



Unlocking the potential of the social and solidarity
economy for people, places and firms in
Latin America and the Caribbean



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Background paper for Ministerial Session II “Empowering local communities and the grassroots economy: Innovative tools and new approaches”.

This background paper has been prepared for the Latin America and the Caribbean 3rd OECD Ministerial Summit on Social Inclusion in Bogota, Colombia, 2024 and explores the role of the social and solidarity economy in Latin America and the Caribbean, along with actions that countries can take to promote its potential.

Karen Maguire, karen.maguire@oecd.org

Amal Chevreau, amal.chevreau@oecd.org

Lucas Leblanc, lucas.leblanc@oecd.org

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Foreword

This publication is designed to serve as a foundation for discussions at the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) Social Inclusion Ministerial in Bogotá, on October 22, 2024. This publication supports Ministerial Session II: Empowering local communities and the grassroots economy: Innovative tools and new approaches. It aims to help policymakers understand the role the social and solidarity economy can play to support social inclusion at the local level, and how to best support the sector's development. The social and solidarity economy supports vulnerable people, places, and firms in grassroots economies to access the economic resources, essential services, and skills needed for social mobility. Based on the 2022 OECD Recommendation on the Social and Solidarity Economy, the paper also presents policies that countries can adopt to further unlock the potential of the social and solidarity economy.

This publication was authored by Karen Maguire, Head of the Local Employment, Skills, and Social Innovation Division, Amal Chevreau, Acting Head of the Social Economy and Innovation Unit, and Lucas Leblanc, Policy Analyst in the Local Employment, Skills, and Social Innovation Division. Nadim Ahmad, Deputy Director of the Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities provided inputs and guidance. The authors would like to thank Ambassador Luis Fernando Medina, Permanent Representative of Colombia to the OECD, and María Angélica Prada Uribe, Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Colombia to the OECD, for their inputs.

Executive Summary

Social inclusion in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has a strong spatial dimension. Inequality among people, places, and firms is high and persistent in the region. In 2022, 29% and 11.2% of the LAC population lived in poverty and extreme poverty respectively, higher levels than before the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD et al., 2023^[1]). Poverty and wealth are very concentrated spatially in the region. In Chile and Mexico, the gap between the region with the highest and lower poverty rate ranged by over 50 percentage points, compared to an OECD average inter-regional gap of 18 percentage points (OECD, 2022^[2]).

These comparisons are also mirrored in the very high levels of informal activity in the LAC region. They are significantly above the OECD average, and which weigh down on the public and private investment that can boost productivity and social inclusion. Countries in the region are therefore looking at new approaches to tackle these inequalities, and in particular the role that actors in the social and solidarity economy can play, especially concerning informality. Nearly 50% of individuals in LAC countries are part of a household which depends entirely on informal employment, with significant national variation (Matthias Arnold et al., 2024^[3]).¹

Across the globe and in LAC, the social and solidarity economy (SSE) is increasingly recognised as a tool for job creation, labour-market inclusion, and people-centred local development. It includes co-operatives, associations, mutual societies, social enterprises, and other forms of solidarity and self-help groupings, whose activities are typically driven by societal objectives, values of solidarity, the primacy of people over capital, in most cases, by democratic and participative governance. It can be a large share of the economy: in Colombia it contributes 4% to GDP, while in Mexico, the social economy accounts for 3.2% of overall employment. It shares similarities with concepts widely used in LAC, such as the “popular”, “grassroots” or “solidarity” economy, which relates to economic activity that low-income individuals and communities engage in to make a living, often informally, ranging from family-run micro-enterprises to small associations of people who collectively manage resources.

The SSE helps people, places, and firms in grassroots economies improve their well-being. By growing activity, strengthening their collective character, and offering a progressive path to formality, the SSE supports vulnerable people, places and firms in grassroots economies to access the economic resources, essential services, and skills needed for social mobility.

