

SEEDING

Social Economy Enterprises addressing
Digitalisation, Industrial Relations and the European Pillar of Social Rights

First Steering Committee Meeting and Launching Event

09.04.2019 - 10.04.2019

NOTES

On 9th of April, 2019 the SEEDING project has officially started with a two times half a day long kick-off meeting held in Brussels, hosted by Brussels office of Legacoop and Confcooperative and followed by a public Launching Event on the 10th of April, at the premises of COPA-COGECA.

The purpose of the Steering Committee meeting was to bring together the project partners, associates and affiliated organisations to discuss in details the implementation of the project. Almost all participating organisations – DIESIS (Belgium), Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini (Italy), Legacoop (Italy), CGM (Italy), COCETA (Spain), Social Economy Slovenia (Slovenia), INNOVA e.G. (Germany), FISE (Poland) and ETUC – was represented. The two partner organisations from the United Kingdom - Wales Cooperative Center and SEUK – did not take part, due to the uncertain nature of Brexit. During the event the participants discussed details such tasks, responsibilities, timeframe, communication, financial issues, evaluation, projectmanagement and scientific coordination of the research.

The second day, on the 10th of April morning, the public Launching Event took place with the involvement of more than twenty people, including invited guests and speakers. **Gianluca Pastorelli**, president of Diesis welcomed the participants. He gave a brief overview on the project activities, introduced the participants, made a remark about the UK situation and gave the floor to **Manuelita Mancini**, director of FGB. She explained that it was difficult to find a good approach when the project was still in a planning stage. Social economy can promote social rights and it is good to exploiting potential benefits. She was also talking about target groups, main research activities (background research, case studies and international workshops) as well as about final analysis and guidelines as outcomes. The main question of the research if there are already practices in social economy dealing with effect on digitalisation / automatisisation and if yes, are there any that can be considered as good practice? She highlighted that the final documents aim to be an easy-to-read text, avoiding usage of highly scientific terms.

In the next section, the two invited speakers were talking about the approach of the European Commission. **Miia Rossi-Gray** policy advisor from DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG Employment) welcomed the project and started her speech on the problematic aspects of digitalisation and policy challenges. She said that there are plenty of opportunities and challenges associated with the new forms of work created. On the one hand there are opportunities to include those people into the labour market who otherwise would be excluded, but there are some challenges related to their working conditions. According to a recent DG Employment and Joint Research Center study, in Europe there are 2 percent of the workforce who gain a substantial share of their income via platforms. The typical platform worker is young, male, has above average education and very likely have family and kids. It is also difficult to tell, what their status is on the labour market. She also mentioned a study by the European Commission and the OECD on policy responses to new forms of work. The study includes a number of responses to platform economy and digitalisation, which shows the weight of the issue. Then Miia pointed out on issues such as consequences on industrial relations, trade union (non-) membership of workers and status of the platform worker vs freelance workers. The situation calls for policy responses in the form of policy initiatives, such as more transparent and working conditions and better access to social protection of workers. Overall, digitalisation is seen as an added value to the social economy, and the social economy may provide some interesting solutions to some of the problematic aspects of digitalization and new forms of work. The speaker finally added that DG Employment does not focus on platforms like Airbnb since it is not a labour intensive form of platform.

Karel Vanderpoorten from DG for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (DG Grow) also interpret the project as an interesting one. The opening statement was that technology is built by humans not to replace humans. He mentioned a study that DG Grow ordered and it will be exploring the ability of the workers, users using the tools offered by digitalisation, skills issues and how to implement digitalisation into management in a human centered way. He emphasized that social economy is not only in the manufacturing sector but also present e.g. in the health, social, energy, safety sector. As social economy regards, there are 2 million social economy enterprises in Europe, representing 10% of all businesses in the EU. More than 11 million people – about 6% of the EU's employees – work for social economy enterprises. They have different legal forms and various objectives ranging from agriculture and banking to provision of employment and sheltered workshop therefore social economy is huge on the EU landscape. On the other hand, there is lack of data in many terms and only anecdotal evidence is available skills and digitalisation in the social economy. The social economy itself is very diverse, there is no

single regulatory framework and there are many types of organisations in there. The most known legal statues are cooperatives, mutuals, associations, foundations and social enterprises¹.

Regarding platform work, many parallel activities are going on and platforms are organised in various ways. He also made some similarities between social economy (real word) and platform economy (digital word) keeping in mind that there are many varieties of social economy in the different member states.

