

PRESS RELEASE

First Informal Meeting of European Ministers for the Social Economy: A Decisive Step for a Growing Sector

Twenty-three European Ministers responsible for the Social Economy met in Paris today for the first informal ministerial meeting dedicated to this topic, hosted by the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union. This new ministerial meeting demonstrates Europe's shared desire to develop the social economy in order to meet the climate challenge and create jobs with high social added value.

Olivia Grégoire, Minister of State reporting to the Minister for the Economy, Finance and the Recovery, with responsibility for the Social, Solidarity and Responsible Economy, met with her EU counterparts in Paris on 17 February 2022. Joined by Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, she chaired the first informal meeting of European Ministers responsible for the Social Economy.

In Europe, the social economy represents around 2.8 million entities with a variety of legal forms (cooperatives, mutual benefit societies (a specific type of collective insurance), non-profits, foundations and social enterprises), on top of 13 million workers and more than 10% of GDP in countries such as France, Italy and Spain. These entities share the common principle of placing people and social purpose over profit, and have a democratic form of governance.

By employing more vulnerable workers, for example, this sector has a great potential to create jobs with high social added value and contribute to the fight against climate change. The European Commission has identified the proximity and social economy as one of the single market's 14 industrial ecosystems. A declaration by 14 Member States, known as the Luxembourg Declaration on Social Economy, voiced back in 2015 the need to develop a common social economy framework. With this goal in mind, the Italian Minister of Labour and Social Policies, Andrea Orlando, presented the priorities of the Italian Presidency 2022 of the Monitoring Committee.

On 9 December 2021, the Commission presented its first Social Economy Action Plan, which contains proposals to develop the social economy across Europe and unlock its potential for creating quality jobs and social cohesion.

The ministerial meeting provided the EU Ministers with an opportunity to acknowledge Commissioner Schmit's work on this Action Plan, underscoring its relevance to the multiple economic, climate and social challenges facing Europe today. They were also able to exchange views on how the Action Plan can be implemented in their respective countries.

The Ministers agreed on the following points:

- **Respecting the diversity of national traditions in the area of social economy and formulating the basis for a common definition in the Action Plan**, taking into account this diversity.
- **Recognising the importance of raising awareness about the social economy in their respective countries, and emphasising the benefit of having specific national legal frameworks to strengthen the social economy ecosystem**, making it possible to implement specific public policies and create labels and certifications. At EU level, they expressed their willingness to adopt a strategy allowing for legislative developments concerning the social economy, and are keen to assist the Commission in its mapping of existing labels and certifications.
- **Ensuring funding for the social economy and better informing sector entities about funding opportunities**. In particular, the Ministers welcomed the Commission's proposal to set up an EU Social Economy Gateway, which will compile a complete inventory of public policies and funding for the sector, and its proposal to increase the availability of public funding. At national level, the Ministers pledged their commitment to promote access to specific funding.
- **Backing the Commission's project to map the various national methodologies for measuring social impact**. The Ministers are ready to cooperate, exchange best practices and reflect collectively on how best to measure social impact in order to avoid "social washing" practices. Improving transparency around the social impact of enterprises is important because it helps lend legitimacy to social economy public policies and develop innovative partnerships with local authorities and mainstream businesses to tackle societal and climate challenges.

This informal meeting between EU Ministers responsible for the Social Economy fostered productive conversations and collaborative work ahead of discussions in 2023 for a future Council Recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions. In the meantime, the Ministers asked the Commission to involve the Expert Group on Social Economy and Social Enterprises (GECES) in the implementation and monitoring of the Action Plan. The outcome of this meeting will also be presented for information purposes to the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) on 14 March 2022.

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