For people, the SSE can further help vulnerable people to access jobs, build their skills, and formalise their activity. The SSE offers services to and employment options for women, young people, and migrants who may struggle in traditional employment. There are opportunities for governments at the national, regional, and local levels to partner more with the SSE and “grassroots” entities to support LAC’s vulnerable populations. The SSE can be a partner to public employment services by providing services directly through procurement, as an employer or trainer of disadvantaged groups, or simply being a local partner. It can also help facilitate transitions from informal to formal jobs in collective entrepreneurship that

¹In Chile, more than 25% of workers hold informal jobs, while in Brazil and Costa Rica, this figure ranges from 36% to 43% respectively. The prevalence of informal employment exceeds 50% in Argentina, Colombia and Mexico and surpasses 65% in Peru.

can increase productivity by lowering barriers to entry for training, increasing bargaining power through collective action, or facilitating access to training and finance.

For places, the SSE offers socially innovative measures to increase access to services. There is an opportunity for regional and local governments to partner in areas of local development and promote social innovation, which can be in public services but also in the use of land and public space, transport, and other local amenities. Social innovation is driven by novel relationships and methods between actors seeking to resolve problems in their communities. These forms of local collective action empower residents to find solutions to their specific needs. In countries such as Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, subnational governments have taken initiatives to support the SSE. In Mexico, for example, the national government's NODESS programme institutionalises and provides actions to support sectoral clusters of SSE entities. In some countries, however, few subnational governments have devoted resources to the SSE, despite the important role it can play in meeting the needs of residents.

As firms, SSE entities offer new forms of collective entrepreneurship that could help resolve social, economic, and environmental challenges. Newer forms of the SSE such as social enterprises, platform co-operatives, and community-based initiatives offer new ways to foster community engagement, generate employment opportunities, and enhance local economic and social development. In LAC, social enterprises can build on grassroots efforts, including indigenous organisations. These organisations typically leverage principles of collective and self-management, along with social capital to address the region's unequal economic and social dynamics. Initiatives such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in Brazil engage consumers in food production, building a mutually beneficial relationship between consumers and producers. Market-oriented SSE entities also engage in the international flows of goods and services, investments, and intangible assets.

Many countries in LAC have started to put in place public bodies, laws or strategies to support the SSE. Building on this strong policy momentum, there are opportunities to amplify and continue to create stronger framework conditions. In some countries, this is done in conjunction with the “grassroots” economy, as many of its activities also involve mutual aid and community engagement. These framework conditions and policy actions are outlined in the [OECD Recommendation on the Social and Solidarity Economy and Social Innovation](#), which covers, for example, awareness and data on these entities, institutional recognition, legal and regulatory frameworks, access to finance and procurement, skills and business support, and impact measurement. LAC countries can use its nine pillars of action to guide their efforts.

1. Introduction

Inequality among people and places holds back Latin America and Caribbean's (LAC) immense potential for social and economic development. LAC benefits from a young population, active civil society, and abundant natural resources. Stark disparities in wealth, access to essential services, and quality of life, however, weaken sociopolitical cohesion and broad-based development. In 2022, 29% and 11.2% of LAC's population lived in poverty and extreme poverty respectively, higher levels than before the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD et al., 2023^[1]). Much of the region's low-income population works outside the formal economy, hindering access to higher-productivity jobs and social protection systems that allow for social mobility.

High wealth inequality compounds large territorial differences in development. In Chile and Mexico, the gap between the region with the highest and lower poverty rate ranged by over 50 percentage points, compared to an OECD average inter-regional gap of 18 percentage points (OECD, 2022^[2]). In Colombia, 31.1% of populations in predominantly rural areas suffer from multidimensional poverty, compared to 11.5% in urban areas (OECD, 2022^[5]). Across LAC, isolated rural territories and urban peripheries face persistent challenges that strain their ability to develop, ranging from informal housing and employment to geographic isolation and weak access to public services.

Vulnerable parts of the LAC workforce often earn a livelihood from the “popular” or “grassroots” economy. The popular economy refers to economic activities that low-income individuals engage in to make a living. Popular economy activities often take the form of informal micro-entrepreneurship, such as the itinerant sale of goods and services in public places, or small-scale collective production of goods based on mutual aid (Box 1.1). Nearly 50% of individuals in LAC countries are part of a household which depends entirely on informal employment, with significant national variation (Matthias Arnold et al., 2024^[3]).¹ In Argentina, the National Registry of Workers in the Popular Economy (ReNaTEP) recorded over 3.6 million workers in the popular economy sector in 2022 (ReNaTEP, 2022^[5]).

