Regional Strategies for the Social Economy

Examples from France, Spain, Sweden and Poland

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Regional Strategies for the Social Economy

Examples from France, Spain, Sweden and Poland

This paper explores the linkages between regional strategies for the social economy and regional development in four EU countries: France, Spain, Sweden and Poland. It provides a comparative perspective of regional strategies for the social economy (*Section 1*), based on i) the level of recognition of the social economy itself, ii) multi-level governance arrangements, iii) the regional strategic priority given to the social economy and iv) financial resources available for regional strategies. It gives examples of strategies for the social economy in selected regions in the four countries to document the diversity of practice (*Section 2*). It outlines conclusions and policy orientations (*Section 3*) to help reinforce the positive impact of regional strategies for the social economy on regional development.

Keywords: social economy, regional development, regional strategies, social enterprises, social entrepreneurship
JEL codes: L3, L31, L38, O18, O35, P13

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Please cite this publication as:

OECD (2020), "Regional Strategies for the Social Economy: Examples from France, Spain, Sweden and Poland", OECD LEED Papers, 2020/03, OECD Publishing, Paris.

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Acknowledgements

This paper was prepared by the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities (CFE) led by Lamia Kamal-Chaoui, Director, as part of the Programme of Work of the Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Programme. It was produced with the financial support of the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission.

The paper was prepared by Amal Chevreau and Heejin Ahn in close cooperation with, and under the supervision of, Antonella Noya, Head of Unit, Social Economy and Innovation. Karen Maguire, Head of the Local Employment, Skills and Social Innovation Division of CFE provided valuable guidance, inputs, and comments. Joaquim Oliveira Martins, Deputy Director of the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities (CFE) reviewed the paper and provided useful suggestions as well as Julie Rijpens. External experts namely Samuel Barco (Spain), Stina Heikkilä (Sweden) and Anna Ciepielewska-Kowalik (Poland) contributed to the paper by providing background information.

The OECD would like to thank Risto Raivio, Estelle Bacconnier and Ana Carrero from the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission who provided valuable comments and advice for the elaboration of this paper. The OECD also thanks LEED delegates from France, Spain, Sweden and Poland for their useful comments.

The authors thank Pilar Philip for preparing the paper for publication.

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Acronyms

France

Bpifrance	Banque Publique d'Investissement Bank of Public Investment
CDC	Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations Bank of Deposits and Consignments
CNCRESS	Conseil national des chambres régionales de l'économie sociale et solidaire National Council of Regional Chambers for the Social and Solidarity Economy
CRESS	Chambres régionales de l'économie sociale et solidaire Regional Chambers for the Social and Solidarity Economy
DLA	Dispositif local d'accompagnement Local Support Tool
FISO	Fonds d'innovation sociale Social Innovation Fund
FNDVA	Fonds national pour le développement de la vie associative National Fund for Community Activity
IAE	Insertion par l'activité économique Integration by Economic Activity
INSEE	Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques National Statistics and Economic Studies Institute
Loi NOTRe	Loi portant nouvelle organisation territoriale de la République Law on the new territorial organisation of the Republic
SCIC	Société coopérative d'intérêt collectif Cooperative Enterprise of Collective Interest
SCOP	Société coopérative et participative Participative Cooperative Enterprise
SIDI	Solidarité Internationale pour le Développement et l'Investissement Fund for International Development and Investment
SRDEII	Schéma régional de développement économique, d'innovation et d'internationalisation Regional Plan for Economic Development, Innovation and Internationalisation
PTCE	Pole territorial de coopération économique Territorial pole for economic cooperation

Spain

CEPES	Confederación Empresarial Española de la Economía Social Federation of Enterprises of the Social Economy
FAECTA	Federación Andaluza de Empresas Cooperativas de Trabajo Andalusia' Federation of Labour Cooperative Enterprises
KONFECOOP	Confederación de Cooperativas de Euskadi Federation of Cooperatives of the Basque Country
UCOMUR	Unión de Cooperativas de la Región de Murcia Union of Cooperatives of the Region of Murcia

Sweden

NSRGA	National Strategy for Sustainable Regional Growth and Attractiveness

Poland

FISE	Fundacja Inicjatyw Społeczno-Ekonomicznych Foundation for Social and Economic Initiatives
KKRES	Krajowy Komitet Rozwoju Ekonomii Społecznej State Committee for Social Economy Development
KPRES	Krajowy Program Rozwoju Ekonomii Społecznej National Programme for Social Economy Development
RPO	Regionalny Program Operacyjny Regional Operational Programme
ROPS	Regionalny Ośrodek Polityki Społecznej Regional Centres for Social Policy
OWES	Ośrodek Wsparcia Ekonomii Społecznej Social Economy Support Centre

European Union

EU	European Union
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
OP	Operational Programme

Other

CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
WISE	Work integration social enterprise

Executive summary

The social economy is a driver of job creation and economic activity with social impact. Based on estimates, the social economy, accounts for 6.4% of employment, representing 11.9 million jobs and between 6 to 8% of GDP across 27 European Union (EU) countries. While traditionally the term social economy refers to certain types of organisations (associations, cooperatives, mutual organisations and foundations), the social economy has expanded its reach in recent years, to include for-profit and non-profit social enterprises. Social economy organisations and social enterprises pursue activities in a wide range of sectors, such as banking, insurance, agriculture, health, social services, and others.

The social economy and regional (and local) development approaches have strong potential to reinforce each other. Effective regional development relies on i) differentiation based on the identification of specific assets (natural resources and specificities, culture, agricultural products, handicraft, specific know-how, etc.) to create advantages; ii) place-based approaches to adapt policies to local needs; and iii) governance to reinforce bottom-up approaches, align stakeholders, build citizen ownership, and create mutual accountability.

Being locally rooted and tapping into informal and formal networks, the social economy contributes to the effectiveness of regional and local development in different ways. It facilitates differentiation through the identification of physical, human or intangible assets to reinforce local social and economic capital in territories. It does so, for example, by highlighting specific physical assets in rural areas (France, Spain), providing public welfare services, and creating employment in various sectors, especially for socially marginalised individuals to transform employment challenges into opportunities for these groups (Poland). It also helps national authorities and regions in implementing specific strategic priorities: innovation (Sweden, France), job creation and diversification (Spain), and provision of social services (Poland).

Place-based approaches are at the very core of social economy practices and organisations. They have adopted a place-based focus to build and foster social cohesion as well as improve economic opportunities in regions. Many of the place-based practices are gaining global momentum, through experience sharing and international networks.

Regional development approaches and strategies are increasingly tapping into the potential of the social economy, particularly in light of decentralisation trends. The governance models offered by some of the social economy organisations ("one man-one vote", reinvestment of benefits, strong involvement of stakeholders, mutual trust, collective private action, etc.) help reinforce citizen ownership and mutual accountability, among other values, which many decentralisation reforms aim to achieve.

The social economy benefits from different degrees of recognition in regional development strategies within the EU. Among the countries reviewed in this paper, Spain and France have a wide recognition of the social economy, while in Sweden and Poland, the social economy enjoys a more moderate degree of recognition. For example, in Sweden, regions focus their regional strategies on fostering social enterprises ecosystems, without specific mention of the social economy, whereas in France and Spain, focus is on the social economy at large through national laws, programmes and regional strategies. In Poland, even if there is still no legal recognition of the social economy as such, it has been gaining momentum through national programmes and regional strategies. These country examples highlight an increase in the linkages between regional

strategies for the social economy and regional development. In some countries EU funding, particularly through the European Social Fund (ESF), has played an important role in the development and financing of regional strategies for the social economy. Challenges may arise for the diversification of financing sources over time.

To increase the scale and scope of regional efforts to boost the social economy, thereby reinforcing regional development dynamics as well, the case studies point to several good practices and opportunities for improvement. The Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool (EC-OECD, 2018[1]) could support implementation of some of the policy orientations through assessments of the ecosystems conducted by national and subnational authorities, networks, academia and other relevant stakeholders.

- Better capitalise on the social economy potential for enhancing regional development

The social economy and regional development are mutually reinforcing dynamics. Regions highlight in their strategies the role of the social economy organisations. By tapping into the social economy potential, national government, regions and the EU could reinforce regional development while also supporting the expansion of the social economy. National governments could do so by facilitating the institutional and legal recognition of the social economy, the adoption of framework laws and national programmes as well as clear financial support. Regions and other subnational levels could adopt strategies for the social economy clearly linked to regional development objectives and priorities, hence maximising their mutually reinforcing dynamics. The strategies, whether at national or regional levels, could benefit from a co-construction approach (e.g. France, Spain) to ensure successful and effective implementation. EU support has been very important for the expansion of the social economy at the regional level across EU countries. The Commission has announced it will propose a European Action Plan for Social Economy in 2021. This is likely to open up new opportunities, providing more support to regional strategies for the social economy.

- Focus strategies on a few clear priorities and attainable objectives

Regional strategies for the social economy could contribute to enhancing regional attractiveness and resilience while supporting people's well-being, work opportunities and mobility. To be successful, strategies need to focus on a few primary objectives and have clear, identifiable and secure sources of funding. Some regional strategies do not have clearly defined financial plans indicating resources available to support social economy development. Other regional strategies outline many objectives (more than 50 measures and objectives in some cases) which could create capacity challenges for implementation and monitoring. Regional strategies are more likely to have measureable impact if they focus on a few attainable and strong priorities and objectives with clear earmarking of funds to facilitate the implementation of activities.

- Strengthen coordination mechanisms with stakeholders and ensure their involvement

Involving the stakeholders across levels of government (networks, financial institutions, national and other subnational authorities, academia, etc.) in strategy development has numerous benefits. For example, they have greater ownership of the objectives and priorities and are more willing to engage in cooperation in the implementation. They also provide valuable information on the user perspective. Regional stakeholders can also support knowledge sharing to better disseminate good practices across the region. There is a need to institutionalise mechanisms to ensure the involvement of all stakeholders is effective and to facilitate their participation in the development of the social economy across levels of government.

The experience of France through the *Chambres Régionales de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaires* (CRESS – regional chambers of the social and solidarity economy) and the *Conférences régionales* (regional conferences*)*, established by the 2014 national framework law (article 8) has proven to be successful in this perspective. The objective of these conferences is to take stock of actions carried out over two years and set directions for the future. In Poland, a support system, based on the Social Economy Support Centers, funded by the ESF, helps reinforce regional ecosystems and the implementation of national guidelines by the 16 Polish regions, established by the National Programme for the Social Economy Development (KPRES). In Spain, CEPES and strong networks of cooperatives also play a significant role in the adoption of co-constructed strategies for the social economy with the Autonomous Communities. This could be

particularly inspiring for countries that have adopted national strategies for the social economy and social entrepreneurship and delegated their implementation to regions.

