical systems and stakeholders?
- What roles should NSOs, governments, researchers and social economy organisations respectively play in data production?
- Should Eurostat or the European Commission be given a stronger mandate to promote harmonisation?

Finally, the development of social economy statistics depends on expertise, resources and continuity. Capacity building across institutions will be key to ensuring that data are produced regularly and used effectively. This raises additional questions:

- How can EU and national funding or coordination mechanisms support long-term investment in social economy statistics?

- What types of training or partnerships are needed most to strengthen statistical capacities in this field?

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