The social and solidarity economy (SSE) can support the “popular” or “grassroots” economy in LAC. The SSE² is an approach used by organisations seeking to reconcile innovative collective business models, democratic governance, and profitability in support of their social purpose (Box 1.1). The concept of the SSE developed from the merging of two notions: the social economy and the solidarity economy. Historically consisting of associations, co-operatives and mutual societies, the concept of the social economy has recently expanded to include foundations and social enterprises, while the solidarity economy also includes more spontaneous community-based initiatives emerging at the grassroots level (OECD, 2023^[6]). The SSE in LAC countries includes informal “popular” or “grassroots” entities, as well as formal structures such as associations and cooperatives.

The SSE can provide a democratically informed economic approach that could complement the state and private action. Beyond a **repair function**, whose primary purpose is to provide solutions to societal challenges such as homelessness, and other forms of social exclusion, often to complement public action, the social economy also has a **transformative function** through which it can inspire more structural transformations within economies and societies, in particular through sustainability and inclusiveness (OECD, 2020^[7]). Examples of this include addressing challenges arising from labour market exclusion (OECD, 2018^[8]) and inspiring other businesses to adopt more sustainable, social and responsible practices (OECD, 2020^[7]). Social economy organisations have also identified and developed niche opportunities

and unlocked new sectors that have been subsequently taken up by traditional enterprises. Social innovation, or new and cost-effective answers to enduring societal challenges, underpin much of the SSE's activities.³ Social innovation and other notions related to the SSE are defined in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1. Overview of terms related to the social and solidarity economy

	Origin	Main features
Social economy	France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concept born in the 19th century in France and rediscovered in the 1970s - Classically associated with co-operatives, mutual benefit societies and associations - Legal, political and economic recognition in some parts of the world (Belgium, Quebec** [Canada], Spain)
Solidarity economy	Latin America France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stress the solidarity dimension - Attention paid to the transformative action and political dimension of such organisations - Make a distinction between a long-established social economy and newer solidarity mechanisms/organisations (e.g. more participatory, smaller initiatives, embedded at the local level)
Social and solidarity economy	France Quebec** (Canada) International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aim to encompass both long-established social economy organisations and newer solidarity mechanisms/organisations - Legal recognition in some countries (France)
Non-profit organisations	United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organisations that belong to neither the private for-profit sector nor the public sector - Exclude any organisation that practices the redistribution of surplus (e.g. most co-operatives)
Third sector	Various countries and regions (including Anglo-Saxon countries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Place this specific field as separate from the public and the private sectors
Social innovation	United States European Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seeks new and cost-effective answers to social and societal problems - Refers to new solutions – in the form of services, products, or relationships – that aim primarily to improve the quality of life of individuals and communities by increasing their well-being as well as their social and economic inclusion

Source: (OECD, 2023^[6]) adapted from (Fonteneau and Pollet, 2019^[9])

This recognition of the SSE's role and potential to support to the popular economy has led to a growing recognition of SSE in policy making across LAC. The SSE has a long history in the LAC region, originating in early forms of worker-run enterprises, to forms of collective initiative found in rural communities⁴. Policy in the last decade (e.g. Ecuador, Mexico, Uruguay) developed the sector's legal and institutional recognition, growing its role in the economy and policy. In Argentina, for example, formalised social economy organisations such as associations, co-operatives and mutual societies co-exist with grassroots, often informal, solidarity popular organisations (INAES and Ministry of Productive Development, 2020^[10]). In Brazil, the solidarity economy refers to small economic units in rural and urban areas abiding by values such as fair trade, democratic governance, equitable distribution of profits and local development (Secretaria Nacional de Economia Popular e Solidária, 2024^[11]). Table 1.2 summarises policies that recognised the SSE in selected LAC countries.