- Encourage impact assessment of regional strategies for the social economy

The evaluation of social and societal benefits as well as the economic value added of social economy organisations might be challenging due to the lack of consensus on methods and the nature of data to be collected. On the one hand, there is a need to develop specific data that can be disaggregated at regional level, that are related to regional development, and that take into account the specificities of the social economy (governance, use of capital, etc.). On the other hand, measuring social impact remains a challenge because the aim is to capture the wider impact of social economy organisations and social enterprises. The issue is that the nature of this "wider impact" (the fact that it concerns tangible and intangible effects with important social and societal dimensions) makes its evaluation complex. Some of the regions analysed have put in place regional councils for the social economy in charge of assessing the impact of the strategies, however, published data on impact measurement or evaluation is not necessarily readily available. France has put in place an observatory on the social economy that collects data and produces key figures and publications on the contribution of the social economy to employment, well-being, etc. The observatory does not assess impact of the regional strategies but that could also be one of its missions. Some regions collaborate with universities to develop a better understanding of social impact measurement. For example, tools like the “sustainability assurance” developed by Region Kronoberg in Sweden can be helpful to establish links between policy initiatives and social impacts at regional level. Partnerships involving social economy organisations, regional authorities and academia could help raise awareness about the importance of measuring impact of the regional strategies for the social economy.

- Take advantage of all opportunities to promote knowledge sharing among EU regions

Knowledge sharing can help scale up the development of informed regional strategies for the social economy. In France, the network of social economy regional observatories developed a coherent methodology to analyse and compare the main trends and dynamics of social economy in the regions. Knowledge produced by these observatories helps the social economy organisations as well as regional and local authorities define their strategies and priorities. The EU makes available multiple tools and measures to help mutual learning between different countries and regions in Europe. EU funds and programmes finance mutual learning activities within a broad range of themes. Both the ESF and the ERDF include such possibilities, for example, through calls for transnational activities within the ESF and the Interreg Europe programme under the ERDF.

Introduction

The social economy traditionally refers to certain types of entities that contribute to economic activity with an expressed social purpose: associations, cooperatives, mutual organisations and foundations. These organisations are governed by specific principles, notably: i) solidarity and mutuality, ii) the primacy of people over capital, iii) democratic and participative governance, iv) the combination of interests of members, users, and general interest (society), and v) reinvestment of financial surplus into services to members or society. More recently, social enterprises have been identified as being part of the social economy. They have different legal forms, including for-profit or non-profit, and pursue both economic and social goals through an entrepreneurial approach (OECD, 2018[2]). The social economy is the outcome of locally based initiatives, often collectively organised, and in some cases strongly supported by national and subnational governments (e.g. Spain, France) (EESC, 2017[3]).

Regional development and the social economy are mutually reinforcing dynamics. Regional development opportunities depend on human capital and innovation (*endogenous growth*), agglomeration effects and distance (*economic geography*) and institutions (*governance*) as the main levers that help shape successful regional development policies and strategies. Similarly, social economy organisations are very often community-based and build on the local human and social capital (OECD, 2009[4]). The persistent inequality across EU regions and the political backlash it has created emphasise the need for place-based policies to bolster the economic conditions in all places. Regional strategies for the social economy could contribute to enhancing regional attractiveness and resilience while supporting people's well-being, work opportunities and mobility.

This paper explores the different links between strategies of the social economy and regional development. It considers: i) the level of institutional and legal recognition of the social economy itself, ii) multi-level governance arrangements (competences), iii) the regional strategic priority given to the social economy), and iv) the financial resources available to support regional strategies. It gives a comparative perspective of the social economy strategies in selected regions in France, Spain, Poland and Sweden. It considers i) orientation of the strategies, ii) allocation of funding, iii) the level of involvement and collaboration of various actors (national and subnational authorities, networks, financing institutions, academia, etc.), iv) efforts to quantify the contribution of the social economy to regional development, and v) monitoring of impact the strategies. Finally, it presents the main conclusions from these country examples and suggests policy recommendations that could help shape coherent regional strategies for the social economy to enhance their impact on regional (and local) development.

1 Comparative perspective of the social economy in selected EU countries

Regions in the EU have been developing specific strategies to promote the social economy as part of their overarching strategies to foster regional development. The interest for the social economy increased with the shift to place-based policies, the adoption of major territorial reforms and the decentralisation of competencies to regions over the past 50 years. Regional strategies for the social economy vary considerably across EU countries. The capacity of regions to elaborate and implement strategies for the social economy is largely affected by: i) the level of institutional and legal recognition of the social economy itself, ii) multi-level governance arrangements (competences), iii) the regional strategic priority given to the social economy), and iv) the financial resources available. This section highlights the implications of these elements based on a comparative perspective of the cases of France, Spain, Sweden and Poland. In France and Spain, the responsibility for regional development is entrusted to regions and is implemented in coordination with the national authorities through various contractual and/or cooperation approaches. In addition, the social economy is very well established across levels of government through an enabling environment composed of national laws, regional regulations, financial support and networks. In Sweden and Poland, following recent reforms, regions have been allocated more competences to promote and implement strategies for regional development and have engaged programmes and initiatives to reinforce the social economy at the regional level.

Institutional and legal recognition of the social economy

The interest of EU regions in developing the social economy has been largely influenced by the level of institutional and legal recognition both at national and regional levels. This factor, in addition to regional competences, the strategic priority given to the social economy and the availability of financial resources have shaped regions' readiness and capacity to include the social economy in their regional development agenda through dedicated strategies.

Figure 1. Factors enabling the development of regional strategies for the social economy

Source: OECD

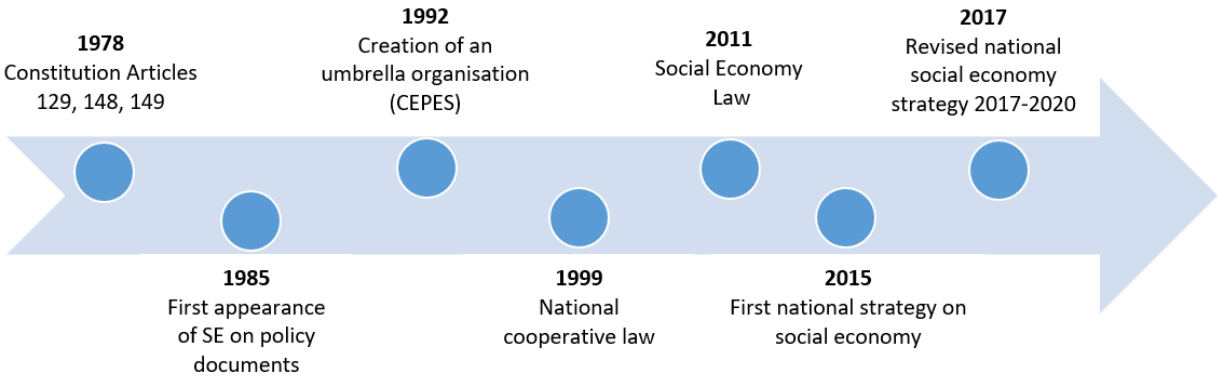
France and Spain have opted for a wide recognition of the social economy

Spain was the first EU country to adopt a national law on the social economy in 2011 (Act 5/2011), followed by a national strategy in 2015, updated in 2017. The main purpose of the 2011 national law was to set up a general legal framework, without replacing existing regulations specific to social economy organisations. It helped in achieving greater visibility and providing legal recognition. The adoption of the national strategy is equally considered as a '… milestone to locate social economy in the government agenda. …It is based on the understanding that the social economy can provide a key contribution to the resilience of the Spanish economy and to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth.' (EC, 2019[5]).

The Autonomous Communities contributed also to this wide institutional recognition, due to their active role in promoting the activities of cooperatives. The Constitution of 1978 highlights the importance of cooperatives "*... as a specific type of business that must be promoted by public authorities ... by appropriate legislation*" (article 129). The Autonomous Communities have the competence to enact laws and can modify and complement national laws according to their relative powers. This competence led to active law making,

especially on cooperatives, and resulted in the adoption of sixteen regional cooperative laws in addition to the national cooperative law adopted in 1999. For example, the laws of the Autonomous Communities govern the great majority of agricultural cooperatives, in support of the development of rural economies. In most cases, agricultural cooperatives are located in areas where no investor owned firm would have chosen to operate (EU, 2012[6]). The Autonomous Communities also have established their own departments dealing with the social economy (EC, 2019[5]).

Figure 2. Spain: Timeline of some milestones on the recognition of the social economy (SE)

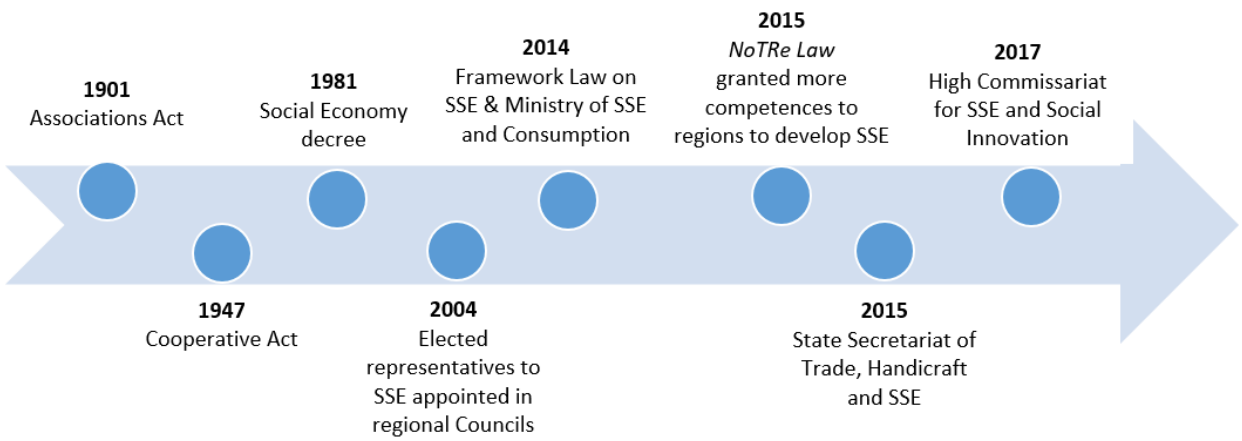


Source: OECD

France has a long-standing tradition of recognising the social economy through specific laws, strategies at both national and regional levels, and political visibility. It has been reinforced by the adoption in 2014 of a national framework law and more recently, the 2018 *Pacte de croissance de l'économie sociale et solidaire* (Pact for the Growth of the Social and Solidarity Economy), aimed at supporting the social economy, social entrepreneurship and social innovation. The government also launched in 2018 the French Impact initiative to foster alliances between public authorities, communities and the social and solidarity economy stakeholders in support of social innovation. This initiative has a territorial component targeting the development of social innovation activities in regional and local ecosystems and their promotion as possible solutions to social and economic challenges at the national level. Several territories (22) were labelled French Impact territories. This label facilitates access to finance, simplifies administrative procedures and fosters relations between networks and potential funders.

