

The Joint Strategy on 3Ps to Support Social and Solidarity Economy: The Power of Collaboration in Central Europe's Social Economy Transformation



The Joint Strategy on 3Ps to Support Social and Solidarity Economy represents a landmark initiative developed by project partners, in the framework of the Interreg 3P4SSE project, to advance Local Action Plans through a strategic, three-pronged approach. This comprehensive strategy is crafted in three sections, illustrating the social economy's foundational principles, a detailed policy agenda, and an actionable framework, all aimed at driving the regional social economy forward.

Context and Background

The concepts of social economy and solidarity economy, though distinct, have evolved closely over time. The social economy emphasizes the entrepreneurial aspect, while the solidarity economy focuses on social justice. Recently, these two concepts have been treated together, particularly within the United Nations framework. Since 2014, the UN has integrated both categories under the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), recognizing them as crucial for advancing the 2030 Agenda and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The UN General Assembly further reinforced this view in April 2023 by passing a resolution promoting SSE for sustainable development, acknowledging its role in realizing and localizing the SDGs.

At the European level, significant strides have been made to bolster SSE. The EU Commission approved an Action Plan for the social economy in December 2021, followed by the European Council's recommendation in November 2023, urging the adoption of national-level strategies for SSE development. The EU's strategy, part of the European Pillar of Social Rights, sees the social economy as fundamental to achieving a just transition, capable of fostering digital and green transitions, providing sustainable goods and services, and addressing social gaps within the single market.

Territorial and Institutional Contexts

Despite progress in regional convergence, Central Europe still exhibits economic and social disparities, particularly between Eastern and Western regions. Life expectancy and living conditions vary

significantly, illustrating the deep-rooted inequalities that persist. Addressing these disparities requires a robust engagement from communities and a bridging of the gap between public and private sectors.

The 3P4SSE project conceptualizes SSE as encompassing diverse entities prioritizing societal purpose over profit. This approach has led to the creation of quality jobs, social integration initiatives, and environmentally sustainable practices. However, Central European regions display different degrees of maturity in institutionalizing SSE, ranging from formalized social economy frameworks to early-stage economies still developing public-private partnerships.

Vision and Objectives of the Joint Strategy

The Joint Strategy on 3Ps is built on the recognition that SSE is pivotal for achieving sustainable development and promoting local development through robust social economy ecosystems and clusters. The strategy shifts from a narrow focus on social inclusion to a broader concept of social innovation. This includes fully integrating disadvantaged social groups, introducing new services driven by digitization and technological transformation, and fostering proactive social dynamics.

The strategy's policy objectives include raising collective awareness, creating supportive social economy clusters through public-private partnerships, ensuring economic sustainability and resilience, and fostering innovation in developmental paradigms. These objectives are designed to maximize the impact of SSE in Central European regions.

Structure and Implementation

The Joint Strategy is structured around four key policy areas: joint investments, social business models, capacity building, and advocacy and impact. Joint investments aim to create supportive environments and innovate social economy ecosystems. Social business models focus on enhancing competitiveness and maximizing social impact. Capacity building endows social economy organizations with the skills to navigate challenges and transformations. Advocacy and impact increase the visibility and influence of social economy organizations in policy decision-making.

To facilitate social innovation and collaboration with public authorities, the strategy includes policy tools such as social procurement, fiscal policies, labeling, General Block Exemption Regulation, and services of general economic interest. These tools are designed to foster market access and support SSE entities.

Sustainability and Future Prospects

Starting in March 2024, project partners will formalize their collaboration through a Memorandum of Understanding, ensuring the sustainability and maintenance of the strategy beyond the project's end. This protocol will define roles, responsibilities, and procedures, guaranteeing that the collaborative efforts continue to thrive.

The Joint Strategy on 3Ps to Support Social and Solidarity Economy is a testament to the power of collective action and strategic planning. By fostering robust SSE ecosystems, it aims to create a more equitable, sustainable future for Central Europe, bridging gaps, and driving regional development through innovative and inclusive approaches.