Table 1.2. LAC countries have expanded the SSE's role in the economy through strengthened frameworks

Examples of public bodies and legal frameworks supporting the SSE in ten selected LAC countries

LAC country	Public body	Legislation (examples)
Argentina	Sub-secretariat for Innovation and the Solidarity Economy, Ministry of Human Capital National Institute for Associations and the Social Economy (INAES)	Law on Co-operatives (1973) Law on Labour Societies (2001)
Brazil	National Secretariat for the Solidarity and Popular Economy (SENAES/MTE), Ministry of Labour and Employment	Law on Worker Co-operatives (2012)
Chile	Division for Associations and Co-operatives, Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism National Institute for Association and Cooperativism (INAC)	Law on Co-operatives (2003) Law on Mutual Societies (1963)
Colombia	Superintendence of the Solidarity Economy	Law on the Solidarity Economy (1988)
Costa Rica	Department for the Social and Solidarity Economy, Ministry of Labour and Social Security	Executive Decree 39835 MP-MTSS on the Social Solidarity Economy (2016)
Dominican Republic	Institute for Development and Cooperative Credit (IDECOOP)	Law on Association Co-operatives (1964)
Ecuador	National Institute for the Popular and Solidarity Economy (IEPS) Superintendence of the Popular and Solidarity Economy (SEPS)	Law on the Social and Solidarity Economy and the Popular and Solidarity Financial Sector (2012)
Mexico	National Institute for the Social Economy (INAES)	Law on the Social and Solidarity Economy (2012)
Peru	Department for Co-operatives and Institutionalality, Ministry of Production	General Law on Co-operative Societies (2018)
Uruguay	National Institute of Cooperativism (INACOOP)	Law on the Social and Solidarity Economy (2019)

Note: The table above presents examples of legislation on the SSE. For most countries, other legislation exists covering specific forms of the SSE, such as associations, co-operatives, or labour societies.

Source: Author's elaboration.

The SSE operates in all sectors of LAC economies. The SSE capitalises on the practices of more traditional forms, such as agricultural co-operatives, labour co-operatives, and grassroots movements, which have long played an essential role.⁵ While agricultural co-operatives have existed for many years, there is growing awareness of how the SSE can also pioneer new business models, including fairer digital and green transitions (such as platform co-operatives). In Colombia, the solidarity economy contributes approximately 4 percentage points to the country's gross domestic product (GDP), while in Mexico, the social economy accounts for 3.2% of overall employment and 1.2% of GDP (Secretaría de Economía, 2019).

With conducive policies, the SSE can help LAC countries reduce inequalities by supporting people, places, and firms. By providing targeted employment opportunities, the SSE promotes social and productive inclusion for the most vulnerable groups, facilitating their integration into the formal economy. Additionally, the emphasis on local and territorial development enables communities to utilise their unique assets, fostering resilience and sustainable growth tailored to local needs. Regions and cities can support socially innovative bottom-up practices to increase access to services and invest in territorial development. The SSE can also serve to help communities transition to more sustainable economic activity. The rise in entrepreneurship within the SSE encourages innovation and self-reliance, helping individuals build sustainable livelihoods while addressing broader economic challenges (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3. The SSE drives local social and economic development through different channels

The social and solidarity economy	Associations, co-operatives, foundations, mutual societies, social enterprises, and grassroots entities		
Policy target	People	Places	Firms
Policy objective			
Social inclusion	Access to labour rights, social protection and formal employment	Access to services in rural and peripheral territories	Development of community goods and services
Productive development	Local job creation and skills development	Investment and territorial development	Capital generation and reinvestment
Environmental sustainability	Waste management, emission reduction, biodiversity protection		

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Box 1.1. What is the “popular” or “grassroots” economy and what is the social and solidarity economy?

Defining the popular or grassroots economy

The popular economy refers to the economic activities that low-income individuals and communities engage in to make a living. Activities are often about survival and contribute to local development.⁶ Popular economy entities can include⁷: (1) *Labour for personal benefit*, performed by independent workers who create goods, provide services, or sell on a small scale, including at home or in public setting, (2) *Family micro-enterprises*, which sell goods or services on a small scale and (3) *Popular economic organisations*, or small groups or associations of people who collectively manage their scant resources to generate income or provide services to satisfy basic needs based on mutual aid.