Regions participated in the adoption of the 2014 national framework law and played an essential role in the recognition of the role of the social economy in enhancing economic growth, social inclusion and sustainable development. Since 2004, elected representatives (Vice-presidents mainly) to the social economy are appointed in regional councils, as well as commissions specific to the social economy as part of the overall regional governance. Following the adoption in 2015 of the *Loi portant nouvelle organisation territoriale de la République, (NOTRe Law)*, regions have exclusive competences to promote regional development with the contribution of the social economy as an important lever (article 2). Most regions have in parallel, developed specific strategies and programmes to support the social economy organisations that are active in goods and services delivery, job creation and integration, and well-being activities.

Figure 3: France: Timeline of some milestones on the recognition of the social and solidarity economy (SSE)



Source: OECD

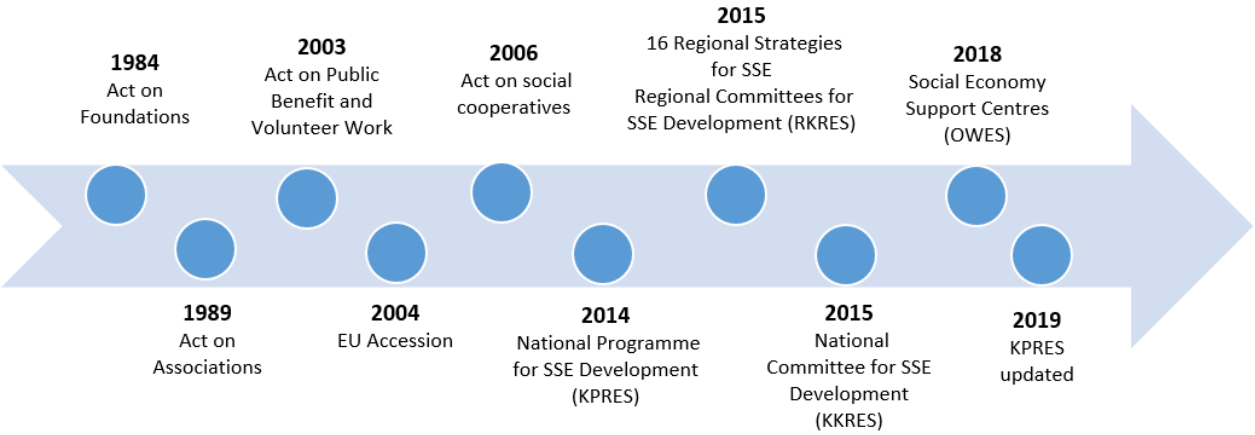
In Sweden and Poland, the social economy enjoys a moderate recognition

In Sweden and Poland, the social economy enjoys a moderate level of recognition. Neither country has a national framework law. However, they have both adopted national strategies to promote economic development and conferred competences, as part of the decentralisation process, to subnational authorities to implement them and ensure alignment of national objectives with regional priorities, including for the social economy.

In Poland, the social economy suffered during the democratic transition period from a negative image. It was considered as a set of actions that compensate for the side effects of economic reforms. This compensatory vision of the social economy slightly impeded its development (OECD, 2009[7]).The development of a more "modern vision" of the social economy coincided with the country's entrance into the EU in 2004, which brought about new opportunities. EU funding, and most notably the EQUAL community initiative, enabled cross-sectoral partnerships, exchange and study visits between EU member states that supported policies and actions benefitting the most vulnerable social groups on the labour market. The European Social Fund (ESF) has also strongly supported the social economy through every programing period with the current programing period having the biggest volume of funds. In 2014, the National Programme for the Social Economy Development (KPRES) was adopted. The main objective of the KPRES is the promotion of ***socially responsible territories*** through the mainstreaming of the contribution of the social economy into different public policies (employment, social inclusion, work integration, etc.).

Polish regions have adopted regional strategies between 2015 and 2016 with the objective of improving the contribution of the social economy to the development of their territories by 2020. However, and despite these waves of expansion and development, the social economy is still strongly associated only with addressing employment needs for the disadvantaged groups. The regional authorities could benefit more from the opportunities offered by the National Programme for the Social Economy Development (KPRES) and EU funds to enhance the recognition of the social economy and its role in complementing market and state provision of services and goods, as well as for addressing social challenges (Brandeleer, 2013[8]).

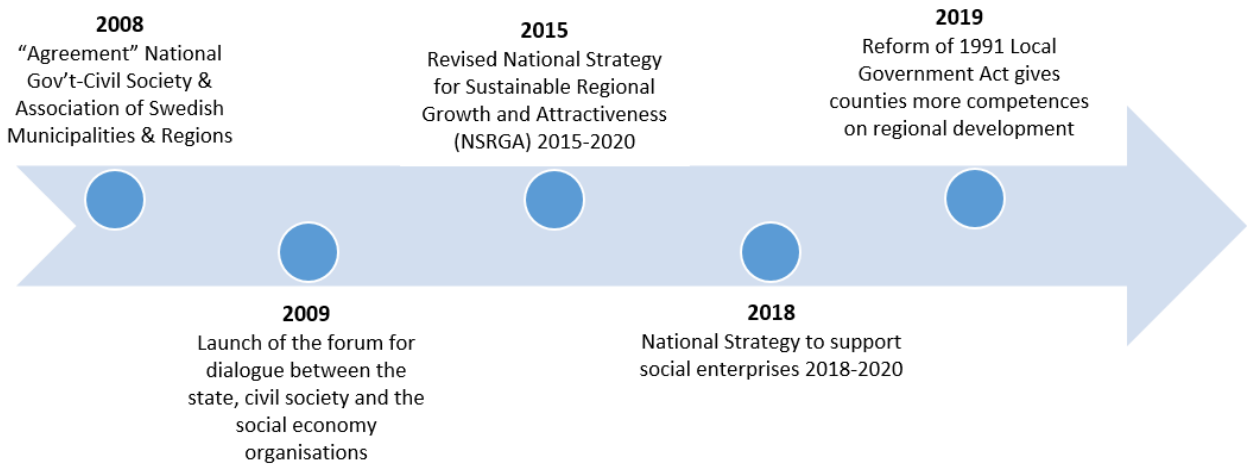
Figure 4. Poland: Timeline of some milestones on the recognition of the social and solidarity economy (SSE)



Source: OECD

Sweden has both a long tradition of social engagement and an established view that the State and the public sector are responsible for social welfare. With growing backing for the Global Goals for Sustainable Development, Sweden started considering opportunities offered by the social economy, mainly through social enterprises, to bring innovative solutions to social and environmental challenges. Despite, these developments, there is little explicit mention of the social economy in many national strategies, such the 2015-2020 National Strategy for Sustainable Regional Growth and Attractiveness (NSRGA), which serves as the guiding policy to regional development. Most national key strategies focus on SMEs and do not cover the social economy organisations. The need for increased knowledge about the social economy is mentioned as a priority under the "innovation and business development" pillar of the NSRGA. In 2018, the Swedish government launched a national strategy to support social enterprises - *a sustainable society through social entrepreneurship and social innovation* 2018-2020. This strategy introduces a large definition of social enterprises and consequently in some regions, the understanding is that it supports the development of the social economy in a very broad sense by putting emphasis on social entrepreneurship. In addition, policies that target specific social impacts have more explicit focus on social enterprises, such as work integration policies (EC, 2019[9]).

Figure 5. Sweden: Timeline of some milestones on the recognition of the social economy (SE)



Source: OECD

Multi-level governance context

The scope of responsibilities and competences of regions depends largely on the institutional organisation of each state (federal or unitary), and on the local context. Mapping the roles and missions, helps clarify how multi-level governance affects a region's capacity to develop effective social economy strategies.

Table 1. Institutional background of the social economy in France, Spain, Poland and Sweden

Country	Institutional structure	Institutional recognition	Legal Definition of social economy organisations	National Laws/policies on the social economy	Competences for regional development	Observations
France	Unitary	Wide	Cooperatives, mutual, associations, foundations social enterprises, defined by characteristics	2014 National Framework Law introduced the obligation for regions to adopt strategies for the social economy. It has also set up the *Chambres Régionales de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaire -CRESS* and *the Conseil National des CRESS (National Council of CRESS)*	NOTRe Law recognises political, legal and financial autonomy of the regions and defines exclusive and shared competences related to regional development that include the social economy as one of its main levers (article 2)	Strong institutional recognition and reinforced regional competences facilitated the adoption of regional strategies for the social economy. The *CRESS* are an illustration of the formal recognition and institutionalisation of the social economy at regional level and the ambition to engage with stakeholders
Spain	Quasi-Federation	Wide	Cooperatives, mutual societies, foundations and associations engaged in an economic activity, employee-owned enterprises, and activities-focused enterprises such as insertion companies, special employment centers, fishermen's associations, agricultural processing companies	Act 5/2011 the National Framework Law on the social economy gave greater visibility to the social economy National Strategy on Social Economy 2015-2016	Article 148 of the Spanish Constitution defines competences transferred to and shared with Autonomous communities that include the social economy and Article 149 defines competences exclusive to the national level	Sharing of competences between national and regional levels and law-making ability of the Autonomous Communities, especially on cooperatives played a significant role in the development of regional strategies
Poland	Unitary	Moderate	No formal definition Entities which economic and public interest activities, contribute to social and professional integration of vulnerable groups, job creation, provision of social services of general interest and local development. For example: social cooperatives; employment cooperatives, foundations associations; social inclusion clubs (KIS); occupational therapy workshops (WTZ)	Not yet been formally or legally recognised 2014 National Programme for the Social Economy Development (KPRES)	Act of 12 March 2004 on social assistance, the KPRES and the Wytczne chapter 7 confer competences to regions to support regional strategies for social economy	Regions have larger competences to promote economic development. They have to ensure the alignment of national strategies with regional priorities.
Sweden	Unitary	Moderate	No formal definition Non-governmental organisations, worker cooperatives, the farmers'	National Strategy to support Social Enterprises - *a sustainable society*	1991 Local Government Act (amended in 2004) A new bill in 2019	There is no explicit mention of the social economy in national strategies.

			wives' associations, non-profit companies, and solidarity economy organisations	*through social entrepreneurship and social innovation* 2018-2020	gavecounty councils (assimilated to regions) larger competences for regional development	Supporting innovation aims at creating environmental and social impacts with the strong contribution of social enterprises for which a national strategy is put in place

Source: OECD based on different documents and (OECD/UCLG, 2019[10])

A sharing of competences across levels of government allowed the expansion of regional strategies for the social economy in Spain

The Spanish Constitution established a highly decentralised state with competences transferred to the regions (article 148) and competences exclusive to the national government (article 149). The Constitution established financial autonomy of regions (article 156) and transferred financial resources are allocated according to priorities locally defined. In this system, substantive rules and regulations related to the social economy fall within the scope of regional government's exclusive competences, especially on cooperatives. Law making related to cooperatives, claimed through the *Estatutos de Autonomía* (regional constitutions) can be adapted to priorities defined by regions. For example, in Catalonia, a law on cooperatives passed in 2015 (Law 12/2015), established that cooperatives can be eligible for regional financial support, if they provide work integration services for people or groups, including services related to health, culture as well as any economic activity.

