



GREECE

**SOCIAL  
AND  
SOLIDARITY  
ECONOMY**

REPORT

# Executive summary

## **Background to the study**

This report presents the findings of a study undertaken to provide an overview of the current social and solidarity economy (SSE) sector in Greece, and to explore the barriers and opportunities for the development of an effective ecosystem to support SSE organisations.

It forms part of a larger project of technical support focusing on the SSE provided by the British Council to the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity (MoL) in Greece with the funding of the European Commission through the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS).

This combined quantitative and qualitative study is the largest to date on the SSE in Greece, in terms of the numbers of organisations that participated. It builds upon previous mapping studies and research to give a fuller picture of the SSE sector in Greece. The report aims to serve as a useful tool for the MoL to comprehensively understand the characteristics and the needs of the SSE ecosystem in Greece when designing initiatives and policies to support the SSE sector. It may well be a useful tool to other actors seeking to support SSE organisations, and of course, to the organisations themselves.

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## The SSE in Greece

The broader social and solidarity economy in Greece is both an old and a new phenomenon. Its roots lie in a number of factors, the most important being the cooperative movements developed over years, but recent legislation and political movements have galvanised much of the recent activity. This means that the SSE sector in Greece is at in a relatively early stage. It is changing dynamically, but at the same time has an urgent need for support, particularly in the form of skills development, networking, finance and enabling policies.

As this report reveals, there is great potential for the SSE in Greece to grow and expand its impact. SSE organisations are helping to tackle some of the country's most significant challenges, notably poverty and unemployment while they are also seeking to promote and demonstrate alternative business models that incorporate social benefit alongside their economic activity.

SSE in Greece is currently significantly underdeveloped in relation to other European countries with the majority of SSE organisations in Greece been small in size and recently established, facing at the same time highly challenging economic conditions with regard to their start-up activities, financial sustainability and market growth.

At the same time the current challenging economic and social landscape in Greece is viewed by SSE actors as a reason why a stronger SSE is needed in order to create new opportunities, address unemployment, and establish new economic and entrepreneurial models in areas where mainstream paradigms have failed.

### Key findings

This study reached out to 1,265 SSE organisations through both quantitative and qualitative research methods. An online survey, sent to these organisations, received 251 responses. More targeted focus groups and interviews were also carried out

with key stakeholders within the SSE sector.

#### Key findings from the survey, focus groups and interviews include:

**Starting up:** 68 per cent of the SSE organisations that responded to the survey have been established in the last five years, from which over 40 per cent in the last three years. In short, much of the SSE sector can be categorised as young/early stage. This predicament may justify the fact that a large

percentage (74 per cent) have a turnover under €50,000 per year, as their short period of operation makes it difficult to get established in the market.

**Working locally:** most operate at neighbourhood, local and regional levels, though a significant minority work nationally or internationally.

**People-focused:** 78 per cent are attempting to address the problem of unemployment. This is by far the most common social objective for SSE organisations, and 37 per cent reinvest any financial surplus into job creation.

**Helping those in need:** 55 per cent are helping the long-term unemployed, whilst significant proportions are supporting the elderly, those with a learning or physical disability, refugees and asylum seekers.

**Diverse industries:** SSE organisations operate across a wide range of industries and sectors, including education, food production, social care, tourism and recycling.

**Optimistic for the future:** 68 per cent expect to increase their turnover in the next 12 months, and a similar proportion expect to increase the number of people they employ. Over 90 per cent believe that the SSE has the potential to grow in their industry and in their geographical area.

**Needing money:** access to appropriate finance is by far the biggest barrier to sustainability and growth, be that obtaining grants and loans for seed capital and/or cash flow for everyday operations.

**More inclusive:** 35 per cent are led by women, and levels of women in the workforce are higher than in mainstream business.

**Educated leaders:** 41 per cent of those leading an SSE organisation have a postgraduate or doctoral level of education which is an enabling condition for their training in operating an SSE organisation, as many of them may need such training.

These findings indicate the existence of a dynamic set of organisations who see significant potential for the SSE growth in Greece.

### Other key findings from the qualitative research revealed:

- Greece has a diverse and pluralistic landscape of different types of SSE organisations with different motivations and means of operation. Presently, this predicament has the drawback of segmentation and fragmentation among them.
- An SSE sector emerging organically and spontaneously, often fuelled by the social movements of 2008 to 2011, is in need of more structure as it matures
- A range of 'micro' internal and operational challenges for SSE organisations, particularly regarding decision-making and conflict resolution
- A range of 'macro' external factors which can help or hinder SSE organisations, including government regulation, access to financial tools, and a broader lack of awareness of the SSE within society
- A belief that the SSE in Greece will grow in the coming years, because of its ability to address unemployment, its link to communities and social movements, and the broader inefficiency of traditional business models to create economic value without producing negative externalities
- Some potential areas for the SSE to expand, including tourism, energy production, waste management, and social services.

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## Challenges and recommendations

From the findings, the report ends with an overview of the challenges and recommendations for growth within the SSE sector in Greece in relation to creating an effective enabling system. They focus on four main areas: awareness and promotion, funding and finance, training, education and skills, and legislation and regulation.

### Key recommendations include:

- Establishing a national centre for SSE in Greece
- Creating and implementing a holistic communication and awareness-raising strategy to promote the SSE movement.
- Providing start-up seed capital (in the form of grants or loans) to emerging SSE enterprises
- Convening a social finance task force to identify alternative forms of finance
- Importing and adapting proven specialist learning programme models
- Providing specialist social impact measurement training