Defining the social and solidarity economy

The SSE is typically made up of entities such as associations, non-profit organisations, co-operatives, mutual societies, foundations, and, more recently, social enterprises. Community-based, grassroots and spontaneous initiatives can also be part of the SSE. As stated in the [OECD Recommendation on the Social and Solidarity Economy and Social Innovation](#), the activity of these entities is typically driven by social objectives, values of solidarity, the primacy of people over capital and, in most cases, by democratic and participative governance. SSE entities distinguish themselves in two respects: their *raison d'être*, as they primarily address social needs and pursue a social purpose, and their way of operating because they implement specific business models based on collaboration, typically at the local level.⁸

Source: (Migliaro, 2019^[12]), Solidarity Economy Roads: Chapter 2 - The Road of the Poor and the Popular Economy. Grassroots Economic Organizing (GEO), <https://geo.coop/story/solidarity-economy-roads-chapter-2>; (OECD, 2023^[13])

2. People – Supporting social inclusion and addressing the needs of disadvantaged groups

What's the issue?

In LAC, the social and solidarity economy (SSE) can further grow its role in supporting vulnerable groups through new partnerships with government. In LAC, SSE organisations work closely with vulnerable segments of the population, such as women, young people, migrants, and indigenous people. Often their effectiveness is built on the involvement of their target groups in the development of their activities to tailor to their needs and build trust. One of the main ways the SSE supports these groups is by providing job opportunities to individuals excluded from the labour market. Policy initiatives can lower the barriers to local job creation by the SSE. Policy initiatives can also provide organisations with a stronger role in labour market policies and greater financing opportunities.

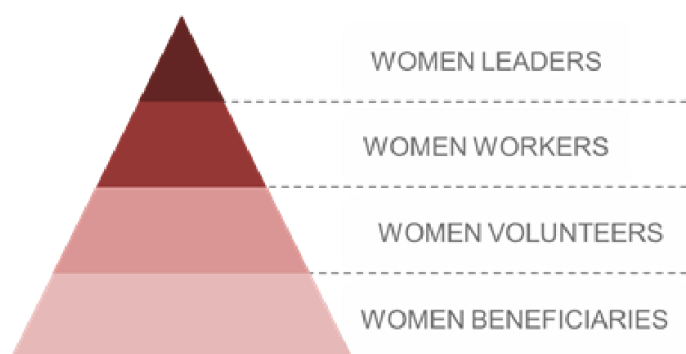
The social and productive inclusion of disadvantaged groups

Women

The SSE can contribute a notable share of jobs in an economy, especially for women. In countries such as Belgium, France and Spain, the SSE is estimated to account for up to 10% of employment. In other countries, over 60% of SSE employees are estimated to be women, reaching as high as 74% in countries such as Belgium (OECD, 2023^[14])⁹. In LAC countries, SSE employment is also significant, albeit women do not necessarily account for the majority of SSE employment likely due to the higher shares of agricultural co-operatives in SSE employment. In Brazil, for example, women represent 44% of employment in the solidarity economy (2018) (OECD, 2024^[15]).

As the SSE grows in LAC, more opportunities may be open to women. Women may not only join the SSE as workers and employees, for example within co-operatives or social enterprises, but also as leaders, volunteers and the recipients of services provided by the SSE (Figure 2.1). Developing the SSE in different economic sectors of LAC economies presents an opportunity to improve the economic conditions of many women with low levels of skills.

Figure 2.1. Women are involved both as employees, members and recipients of SSE entities



Source: (OECD, 2023^[14]), “Beyond pink-collar jobs for women and the social economy”, *OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Papers*, No. 2023/07, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/44ba229e-en>.