The example of the Mondragon Corporation (Basque Country), demonstrates how cooperatives can strongly contribute to regional development. The Corporation is an international cooperative business group, employing over 85 000 people, but governed in accordance with the social economy principles. It has grown to be the tenth largest business in Spain with core activity being the production of white goods. The Cooperative Corporation has member cooperatives in all Basque provinces and has diversified activities in finance (it operates a savings bank), retail and manufacturing as well as in education, where it operates schools, technical colleges and a cooperative university. All Mondragon affiliate cooperatives have to allocate a portion of their net profits to a social fund used for community investments.

Cooperatives and social economy federations played a significant role in the development of social economy at the regional level, especially where cooperatives have significant social and economic weight such as in the Basque Country, Catalonia and Andalusia. Strong federations: UCOMUR in Murcia, FAECTA and FAECA in Andalusia, KONFECOOP in the Basque Country, FEVECTA in Valencia or Cooperative Confederation and Treball in Catalonia have also contributed to raising institutional visibility of the social economy both at national and regional levels.

Regions in France and Sweden have increasingly been granted more competences to develop regional development strategies but have different approaches to the role of the social economy

In France, the 2014 National Framework Law highlighted the role of the social economy in reinforcing regional development by stating the necessity to adopt regional strategies to strengthen local development (article 7). Regions elaborated strategies between 2017-2018 in collaboration with the *Chambres Régionales de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaire*, *CRESS*, (regional chambers of the social economy) and the networks of the social economy organisations (OECD/European Union, 2017[11]).They have also established dedicated social economy services, incorporated in their economic development departments (AVISE, 2017[12]). Regions' competences have evolved following the different decentralisation "waves", which have resulted in

the reduction of the number of regions (22 to 13) in 2015. One of the stated rationales behind establishing larger regions was to transfer more competences to regional authorities, in order to reduce duplication of efforts with the national government and to clarify roles and responsibilities, especially with regard to economic development.

With the adoption of the 2015 *NOTRe* Law[1], the general competence clause was removed (except for municipalities), which means that regions have political, legal and financial autonomy. The law also clarified what are the exclusive, transferred and shared competences with the national government. In this new distribution of roles, regions have the obligation to design a *Schéma régional de développement économique, d'innovation et d'internationalisation* (regional plan for economic development, innovation and internationalisation) (*SRDEII*)[2], that outlines among its priorities and objectives, guidelines for the development of the social and solidarity economy.

The guidelines have to include the proposals of the biennial regional conferences on social economy established by the 2014 National Framework Law. Approaches to the role given to the social economy in the *SRDEII* vary from one region to the other. Some regions highlighted the importance of the social economy by facilitating access to existing regional financial support (*Île-de-France*). Other regions opted for the "pillar approach" whereby the social economy becomes one of the priorities, with dedicated strategies and action programmes. This is particularly the case in the *Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes* region, where one of the objectives is to "set up economic development programmes open to the social economy organisations regardless of status" (AVISE, 2017[12]).

Box 1. Examples of public initiatives supporting social economy in France

To support the development of the social and solidarity economy, various initiatives emerged among which the following:

Created in 2002, the ***Dispositif local d'accompagnement*** (DLA) (local support action) supports social and solidarity economy employers to strengthen their economic model at different stages (creation, expansion, consolidation). This support, individual or collective, is provided by non-profit organisations through an agreement with national authorities, other public bodies or local authorities. DLA funding has different sources: State, Regions, European (ESF), and *Departements*.

L'Insertion par l'activité économique (IAE) (inclusion by economic activity) allows several types of social economy organisations (associations, work integration enterprises) to facilitate professional integration.

Le Pole territorial de coopération économique (PTCE) (economic cooperation territorial pole) established by social and solidarity economy organisations, public actors as well as training, academic or research organisations, to design a common strategy for cooperation around innovative economic projects for local development. For example, the creation of the Romans-sur-Isère PTCE allowed the relocalisation of the shoe industry.

Source: http://www.esspace.fr/politiques_ess.html

1 Adopted on 7 August 2015, the Loi NOTRe is the law on the new territorial organisation of France. It confers new competences to the regions and defines competences of each local authority. This is the third part of the territorial reform, after the law of modernisation of the territorial public action and metropoles and the law on the delimitation of the regions.

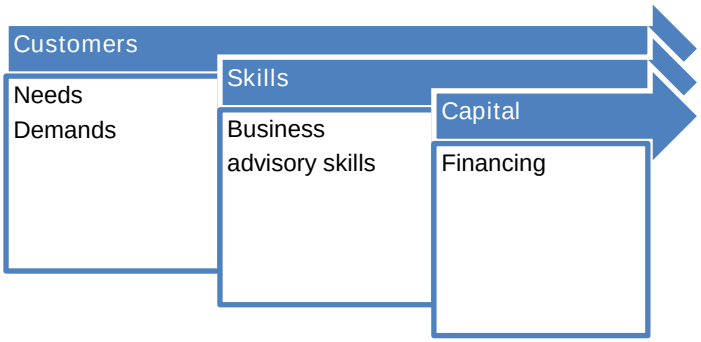
2 Schéma régional de développement économique, d'innovation et d'internationalisation- SRDEII: regional plan for economic development, innovation and internationalisation) is adopted for five years and is implemented through partnership and contracts between the region and the national government.

In Sweden, one the most decentralised EU countries with respect to expenditure and tax revenues, a reform introduced in 2019, gave county councils (assimilated to regions) larger competences and responsibilities for regional development. Traditionally, municipalities had more influence and responsibilities in Sweden's multi-level governance context. This reform followed an experimentation with increased responsibilities and competences in the counties of *Västra Götaland* and *Skåne* since 1996 (OECD/UCLG, 2019[10]).

The national level continues to play a central role in the promotion of regional development through national strategies that often serve as overall frameworks for programmes and initiatives adopted by the county councils (regional bodies). Regions and municipalities have adopted strategies which focus on the development of social enterprises (often work integration social enterprises) in alignment with the 2018-2020 national strategy on social enterprises. The role of civil society organisations (CSOs) is recognised in cultural activities.

The central government explicitly aims to support innovation that creates monetary value and environmental and social impact. For example, innovative procurement practices are envisaged, where environmental and social considerations would be central elements. The social economy organisations and regions are mobilised in multi-level governance and dialogue mechanisms. For example, the agency for public employment services (*Arbetsförmedlingen*) often works in partnership with regions and social economy organisations to promote work integration. All regions are members of a network called Reglab together with the two main national agencies responsible for the implementation of regional development policies, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (*Tillväxtverke*t) and Sweden's innovation agency (*Vinnova*), and the Association for Swedish Municipalities and Regions (SKR).

Figure 6. Action areas in the national strategy for social enterprises in Sweden



Source: Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation (2018[4])

In Poland, regional authorities have started to promote the social economy through a variety of instruments and institutions

The decentralisation has gradually advanced in Poland. Municipalities were re-established in 1990 by the Act on Municipalities and the intermediate level represented by counties (regions) was reintroduced in 1999 by the Local Government Organisation Act. Since 2007, regions are fully responsible for an important share of European cohesion funds (25%) and in 2009, greater competences were transferred to regions to design and implement strategies for regional development (OECD/UCLG, 2019[10]).

Regions manage and coordinate regional social programmes through the marshal offices for the most part, within the framework of the Regional Operational Programmes, *Regionalne Programy Operacyjne* – RPO[3], financed by EU-funds. They showed interest in integrating the social economy in regional development strategies in order to make good use of the opportunities offered by EU programmes. EU funds such as the European Social Fund target social inclusion and social economy, thus opening possibilities for regions to adopt multiannual and holistic approaches in designing strategies for the social economy.

Three guiding documents confer competences to the regions to support regional strategies for the social economy: i) the Act of 12 March 2004 on social assistance (law); ii) the *Wytyczne chapter 7*[4], which describes the regions' missions within the frameworks of the EU funds (European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund) and iii) the 2014 National Programme for Social Economy Development (KPRES).

The 2004 Act on social assistance acknowledges that regions are competent to "coordinate actions in the social economy in regions" (article 21), through five key actions (article 21a) (EC, 2019[13]):

- the development of the infrastructure of services in social and professional reintegration
- the promotion of new methods of action in social and professional reintegration
- the support of partnerships between local authorities and services providers
- the monitoring of the development of local social entrepreneurship
- the improvement of skills of public servants in charge of social and professional reintegration.

The KPRES defines the social economy as a "sphere of civic and social activity, which serves, through economic and public benefit activities, … vocational and social integration of people at risk of social exclusion, creation of jobs, provision of social services of general interest (for the public welfare) and local development. " (MPiPS, 2014, p. 21[14]; Rada Ministrów, 2019, p. 9[15]).

The National Committee for Social Economy Development[5] (KKRES) coordinates policy dialogue on the social economy to guarantee coherence and alignment of national strategies across levels of government. The regions adopted regional strategies, with the objective of improving the role of the social economy in regions by 2020. The sixteen regions in 2013-2014 adopted regional programmes for the social economy, updated between 2015 and 2016. They have also established regional committees for social economy development. In 2019, the KPRES was updated following a resolution of the Council of Ministers. The new KPRES will be in force until 2023. The National Committee for Social Economy Development has created a working group to coordinate the updating of the 16 regional strategies in accordance with the new KPRES. This new programme puts more emphasis on the solidarity economy, defined as the part of the social economy whose primary goal is professional and social integration, including through vocational and social reintegration of people with disabilities.

Despite this promising development, in some less developed regions such as Podlaskie, Świętokrzyskie and Lubelskie regions (voivodships), the social economy still suffers a negative image as a result of a communist legacy which discredited the cooperative movement and the social economy in general (Ciepielewska-Kowalik et al., 2020[16]).

3 Funded by two sources, i.e. Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF).

4 Guidelines on actions in the field of social inclusion and tackling poverty with European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund 2014-2020. This document is aimed at coordinating actions financed by ESF and ERDF in the fields of tackling poverty and supporting social inclusion in the regions, https://www.funduszeeuropejskie.gov.pl/strony/o-funduszach/dokumenty/projekt-wytycznych-w-zakresie-realizacji-przedsiewziec-w-obszarze-wlaczenia-spolecznego-i-zwalczania-ubostwa-z-wykorzystaniem-srodkow-efs-i-efrr-na-lata-2014-2020 (retrieved 27.11.2019).

5The State Committee for Social Economy Development was established on the basis of the National Strategy for Social Economy Development and the Ordinance of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy adopted on 27 February 2015.

Box 2. Coordination, and support missions of the Regional Centres for Social Policy in Poland (ROPS)

The coordination mission of ROPS targets all stages of the regional strategies for the social economy: setting priorities, programming, implementation and evaluation. Capacity-building actions on public procurement and social clauses, management of EU funds and integration of the social economy within regional policy are designed for regional authorities. Other actions include supporting collaboration between social economy organisations and welfare public institutions (e.g. social welfare centres, labour offices, district family support centres, etc.), education (social economy integration in curricula, among academics, and promoting internships in social economy), science (research on the social economy, supporting testing of innovations), and for-profit enterprises. ROPS also support social economy networks to raise the visibility of the social economy at the regional level.