The rest of the speech was about open sources like open software, open data to spread over the world and its advantages - it is good for the social economy since people in SE has easier access to these software with no high cost involved. He closed his speech with the consequence that we should invest much more into digital technology, since it brings people back to the labour market and help them e.g. learning a language (migrants, low skilled people) by use of robots. It is useful for other professions as well, for example for HR managers and psychologist. Digitalisation also creates more jobs, not destroying those, so it is shown in some pioneering at WISE's (= work in social enterprises) and to invest into technology.

At the Q+A session, there was a few exchange on the nature of social economy and digitalisation. **Nena Dokuzov** (Social Economy Slovenia) in her question raised the issue how to transfer and integrate data and what about intellectual rights, human rights, responsible consumptions, social economy – platforms since everything seems connected with everything. She also stressed that digitalisation and block chain technology is an opportunity for social enterprises.

The session's closing presentation was held by Eurofound research assistant, **Eleonora Peruffo**. As an introduction, Eleonora said a few words about Eurofound. Eurofound is the second oldest agency in the European Union and has a tripartite nature - national authorities, trade unions and employer organisations – represent themselves on its board. The tripartite nature gives the opportunity that all the perspective of different stakeholders on certain issues are taken into account. In her presentation Eleonora talked about the industrial revolution that finally led to the digital age and transformed society. She made analogy with electricity: it took some time to let the factories understand how electricity could improve the production process and output of businesses. She pointed out that now people are starting to see the technologies' combinatorial power and the potential applications of it. According to her presentation, digitalisation has

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/social-economy_en

four key attributes that has transformative potential to economic activities: flexibilisation of production, fast and pervasive information availability, digital goods with low or marginal costs and strong network effects. She also gave some details of the recent Eurofound concept paper on digital age, which includes possible and already existing implications of digitalisation on areas of work. Technologies can be split into 3 vectors: automation, digitisation and work coordinated by algorithms. She also pointed out that it is not a robocalypse (yet) as people like to say often. One of the most interesting slide was about jobs that likely to be disappeared, stays unchanged or to be created. She said some words about key technologies in digitalisation such as additive manufacturing (3D printing) touching upon health and safety for this technology, Internet of things and virtual augmented reality, also on game changing technologies such as industrial biotechnology. Finally, she also detailed the changes and challenges still ahead of companies, industrial relations and policymakers such as global wide competitions, trade union issues, working conditions and blue-collar jobs turning white collar.

In the last session, representatives of social economy enterprises were sharing some basic details about their organisations, nature and extend of the social economy in the given country and their experiences so far. The individual presentations by **Julia Koczanowicz-Chondzynska** (Foundation for Social and Economic Initiatives – FISE), **Pedro Blazquez** (COCETA, Spain), **Hans-Gerd Nottenbohn** (Germany, innova eG) and **Gianluca Verasani** (Legacoop Produzione Servizi, Italy) showed a very diverse picture of the social economy in the various countries. In Poland, social economy is still not so widespread but constantly growing in several sectors and the financial background mainly comes from European Social Fund and government support. Therefore in the focus of FISE is the labour market and to provide access to safe working conditions of the workers employed in the social economy. In Germany, most of the cooperatives are consumer-lead, not workers' cooperatives and majority are in eastern Germany coming from the socialistic era. As activities regards, innova eG has broad activities such as helping to form co-operatives for elderly people to have housing, co-operatives for freelancers or using renewable energy. In Italy, social economy is a very important player in economy, Legacoop is a huge organisation with members from sectors such as construction, industry, cleaning, logistic and food and its main task not only provide support to its members, but also to act as a formal political body. In Spain, COCETA is an association for worker's cooperatives and its main aim to spread cooperativism and social economy in the country. Despite the differences, in all countries it is inevitable to face the challenges and effect made by digitalisation and automatization. The speakers were introducing some practices that already exist in the targeted countries. In Poland, FISE provide support for all kind of social enterprises by various traditional and innovative ways (support centre, prize competitions, TransferHub project or career information points for foreigners). In

Germany, the examples were mainly brought from the health care and social sector (Salzhausen hospital, a home-care service in Bremen and a cooperative in Berlin helping people who live with disabilities, Locumcert platform for doctors). From Spain, there are already several good practices developed to cope with the challenges (Mandragon Assembly, M. Marble project, Coenca from the manufacturing sector and Barbate ambulance from the healthcare sector). From the representative of Italy the participants could learn from examples taken from the production and service examples, such as the global wide initiative („Global Network” by Sacmi Imola) and also a local result of a wider initiative (training provided for workers – cleaners – on how to use new technologies at work).

After the last presentation, **Gianluca Pastorelli** made a short summary of the event, drafted the next steps and closed the event.

24.04.2019