Women are attracted by the SSE’s values, employment arrangements, smaller pay gaps with men and its capacity to empower. The values of many organisations, such as commitment to developing human potential and promoting social justice, align with the aspirations of women (Baruah, 2023^[16]). They can also provide a way to elevate the visibility of non-market or informal economic activities predominantly performed by women, such as care and domestic work, and progressively integrate them into formal activity. Driven by their member-centered workplaces, SSE entities also tend to provide greater flexibility for women in terms of working hours, part-time work opportunities and diversity and inclusion policies (OECD, 2023^[14]). Across the majority of OECD countries for which data is available, the share of management positions held by women is higher in SSE enterprises than in the overall economy.¹⁰

In addition to the employment opportunities they provide, women are also the beneficiaries of SSE activities in LAC. In Brazil, for example, *Clubes de Troca* founded by members of a community provide a place for women to build a social and economic network through fair trade of goods and services (CEFURIA, n.d.^[17]). Across LAC, the NGO *No Pausa* provides awareness around menopause through research programmes, awareness campaigns and training modules for companies and public administrations about the effects of menopause on women in the workplace (No Pausa, 2024^[18]).

Youth

The SSE also offers values-driven employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for young people in LAC. Survey evidence suggests young people are increasingly concerned with ethical leadership and social values in their careers, making the SSE’s socially driven goals and democratic governance attractive factors for those born after 1989 (O’Boyle, 2021^[19]). In Brazil, for example, people aged under 25 account for 26% of the workforce in social enterprises, and those aged between 25 and 39 account for 46% of social enterprise employment (Möller, 2020^[20]). The 2021 OECD Youth and Social Enterprise (YSE) survey revealed multiple potential advantages brought about by social enterprises for young people, including the potential to generate social innovation and innovative solutions for local issues and employment opportunities (Figure 2.2) (OECD, 2022^[21]).

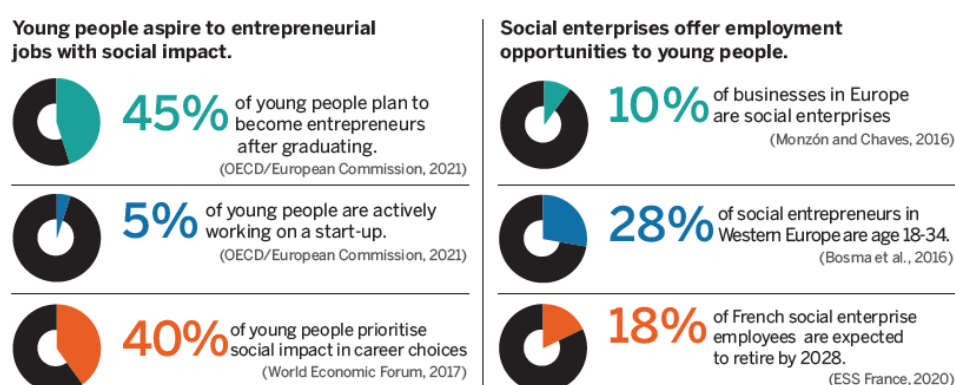
Social enterprises can help young people acquire work experience as well as essential leadership and transformative skills for better job prospects. Young people who have acquired people-centred and sustainability-focussed mind-sets and skills as leaders in social enterprises carry these into the wider economy and support its transformation towards more sustainable practices as intrapreneurs (i.e. employees within an organisation who apply entrepreneurial approaches to advance innovation and

organisational development) (Grayson, 2011^[22]) (Huang, L., S. Yang Lin and Y. Hsieh, 2021^[23]). In this context, the familiarity with social enterprises prior to entering labour markets can be an important factor. A large number of higher education institutions in different regions of the world already engage with social enterprises for this purpose. For example, 89% of higher education institutions in the United Kingdom surveyed by the British Council, along with 88% in Mexico and 62% in the United States, were working with social enterprises in 2016 (Council/SERIO, 2016^[24]).

Young people in LAC can benefit from SSE jobs due to the specific forms of exclusion they face.

Young people experience higher levels of unemployment and inactivity. In countries such as Colombia, young men with low-to-medium income face a higher risk of involvement with gang activity (Blattman, Rodriguez Uribe and Tobón, 2024^[25]). Employment and community engagement, on the other hand, can reduce the risk that a young person will join a criminal network. The SSE offers a pathway for youth, whether through social entrepreneurship or membership of an existing SSE entity, to enter the labour market. In 2021, Mexico's National Institute for the Social Economy (INAES) hosted the *Encuentro Iberoamericano de Juventudes: Reconstruir el mundo desde la Economía Social y Solidaria* to give LAC-wide visibility to the SSE's potential to support young people (INAES, 2021^[26]).