Source: (Ministry of Economic Development, 2019[17])

Securing diversified financial resources for the social economy

The social economy has grown in terms of organisations and relevance, thus contributing to employment, social inclusion, democratic participation and community building in most EU countries and regions. Developing regional strategies for the social economy depends on the availability of funds from a variety of sources: the EU, public funds and private sources (cooperatives, cooperative banks, foundations etc.). EU funding has played a significant role in this perspective, mainly through the European Social Fund (ESF) (Box 3).

However, much remains to be done to create an enabling environment that supports the steady development of the social economy and maximise its impact at the regional level, notably financing.

Box 3. The European Social Fund (ESF)

The European Social Fund (ESF) is the main EU funding instrument that supports employment and social inclusion. It mobilises annually funding of approximately EUR 10 billion. Each Member State, in partnership with the European Commission, agrees on one or more Operational Programmes (OP) for ESF funding for the seven-year programming period. OP's describe the priorities for ESF activities and their objectives.

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/social/.

Spain has an ESF Operational Programme (OP) with a specific focus on the development of social economy (2014-2020). The objective of the programme is to support access to the labour market for groups at most risk of discrimination (women, Roma and other ethnic minorities, migrants, prisoners and ex-offenders, people with disabilities etc.) and strengthen the role of the social economy and social entrepreneurship to facilitate access to employment. Under this programme, which includes a wide range of labour market measures, Spain has agreed to invest EUR 1.1 billion overall, of which EUR 800 million are from the ESF. From this overall budget, about EUR 31 million is targeted specifically to the social economy.

In addition to the national OP, there are regional operational programmes through which regions can support the social economy, in order to reach specific objectives, such as labour market integration or social inclusion. Overall, for all ESF OP's in Spain, some EUR 300 million is planned to be spent on social economy

measures. EU funded programmes and transferred national resources have helped develop regional strategies for the social economy in Spain. However, they also raise questions about the level of interconnection between the different sources (EU, national and regional) and regional capacity to coordinate and allocate funding efficiently to the benefit of all types of places.

In France, the 2015 territorial reform enlarged the competences of the regions without allocating a proportional amount of additional resources. Since the suppression in 2010 of the professional tax, financial transfers from the national government to regions have diminished. Despite budgetary constraints, regions have set up financial support systems dedicated to the social economy and social innovation. According to a report by a parliamentary information mission on *Banque Publique d'Investissement,* 22 regional guarantee funds in addition to national funds, and 95 investment tools were available at the end of 2014, representing a total of EUR 2.2 billion to support regional development in general and some of these funds benefit the social economy (Assemblée nationale, 2015[18]). Cooperative banks and mutual societies are often associated with the creation and management of these funds. Regional support takes different forms (subsidies/grants or repayable loans at preferential rates) and is available to social economy organisations. However, most regional funds are not tailored specifically to the social economy organisations and do not necessarily take in account their characteristics and needs.

In Poland, regional strategies for the social economy benefited from funds for 2014-20 with an estimated budget of PLN 3 billion (EUR 667 million) (R2G, 2018[19]). The vast majority of funding for the social economy at the regional level is provided by the ESF. The ESF funds the entire support system implemented under the 16 regional Operational Programmes (RPO). The Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development OPKED[6], also funded by the ESF, provides important additional support for the social economy through various channels. For example, the loans provided by the Social and Economic Investment Company TISE SA are funded under OPKED. Established in 1991 by the BISE Bank, the Foundation for Social and Economic Initiatives (FISE) and the French investment fund SIDI and currently owned by the French cooperative bank *Crédit Coopératif*, TISE provides loans only for social enterprises. OPKED also provides important support mostly through projects implemented by the Ministry of Family, Employment and Social Policy. Despite the existence of this variety of financial support schemes, social economy organisations still face difficulties for their expansion at regional level, mainly due to the lack of funds tailored to their activities and needs in addition to difficulties in accessing private funding.

In Sweden, strengthening social enterprises is viewed as an important element in the government's strategy to establish a sustainable society and meeting the global 2030 Agenda. The 2018-2020 National Strategy for Social Enterprises has a budget of SEK 50 million (EUR 11.5 million) per year. However, the strategy does not have an explicit regional dimension, and financial support is subject to regional authorities' decision. There is a need to raise awareness and expand knowledge about the social economy potential at national, regional and municipal levels as well about social enterprises' innovative capacity to address regional development issues at large.

6 The operational programme Knowledge Education Development for the implementation of the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) in Poland aims to contribute to addressing key challenges which Poland faces in the fields of employment, social inclusion, health, education and public administration.

2 Examples of regional strategies for the social economy

The social economy organisations contribute to regional development in different ways: they create employment, especially for socially marginalised individuals and groups, complement public services; create and manage workplaces and provide job opportunities in remote communities, while facilitating economic and social development through grants (e.g. foundations) and low-interest loans (e.g. credit unions). This section presents an analysis of strategies for the social economy in selected regions in France, Spain, Sweden and Poland. The selected regions document the diversity of regional strategies and highlight how they contribute to regional development. The analysis looks more specifically into: i) the orientation of the regional strategies, ii) the allocation of funding, iii) the level of involvement of stakeholders, iv) regional efforts to estimate the contribution of social economy to regional development and v) the monitoring framework to assess the impact of the strategy.

Table 2. Paid employment in traditional social economy organisations (2015)

Country	Cooperatives and similar	Mutual Societies	Associations & Foundations	Total (a) employment in the social economy	Total (b) national paid employment	A/B %
France	308 532	136 723	1 927 557	2 372 812	26 118 000	9.1%
Spain	528 000	2 360	828 041	1 358 401	17 717 000	7.7%
Sweden	57 516	13 908	124 408	195 832	4 660 000	4.4%
Poland	235 200	1 900	128 800	365 900	15 812 000	2.3%
Total	**1 129 248**	**154 891**	**3 008 806**	**4 292 945**	**64 307 000**	**6.6%**

Note: this table presents paid employment in the social economy organisations in the four selected countries in 2015 and its contribution to national paid employment. The figures are used in the analysis to illustrate the weight of the social economy in each country.
Source: (EESC, 2017[20]) based on Eurostat 2015

France: Boosting regional development

In France, in 2015 the social economy accounted for 9.1% of paid employment, representing 2.3 million jobs (Table 2). It is estimated that two-thirds (61.3%) of municipalities have at least one social economy employer organisation with an average of 11 social economy organisations in each municipality (CNCRESS, 2015[21]). The social economy is advanced and legally embedded in France, and has succeeded in securing recognition in the political and institutional sphere. Since the mid-19th century, the founding principles of the social and solidarity economy have gradually gained recognition via a series of laws, leading up to the 1970s and 80s where the social economy (promotion of activities that pursue economic and social goals) and the solidarity economy (promotion of social change through solidarity and political action) merged in a single concept. A number of federations representing social economy organisations such as the *Chambres Régionales de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaire* (*CRESS*) played a central role in enhancing visibility of the social economy since in the 1990s. Regions recognise the importance and potential of the social economy

and have put in place dedicated strategies. The regions of Île-de-France, Brittany, New Aquitaine and Corsica have active regional development strategies adopted between 2016 and 2017, and comprehensive social economy ecosystems. They have started by the institutionalisation of the social economy in regional programmes and planning documents, then elaborated specific strategies and consolidated the ecosystem by creating a regional observatory.

Orientations of the regional strategies

The regional strategies of the four regions adopted between 2016 and 2017 highlight the role of social innovation as a key driver for the promotion of new business models (New Aquitaine and Île-de-France), digital transformation of businesses (Brittany) and the development of rural areas (Corsica). The region of Île-de-France focuses on promoting circular economy and the emergence of social joint ventures. For the region of Corsica, the social economy and social innovation are strategic pillars that could support job creation, especially in rural areas. The region of Brittany developed a regional strategy, which aims at bringing concrete solutions to employment and ecological transition challenges. The New Aquitaine region adopted a Schéma régional de développement économique, d'innovation et d'internationalisation (regional plan for economic development, innovation and internationalisation) SRDEII in 2016 and a social economy strategy (Avise, 2018[22]) that focuses on reducing disparities between urban and rural areas especially in terms of economic development and employment. The region supports innovative projects to revitalise declining rural areas.

Allocation of funding

Financial tools have been put in place to boost social economy and social innovation in French regions. The *Fonds d'innovation sociale*, FISO (social innovation fund), was set by the *Banque Publique d'Investissement* (Bpifrance) and is equally funded by the national government and the regions. The FISO provides funds to projects with social impact and is deployed throughout the national territory. It is open to SME's and social economy organisations: associations, cooperative structures and social enterprises. There are other funds, such as the *Fonds National pour le Développement de la Vie Associative* (FNDVA) managed by the national government and social economy organisations. However, most regions, including Île-de-France, Brittany, New Aquitaine and Corsica face challenges in funding their social economy strategies due to a decrease in public support over the last years and/or complex financing schemes. According to a report realised by a parliamentary mission in 2015, there is a need to support the development of the social and solidarity economy in regions by ensuring a clarification of the funding mechanisms offered by the State, regional councils, *Bpifrance* and the *Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations* (Assemblée nationale, 2015[18]). Regions have also difficulties mobilising European funds (Brittany and Île-de-France,) or private funds (New Aquitaine) to support social enterprises. In general, it seems that EU structural funds play relatively a small role for the social and solidarity economy in France and the lack of information on how they are allocated is a challenge in determining the share of EU funds in the financing of the regional strategies (EC, 2020[23]).

Level of involvement and collaboration of various actors

The *Chambres Régionales de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaire,* (CRESS) are well established in French regions. They contribute to the development, coordination and implementation of social economy strategies. Most regional authorities sign a multiannual agreement with these regional networks to define shared priorities and objectives. In the region of Corsica, the Economic Development Agency has set up a department of the social and solidarity economy to bring greater visibility, recognition and collaboration with networks. The region of Brittany has a vibrant ecosystem comprised of well-established networks (CRESS, trade unions and employers' organisations). In the region of Île-de-France, social economy strategies are implemented in close collaboration with the CRESS, with financial institutions such as Bpifrance, the bank *Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations* (CDC), other local authorities (the *Départements)*, and the main social economy operators, such as *France Active*. *France Active* is a network of local structures dedicated to job

creation through business support and financing for social enterprises, in addition to Uriopss and (*Unions Régionales Interfédérales des Œuvres et Organismes Privés non lucratif Sanitaires et Sociaux)* and Urscop (*Unions Régionales des SCOP*) that facilitate the exchange of good practices and cooperation between various social economy organisations.

Regional efforts to estimate the contribution of the social economy to regional development

All regions highlight the contribution of the social economy to job creation more specifically. According to the National Statistics Institute -INSEE, in the region of Brittany the social economy provided 14.3% of total employment and 17% of private employment in 2015. In the region of Corsica, the social economy provides 8.6% of employment and in the region of Île-de-France, social economy provided more than 400 000 jobs in 2017, representing 7.1% of the employment in the region compared to 10.5% nationally. In the region of New Aquitaine, the social economy represents 12% of paid employment (Avise, 2018[24]).

Monitoring impact

The CRESS in the four regions publish key figures and data on the contribution of the social economy to various sector and places. However, difficulties in accurately measuring the social impact of the strategies and their contribution to regional development more generally, remains a challenge.

Spain: Contributing to job creation

Spain is recovering from a financial crisis that lasted several years starting in 2008, which led to a strong economic downturn, a severe increase in unemployment and bankruptcies of major companies. The crisis also led to a reduction in government spending including in social economy entities. Since then, numerous initiatives have been put forward by civil society, or proposed by national, regional and municipal governments to include the social economy in policies, acknowledging its potential to address unemployment, reintegrate vulnerable groups into the labour market and provide new innovative services. In Spain, the social economy provided 1.3 million jobs in 2015 accounting for 7.7% of the total national paid employment (Table 2). The Balearic Islands, Murcia, Galicia, Navarre and the Basque Country are the regions that have active social economy strategies. The Balearic Islands, Murcia, Galicia and Navarre are the regions which committed to "…transforming the local economy towards models closer to the social economy, placing it, its organisations and values at the heart of economic policies". For example, Galicia enacted in 2016 the Law 6/2016 on the social economy, with the aim of mainstreaming its contribution in public policies related to entrepreneurship, rural development and education (EC, 2019[5]).

Orientations of the regional strategies

Regional strategies of the Balearic Islands, Murcia, Galicia and Navarre have set as their main objective job creation. Given that, Spain has the second highest unemployment rate in the EU (13.7 % in December 2019) this focus is not surprising. The Navarre Plan includes job creation but also social responsibility as its main priorities. In Murcia (14%) and Galicia (11.5%) where unemployment rates are high, strong emphasis is placed on employment with clear quantitative targets set in their regional strategies (creation of 3 500 jobs annually with a target of 80% permanent jobs).

Allocation of funding

Spain uses ESF funds actively through an Operational Programme (2014-2020). Under this programme, EUR 31 million are targeted specifically to the social economy (page 22). The programme outlines priorities for the development of the social economy. An important part of this programme is dedicated to developing

social entrepreneurship and social innovation as well, as areas that facilitate access to employment and where public and private partnerships, including NGOs and employers play a strong role.

Level of involvement and collaboration of various actors

Spain developed a partnership model that promotes the involvement of different stakeholders: regional authorities, universities, associations, and the private sector (e.g. the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation and the CEPES-Andalusia system in the south of Spain). The Spanish Business Confederation of Social Economy (CEPES) is an umbrella organisation created in 1992 to represent the companies of the social economy. CEPES mobilises diverse national and regional actors (e.g. cooperative federations) and contributes to the formation of regional umbrella organisations. For example, CEPES established a regional federation in Navarre emerging from the coordination of local networks of the different families of social economy organisations (EC, 2019[5]). In Murcia, a task force on the social economy involving all regional ministries and networks ensures the participation of all stakeholders in the definition of the strategies.

Regional efforts to estimate the contribution of the social economy to regional development

There are no qualitative evaluations on the contribution of the social economy to regional development in the four regions. However, in light of the measures put by the Ministry of Employment to promote the competitiveness of worker-owned companies more specifically, some regions (Murcia and Galicia) encouraged the creation of more *Sociedades Laborales* (employee-owned companies) over other forms of social economy organisations and enterprises through their strategies due to their contribution to employment creation, thus reinforcing regional development (EC, 2019[5]).

Monitoring impact

The four regions established evaluation mechanisms with and/or within formal new bodies such as the social economy councils. In Murcia and Navarre, there are informal monitoring committees, while in Galicia and the Balearic Islands, these councils serve as permanent monitoring bodies. Murcia and Navarre have a more detailed monitoring system, which includes indicators, procedures and a monitoring plan. This can be partly explained by the fact that Murcia has adopted three strategic plans so far and that Navarre is more active in the evaluation of policies. However, none of the four regions has published impact monitoring or measurement reports.

Sweden: Focusing on social enterprises

Sweden is a universal welfare state in which relatively high taxes allow the public sector to provide healthcare, education and social security to all citizens. It shares several features typical of Nordic welfare states, such as a large public sector and a growing role for the non-profit organisations as providers of social services. The term “social economy” was popularised by a strong civic society tradition in the 19th century, consisting of volunteer engagement and the formation of “associations” in various spheres (politics, sports etc.). The concept of “societal entrepreneurship” emerged during the late 1970s to counteract the decline of large corporate and industrial activities in smaller local communities. Societal entrepreneurship emerged at the periphery however, and since the late 1990s, this form of activity has expanded and taken a strong entrepreneurial dimension. In Sweden, few regions and municipalities have adopted strategies that focus mainly on social enterprises (often work integration social enterprises) without clear reference to social economy. The social economy provided nearly 200 000 paid jobs in 2015, accounting for 4.4% of total national paid employment in the country (Table 2). Regions are expected to translate the objectives of the national strategies through action programmes at the local level.

Orientations of the regional strategies

Regions are not required to work with the social economy organisations or support social enterprises. The 2018-20 National Strategy for Social Enterprises "a *sustainable society through social entrepreneurship and social innovation*" provides a guiding framework. Consequently, the way and extent to which counties integrate the social economy and social enterprises in their regional development strategies varies widely. In 2020, the Swedish government has commissioned the development of a handbook for regional authorities in order to link the social economy to regional development strategies, led by the *Örebro* county. The *Örebro* county adopted its first Action Plan for Civil Society and Social Economy in 2018 with the objective to also support the implementation of the regional development strategy priorities, thus clearly linking social economy to regional development.

The *Örebro* county's Action Plan (Region Örebro County, 2018[25]), developed with representatives from social economy and civil society as well as public sector representatives, has four milestones with actions and deliverables related to different priority areas:

- increased understanding of the importance of civil society and the social economy for regional development and growth;
- clarify and strengthen the support for civil society and the social economy throughout the county;
- create, strengthen and coordinate networks
- raise the international profile of civil society and the social economy issues in the region.

The social economy is also mentioned under several strategies in the *Östergötland* region's Regional Development Programme 2030. Municipalities are encouraged to work with local businesses, including those from the social economy, to fund alternative solutions to ensure service provision in local areas. Targeted policy initiatives have also supported the development of WISEs in the region, with particular focus on facilitating their access to public procurement.

Box 4. Defining social enterprises in Sweden

There is no agreed definition or criteria to identify social enterprises in Sweden, nor does any separate legal form exist. As a result, social enterprises operate under any existing legal form, adopting practices or governance structures that sometimes conceptually adhere to the EU operational definition, and sometimes to other definitions set out in national policy initiatives.

The understanding of what constitutes a social enterprise has evolved over time through a combination of factors, including practices, policies and conceptual debates at national and EU levels. Different definitions have been proposed for the social economy and social enterprises, leading to the official working group on social economy of the Ministry of Interiors referring to the social economy as "*consisting of organised ventures primarily with societal aims and with an organisational autonomy from the public sector*" (Gawell, 2019). In 2009, the forum for dialogue between the state, civil society organisations and the social economy called "the Agreement" (*Överenskommelsen*) used the term idea-based organisations as a catch-all terminology encompassing civil society, social economy and third sector organisations to deliberately avoid imposing any uniform terminology. The organisations signing the Agreement stress the importance of idea-based organisations to forward members' or public interests and to reinvest any potential profits in that goal. The strategy for social enterprises 2018-2020, identifies social enterprises as companies (regardless of legal form) with certain "characteristics", namely whose business activities are the means to achieve a social aim, towards which impact is measured, and whose profits are reinvested in its own social purpose or other public benefit (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, 2018[26]).

Cooperatives and work integration social enterprises (WISEs) have further shaped the understanding of social enterprises in Sweden. Policy initiatives aimed at supporting work integration have resulted in self-identification in the online register Sofisam (www.sofisam.se), where 351 WISEs are registered and from which statistics are sometimes generated on social enterprises in lieu of any official statistics data sources. In the frame of support to WISEs, some operational criteria have been proposed, such as:

- an overall purpose focussed on work integration;
- a participatory and inclusive governance structure, either through co-ownership or other well-documented agreements or practices;
- re-investment of profits to forward the work integration purpose in the organisation or elsewhere;
- independence from public authorities.

Another influence in the conceptual debate is the term "societal entrepreneurship", which is sometimes referred to as entrepreneurship to drive positive societal change. A recent trend shows that more business-oriented ventures also start to identify as social entrepreneurs or social innovators. Two main sides of the spectrum of understanding thus emerge: social enterprises with a tradition in the cooperative and democratic movement and social entrepreneurship belonging to a more business-oriented field (EC, 2019[9]). Social enterprises themselves tend to alternate their terminology depending on the situation, sometimes presenting themselves as a non-profit organisation, sometimes a cooperative or social enterprise, or as just enterprises (depending on their legal status). Social enterprises operating as limited liability company typically adopt an amended statute that provides, for example, for reinvestment of profits in the company purpose, or transparent and democratic governance practices.

Source: (EC, 2019[9])

Allocation of funding

The Innovation Agency *Vinnova* programmes help stimulate social enterprise development in the counties by funding projects proposed by local and regional actors. Twelve counties received national funding to support the integration of social enterprises in their regional growth strategies. All the projects at the regional level were supported by *Coompanion*, which is an umbrella organisation that helps the development of cooperatives in general and WISEs. *Coompanion* leads an EU-funded project called the WISE Academy (*ASF Akademin*), which aims to strengthen competences and methods applied by social enterprises in work training. Targeted policy initiatives have also supported the development of WISEs in regions, with particular focus on facilitating their access to public procurement.

Level of involvement and collaboration of various actors

In several places, regional agreements between public authorities and civil society, and social economy organisations have been valuable forums for dialogue between a range of actors, which have often emerged "Bottom up". In 2008, the central government signed "the Agreement" (*Överenskommelsen*) outlining the basic principles for the relationship between the central government, SKR and idea-based organisations[1] working in the social field, namely health care and social welfare services, including for the disabled, elderly and disadvantaged families. The "Agreement" allowed more dialogue between the public sector across levels of government and actors from civil society and the social economy active in providing services. It outlines six shared principles for the collaboration: i) independence and autonomy, ii) dialogue, iii) quality, iv) a long-term approach, v) openness and transparency, vi) diversity. The rationale behind the "Agreement" is to give more visibility to the role of civil society and the social economy in society, to clarify their relationship with the public sector and to preserve their independence. Social enterprises and civil society organisations often work in close collaboration with public agencies at national, regional and municipal levels, they remain

independent and allow for citizens' self-expression and freedom of choice when it comes to welfare services (Department of Social Welfare, 2008[27]).