Figure 2.2. Young people and social enterprises

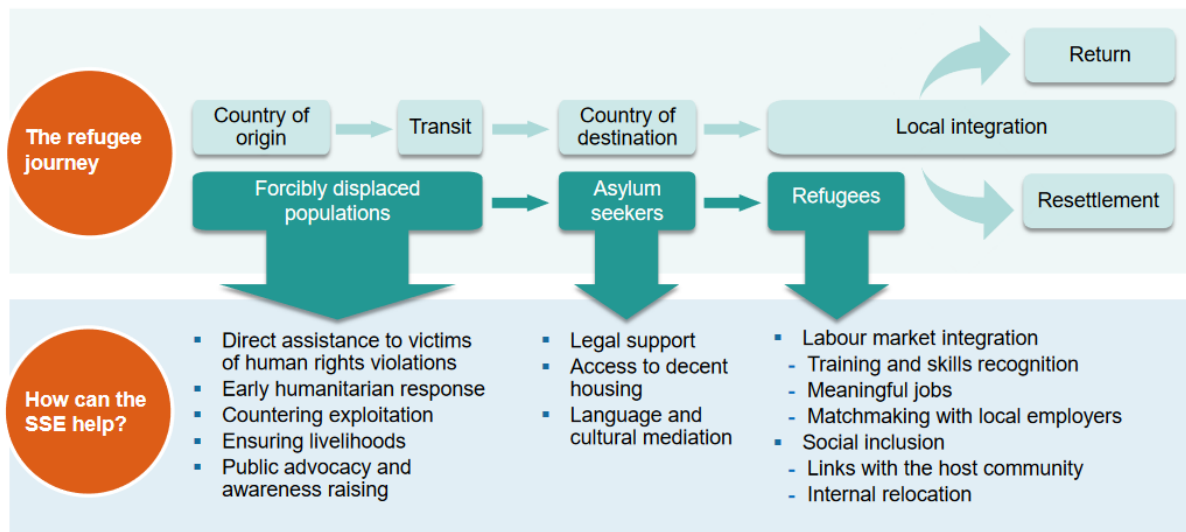


Source: Based on various sources compiled in (OECD, 2022^[21]), "Unlocking the potential of youth-led social enterprises", OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Papers, No. 2022/11, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/d5bddad8-en>.

Migrants

SSE entities also play a strategic role in supporting asylum seekers throughout their journey from and into LAC countries. In mid-2023, 22.1 million were displaced in the Americas (UNHCR, 2024^[27]). LAC represents one third of all new asylum applications in the world according to UNHCR. Over 7.7 million Venezuelans have left their home country alone since 2015 (IDB, OECD, and UNHCR, 2023^[28]).¹¹ SSE entities, such as grassroots associations, international NGOs or start-ups, support refugees in their country of origin, through transit countries and in host countries through different forms of humanitarian, legal, social and labour market support (Figure 2.3^{Error! Reference source not found.}). In Mexico, for example, organisations such as the *Centro Mexicano Pro Bono*, the *Fundación Barra Mexicana* or *Asylum Access Mexico* work along the country's borders to provide legal support and counselling to refugees (Centro Mexicano Pro Bono, 2024^[29]; Fundación Barra Mexicana, 2024^[30]; Asylum Access Mexico, 2024^[31]; OECD, 2023^[32]). (Box 2.1)

Figure 2.3. SSE entities support forcibly displaced people, asylum seekers and refugees throughout their journey



Source: (OECD, 2023^[32]), "The social and solidarity economy as a partner along the refugee journey", *OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Papers*, No. 2023/15, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/174514e3-en>.