Regional efforts to estimate the contribution of the social economy to regional development

The contribution of social enterprises, especially WISEs, tends to be measured in terms of employment opportunities. In 2018, 343 organisations, employing 3500 people, were considered WISEs. Another 9500 people participate in their activities. They tend to condense in the Gothenburg region (EC, 2019[28]). Seizing the potential of civil society and the social economy is seen as context-based: what works in one local area may not work in another. In the *Örebro* county's Action Plan, the social economy and civil society are seen as contributing to achieving social inclusion. In 2019, the county administration of the *Örebro* county carried out a stocktaking of models and methods on how to evaluate the social impact of civil society and social economy on regional economy. This resulted in the formulation of a pilot project to test the use of social return on investment among a few social enterprises in the region, to draw lessons for its wider applicability.

Monitoring impact

Measuring the impact of social economy is envisaged by linking initiatives to impact indicators. This is the case in the *Örebro* county, where progress against the Action Plan for social economy is reported on a yearly basis to the Department for Regional Development. In the *Västra Götaland* county, an evaluation of the programme for social enterprises indicated the need to evaluate the direct links between results and desired impacts of the programme. In the Skåne county, each prioritised standpoint in the *Open Skåne* 2030 strategy includes several outcome indicators in order to determine if the strategy contributes to the set objectives. However, no quantitative target is set or reported for growth in number of social enterprises. The current approach taken by the *Västerbotten* county to measure the impact of its regional strategy on the sustainable development of the region is to use the same quantitative indicators applied in the EU 2020 strategy and complementing them with additional context-based indicators.

Poland: Raising awareness of the unrealised potential of social economy

Since the EU accession in 2004, Poland's economy accelerated and transformed, hence becoming one of the fastest growing economies at more comparable levels of development with other EU Members. The country continued to experience economic growth despite the global crisis due in large part to significant EU structural funds, being the largest beneficiary of cohesion funds. The EU funds have played a central role in developing social enterprises since the 2007-13 programming period. For instance, the *Wielkopolskie* region has a well-developed social economy support system, as it was the first to benefit from an EU-funded project since Polish entrance to the EU. A key priority of the EU funds was to revitalise regions in need of investments, given that Poland suffers from high levels of regional economic disparities (the fifth highest among 30 OECD countries) (OECD, 2018[29]). To respond to these socioeconomic realities, the social economy entities (*podmioty ekonomii społecznej*) comprised of mainly social enterprises (*przedsiębiorstwa społeczne*), have provided social and professional work reintegration opportunities for vulnerable groups (i.e. long-term unemployed, homeless etc.) and served as social welfare providers.

The social economy contribution to national economy is low: 2.3% of national paid employment in 2015 (Table 2). It still suffers a negative image, which contributed to the steady fall in the creation rate of cooperatives since the mid 1990's. However, the creation of new forms of social economy organisations, namely social enterprises, considered as modern and more effective, is on the rise (EC, 2020[30]), and contribute in some regions such as the *Wielkopolskie Voivodship* to establishing more vibrant social economy ecosystems.

Orientations of the regional strategies

All regions in Poland are required to integrate the social economy in their socio-economic development strategies by 2020[7] to: i) improve job creation, ii) facilitate integration of vulnerable and socially excluded groups, iii) ensure accessibility of public welfare services, iv) support the development of rural areas and marginalised districts, and v) boost tourism. The main objective of most regional strategies is to increase the social economy's contribution to the regional economy (e.g. *Pomorskie, Wielkopolskie, Małopolskie voivodships*) More specifically to provide social and professional reintegration services to vulnerable groups and support social economy organisations in becoming public welfare providers (e.g. *Śląskie and Wielkopolskie voivodships*), including through partnerships with the public sector (e.g. *Świętokrzyskie voivodship*).

Allocation of funding

The social economy strategies benefit from funds from different sources. They include i) EU funds, mainly the ESF and the National Operational Programme KED, operating within the framework of 16 regional operational programmes ii) public funds and iii) private funds (page 22). Although not a source of direct funding, the latest amendments in the Polish public procurement law, approved in September 2019, introduced reserved contracts for social cooperatives and other contractors meeting social criteria and providing social services, thus offering possibilities for social economy organisations to access markets and diversify their opportunities. Access to markets is a different mechanism from the previously mentioned sources of funds. However, it is a means by which regions could support the social economy organisations, by diversifying their opportunities and strengthening their entrepreneurial approaches.

Level of involvement and collaboration of various actors

Some of the regions such as the *Wielkopolskie voivodship* identify insufficient involvement of stakeholders as the main barrier, which hinders the development of the social economy. The lack of collaboration between the social economy organisations, public administration and business is the result of low interest in the social economy in many regions, where it is still associated only with serving vulnerable groups. Regional strategies aim to address this issue by promoting inter-sectorial collaboration as a step towards more co-governance and co-management of social services with the regional public administration.

Regional efforts to estimate the contribution of the social economy to regional development

The potential of the social economy organisations as providers of general interest services have yet to be unleashed. The social economy does not contribute significantly to the national economy nor in providing employment (EESC, 2017[20]). Most of the social economy entities rely on volunteers and public grants rather than generating revenues from their own entrepreneurial activities. Public administration representatives do not have sufficient knowledge at both national and local levels about the potential of the social economy and its role in economic development.

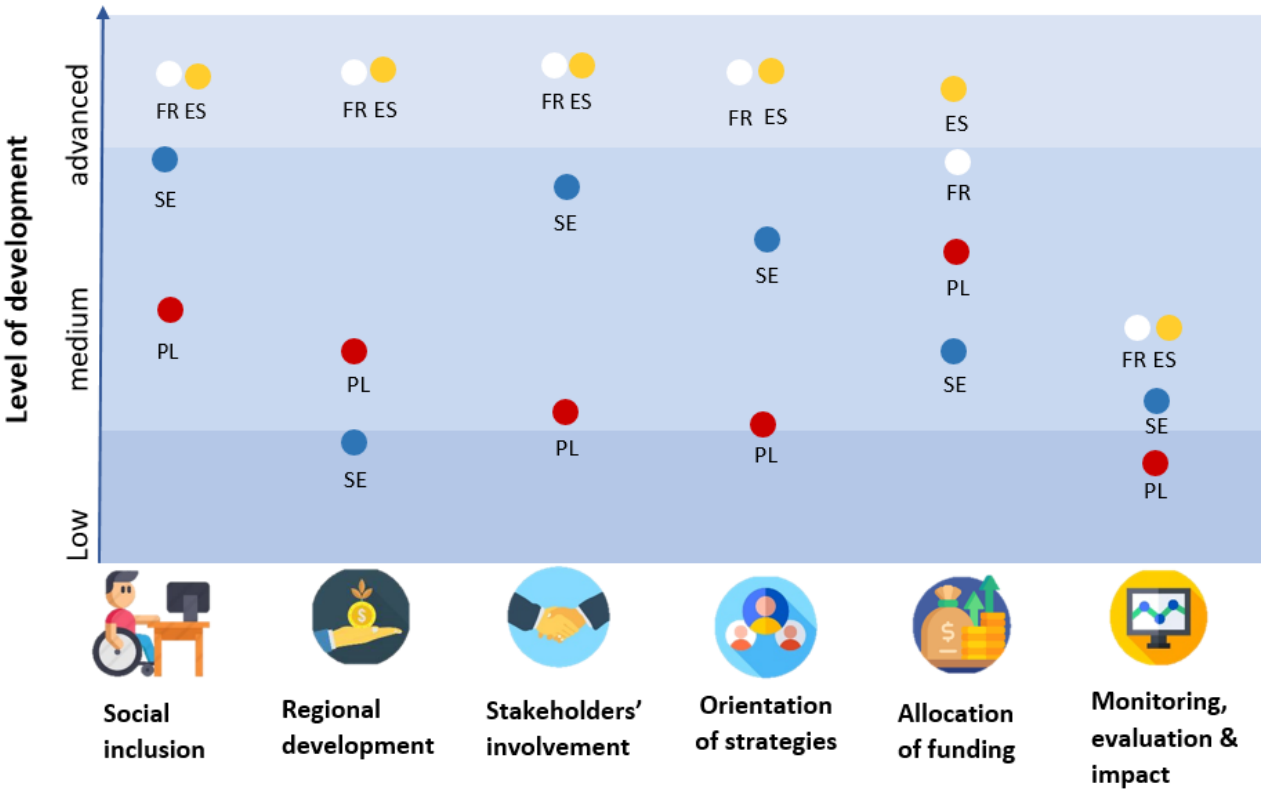
Monitoring impact

The ROPS are responsible for producing the monitoring reports, which are further reviewed and validated by the Regional Committees for Social Economy Development. Every region is required to perform an evaluation of the support system of the social economy under ESF. However, there is no common system of impact evaluation of the regional strategies for the social economy. Some regions provide annual or biennial monitoring and evaluation reports based on the indicators outlined in the regional strategies. A

7 This obligation was introduced by the 2014 National Programme for Social Economy Development -KPRES

monitoring system is being developed by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, to reinforce regional efforts in monitoring economic and social impacts of the social economy strategies. The Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy is also working on a forthcoming report on financial and non-financial support from ESF for the social economy in Poland, which will provide insights on the impact of the regional strategies.

Infographic 2.1. Level of development of regional strategies for the social economy in France, Spain, Sweden and Poland



Source: OECD

Regions in France, Spain, Sweden and Poland have differentiated approaches to the social economy's role in promoting social inclusion and regional development. The infographic presents the level of development of the regional strategies for the social economy based on i) the orientation of the strategies , ii) the allocation of funding, iii) the level of involvement of stakeholders iv) regional efforts to estimate the contribution of social economy to regional development and v) the monitoring framework to assess the impact of the strategy.

In France and Spain, where social economy benefits from wide recognition, it is associated with regional development, social inclusion and beyond to other strategic priorities. In Poland, the regional strategies offer a broad scope of actions in the field of social services and address employment needs for the disadvantaged groups. This evolution needs to link more the social economy to other dimensions of the regional development (innovation, job creation at large, rural-urban linkages etc.). In Sweden, some regions and municipalities have adopted strategies that focus mainly on social enterprises (often work integration social

enterprises) and linkages with regional development challenges need to be reinforced. The level of involvement and collaboration of actors is advanced in France and Spain where regions have adopted a “co-creation and construction” approach involving the stakeholders in the development and implementation of the regional strategies of the social economy (i.e. CRESS in France and CEPES Spain). In Sweden, agreements between public authorities and civil society and social economy organisations are forums for dialogue. However, stakeholders are not involved in the design of the regional strategies. Regions in Poland follow what appears to be a “top-down process”. For the most part, regional government decides the volume of funds allocated for the social economy development in RPO. However, collaboration between the social economy organisations, public administration and business is not yet optimal due to insufficient interest in the social economy in many regions from the general public and the negative image of the social economy.

The allocation of funding is shaped by the availability of funding sources at European, national and sub-national levels and the degree of regions’ autonomy in the management of funds. Spain and Poland have taken more advantage of the opportunities offered by funds from the ESF. The regions’ capacity to monitor, evaluate and implement the strategies is a challenge in all regions of the four countries. The regions do not publish reports on the impacts produced by the implementation of their strategies. This is partly due to the lack of consensus on methods and nature of data to be collected and the need to strengthen capacity at regional and national levels to monitor and evaluate impact.

3 Conclusions and policy orientations

Regions in France and Spain have developed strong social economy strategies. In Poland, the social economy is progressively gaining momentum through dedicated national programmes and strategies. In Sweden, regions focus their regional strategies on fostering social enterprises ecosystems, without specific mention of the social economy. There is diversity in approaches, and practice is country and region specific. In France, Spain and Poland, regions are required to design and implement strategies for the social economy and integrate them to their regional development objectives and priorities. They have been granted competences in this perspective. In Sweden, regions have large competences to implement regional development strategies that could also integrate objectives of the national strategies dedicated to the promotion of innovation and social enterprises. The institutional organisation, the role played by the regions in delivering inclusive and sustainable development for their territories, and the contribution of the social economy to the national economy are factors that influence how regions view and develop the social economy. The formal competences of a region to promote regional development have different implications depending on their capacity to develop coherent and efficient strategies for the social economy that pursue local objectives while integrating national priorities. Building on the case studies, this section presents five main conclusions of the analysis and provides policy orientations to help scale up the impact of regional strategies for the social economy on regional development.

Conclusions

The contribution of the social economy to regional development is increasingly recognised

The social economy is deeply rooted locally and linkages with regional development are increasing in scale and scope. In France, the 2015 NOTRe Law introduced the obligation for regions to include the social economy in their regional economic programmes and plans. In Spain, the Autonomous Communities have integrated the social economy into their overarching strategies through laws and regulations. In Poland, regions collaborate with social economy organisations to establish ***socially responsible territories*** not only through the promotion of work integration enterprises but also by encouraging their contribution to the development of rural areas and expansion of tourism. Moreover, regions highlight in their strategies the role of the social economy organisations in implementing specific strategies and priorities: innovation (Sweden, France), job creation diversification (Spain) or provision and delivery of social services (Poland).

The degree of formal recognition of the social economy at national level influences the level of support at regional level

Although, in some cases regions have developed social economy strategies before the adoption of national frameworks (e.g. France and Spain), generally the level of legal and institutional recognition of the social economy at national level influences possibilities for their expansion at regional and local levels. In Poland, there is moderate recognition of the social economy, which is still fragmented, and does not operate under a strong common identity, as different types of organisations operate under different legal frameworks. In France and Spain, the existence of strong legal frameworks enables national and regional authorities to

identify and effectively support social economy actors. In Sweden, regions have the autonomy to define their own priorities, but they have chosen not to promote the social economy as much as regions in other countries have. Regional strategies are often a result of a partnership between the state and the regions. Such partnerships are formalised progressively with the involvement of local actors such as social enterprises and NGOs to support the implementation of national strategies at the regional level (Sweden and Poland) or to address more specifically the priorities of territories (Spain and France). Based on the case studies analysed, it seems that while national and regional strategies might be complementary, regional strategies can also go beyond national strategies and define their own priorities and objectives to benefit their territories. For example in Spain, the Autonomous Communities expanded cooperatives beyond the traditional sectors such as agriculture to other types such as housing cooperatives and social initiative cooperatives to advance social inclusion and support employment strategies (EC, 2019[5])

Regions follow different approaches in involving stakeholders: a "co-creation and construction" approach (France, Spain) or a top-down process (Poland and Sweden)

Regions in France and Spain have adopted a "co-creation and construction" approach, involving the stakeholders (regional conferences and the CRESS in France and strong cooperatives networks in Spain), in the design and implementation of the strategies for the social economy. The involvement of the stakeholders in both countries is enshrined in the national framework laws for the social economy. This approach has helped guide regional authorities in identifying priorities and reinforced shared appropriation by regions and social economy organisations of the objectives and timelines of implementation of the regional strategies. Regions in Poland have followed a more "top-down process" as their strategies have mainly integrated at a regional level the objectives and priorities of the National Programme for the Social Economy Development. In Sweden, the State has put in place the National Strategy for Social Enterprises and regions can decide whether to have a regional strategy. However, regions are encouraged to promote the creation of social enterprises. In both countries, there are no formalised mechanisms to ensure systematic involvement of stakeholders.

Funding is critical to the development of regional strategies in light of enlarged competences given to regions following multi-level governance reforms

Funding is critical for the development of regional strategies, in light of the enlarged competences and prerogatives given to regions that include also the development the social economy. The weight of social economy varies in the selected regions, depending also on the availability of funds. Access to funding remains one of the biggest constraints in France for example. The decrease in financial support was identified as a key issue in a number of regions (Corsica, New Aquitaine), which infers that regions could benefit from tapping into other sources for funding (i.e. private sources) or direct some of the EU funding directly towards the social economy. In Poland and Spain, regions have taken more advantage of the opportunities offered by EU funds, especially from the ESF, which has proven to be critical in supporting regional strategies for the social economy. Their Operational Programmes have clearly targeted social economy development in the regions.

Lack of systematic impact evaluation

Some regions have put in place mechanisms to assess the impacts associated with the social economy and their linkages with regional development programmes. Current approaches in impact evaluation consist in using quantitative indicators such as employment rate (Spain), investment in innovation (Sweden) complemented with additional context-based indicators. Some regions have put in place monitoring committees (Murcia and Navarre) while others established "permanent" bodies such as the social economy councils, which have among their missions the evaluation of the impacts of strategies (Galicia and the Balearic Islands). In Örebro County (Sweden), progress against the Action Plan for Social Economy is reported on a yearly basis to the Department for Regional Development. In the case of France, there are

legal obligations for the CRESS to collect and publish data regularly, compiled at national level by the Observatoire national de l'ESS. However, and despite these various initiatives, the regions have not yet published reports on the impacts produced by the implementation of their strategies. Awareness of the importance of impact measurement remains either low or not yet effective.

Policy orientations

Better capitalise on the social economy potential for enhancing regional development

The social economy and regional development are mutually reinforcing dynamics. Regions highlight in their strategies the role of the social economy organisations. By tapping into the social economy potential, national government, regions and the EU could reinforce regional development while also supporting the expansion of the social economy. National governments could do so by facilitating the institutional and legal recognition of the social economy, the adoption of framework laws and national programmes as well as clear financial support. Regions and other subnational levels could adopt strategies for the social economy clearly linked to regional development objectives and priorities, hence maximising their mutually reinforcing dynamics. The strategies, whether at national or regional levels, could benefit from a co-construction approach (e.g. France, Spain) to ensure successful and effective implementation. EU support has been very important for the expansion of the social economy at the regional level across EU countries. The Commission has announced it will propose a European Action Plan for Social Economy in 2021. This is likely to open up new opportunities, providing more support to regional strategies for the social economy.

Focus strategies on a few clear priorities and objectives

Regional strategies for the social economy could contribute to enhancing regional attractiveness and resilience while supporting people's well-being, work opportunities and mobility. To be successful, strategies need to focus on a few primary objectives and have clear, identifiable and secure sources of funding. Some regional strategies do not have a clearly defined financial plan indicating the resources available to support social economy development. Other regional strategies outline many objectives (more than 50 measures and objectives in some cases) which could create capacity challenges for implementation and monitoring. Regional strategies are more likely to have measureable impact if they focus on a few attainable and strong priorities and objectives with clear earmarking of funds for the implementation of activities.

Strengthen coordination mechanisms with stakeholders and ensure their involvement

Involving the stakeholders across levels of government (networks, financial institutions, national and other subnational authorities, academia, etc.) in strategy development has numerous benefits. For example, they have greater ownership of the objectives and priorities as well as cooperation in the implementation. They also provide valuable information on the user' perspective. Regional stakeholders can also support knowledge sharing to better disseminate good practices across the region. There is a need to institutionalise mechanisms to ensure the involvement of all stakeholders is effective and facilitate their participation in the development of the social economy across levels of government. The experience of France through the *Chambres Regionales de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaires* (CRESS) and the *Conférences régionales* (regional conferences*)*, established by the 2014 national framework law (article 8) has proven to be successful in this perspective. The objective of these conferences is to take stock of actions carried out over two years and set directions for the future. In Spain, CEPES and strong networks of cooperatives also played a significant role in the adoption of co-constructed strategies for the social economy with the Autonomous Communities. This could be particularly inspiring for countries, which have adopted national strategies for the social economy and social entrepreneurship and delegated their implementation to regions.

Encourage impact assessment of regional strategies for the social economy

The evaluation of social and societal benefits as well as the economic value added of social economy organisations might be challenging due to the lack of consensus on methods and the nature of data to be collected. On the one hand, there is a need to develop specific data that can be disaggregated at regional level, that are related to regional development, and that take into account the specificities of the social economy (governance, use of capital, etc.). On the other hand, measuring social impact remains a challenge because the aim is to capture the wider impact of social economy organisations and social enterprises. The issue is that the nature of this "wider impact" (the fact that it concerns tangible and intangible effects with important social and societal dimensions) makes its evaluation complex. Some of the regions analysed have put in place regional councils for the social economy in charge of assessing the impact of the strategies, however, published data on impact measurement or evaluation is not necessarily readily available. France has put in place an observatory on the social economy that collects data and produces key figures and publications on the contribution of the social economy to employment, well-being, etc. The observatory does not assess impact of the regional strategies but that could also be one of its missions. Some regions collaborate with universities to develop a better understanding of social impact measurement. For example, tools like the “sustainability assurance” developed by Region Kronoberg in Sweden can be helpful to establish links between policy initiatives and social impacts at regional level. Partnerships involving social economy organisations, regional authorities and academia could help raise awareness about the importance of measuring impact of the regional strategies for the social economy.

Take advantage of all opportunities to promote knowledge sharing among EU regions

Knowledge sharing is key to the development of informed regional strategies for the social economy. For example, in France, the network of regional observatories for the social economy developed a coherent methodology to analyse and compare the main trends and dynamics of social economy in the regions. Knowledge produced by these observatories helps the social economy organisations as well as regional and local authorities refine their strategies and target their priorities. The EU also makes available multiple tools and measures to help mutual learning between different countries and regions in Europe. EU funds and programmes finance mutual learning activities within a broad range of themes. Both the ESF and the ERDF include such possibilities, for example calls for transnational activities within the ESF and the Interreg Europe programme under the ERDF. In addition, some thematic programmes such as Erasmus+ include relevant schemes. Given the potential of the social economy to address a variety of topical societal challenges, mutual learning activities are well placed to be supported under these programmes. Amongst the actions specifically targeting the social economy, the European Commission has recently launched a campaign called European Social Economy Regions (ESER), which, in its next phase, will include funding specifically for mutual learning actions.

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