In host countries such as Colombia and Mexico, SSE entities help asylum seekers receive the administrative, social and labour market support they need. Associations and grassroots organisations offer help with services such as applications, legal proceedings, translation and access to social services such as housing and health care. SSE entities also act as effective links to the labour market through their close links with communities and knowledge of local employment and training opportunities. Across LAC, for example, the Tent Partnership for Refugees (Tent) provides guidance to business on how to hire and train refugees, including partnerships that helped refugees find work in Colombia and Peru (OECD, 2023^[32]).

Box 2.1. In Mexico, the SSE supports the professional and social integration of migrants

The SSE and civil society organisations support migrants along their journey by providing free legal services, advocacy, and representation to ensure access to justice and protection. When arriving at a destination country, migrants' right to access independent, impartial, prompt justice that guarantees equality and non-discrimination is often violated. However, SSE entities can be useful in protecting human rights for migrants by guiding migrants through complex legal systems, supporting the exercise of their rights, or advocating for improved access to their rights or the establishment of better rights.

In Mexico, SSE entities and civil society organisations such as Centro Mexicano Pro Bono, Fundación Barra Mexicana, and Asylum Access Mexico address issues such as unfair access to legal representation and systemic deficiencies in the justice system:

- **Centro Mexicano Pro Bono (CMPB)** supports civil society organisations and vulnerable groups, including migrants during the initial phase of their arrival in the destination country. CPMB offers free-of-charge advisory and legal representation services in areas such as real estate, and labour matters, among others.
- **Fundación Barra Mexicana (FBM)** provides free legal services to low-income individuals, including migrants, who face legal barriers to accessing justice in Mexico. These barriers can range from an inability to pay for private legal representation to more structural issues like discrimination. FBM uses the law as a tool for social change, working to prevent disproportionate sentences and support migrants' social integration. Through pro bono legal work, educational training, and partnerships, FBM helps ensure that vulnerable groups, including migrants, can have access to justice and equality.
- **Asylum Access Mexico (AAM)** offers free legal services to help migrants overcome legal barriers such as unlawful detention and restricted access to employment often faced during the initial phase of the migrant journey. Through pro bono advisory and legal counseling, AAM aims to improve living and working conditions, and facilitate access to justice and protection for refugees seeking asylum in Mexico. AAM also contributes to legal community empowerment allowing refugee communities and their allies "to understand, use and shape the laws that affect them". Lastly, AAM advocates for better policies affecting migrants in Mexico and train government officials to improve migrant protections.

Source: Centro Mexicano Pro Bono. (2024). <https://www.probono.mx/>; Fundación Barra Mexicana. (2024). <https://fbma.org.mx/>; Fundación Barra Mexicana AC. (2021). *Strategic plan of the Barra Mexicana AC Foundation for the period 2021–2026*; Asylum Access Mexico. (2024). *Where we work*. <https://asylumaccess.org/where-we-work/mexico/>; OECD. (2023). The social and solidarity economy as a partner along the refugee journey. *OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Papers*, No. 2023/15. OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/174514e3-en>.

Public employment services collaborate with the SSE to reach the most disadvantaged

In LAC, the SSE's close relationship with vulnerable groups can support employment and training policies. Policies can provide a more amenable framework for public employment services (PES) to support SSE entities to the benefit of jobseekers and vulnerable groups. For example, in France, legal frameworks outline a role for social enterprises to recruit vulnerable jobseekers to prepare them for the job market. Associations rely partially on volunteers and outside funding to deliver services to vulnerable people. In LAC, partnerships between PES and the SSE present an opportunity to leverage their unique proximity to fragile segments of society.

Different types of relationships between employment services and the SSE could be further developed. SSE entities such as social enterprises or co-operatives become employers of vulnerable people when they hire jobseekers. Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISE), economic entities which operate with the main objective of helping vulnerable people with social and professional integration, can benefit from legal recognition to serve this role (ENSIE, n.d.^[33]). SSE entities can specialise or provide wrap-around services for the general or specific challenges faced by vulnerable people, ranging from health and psycho-social issues, to isolation, debt, or housing. In LAC, the breadth of grassroots organisations supporting vulnerable groups could be further supported through new funding mechanisms through employment services.

Coordination between government services and SSE entities can provide new ways of helping individuals facing complex social challenges. In Argentina, legislation such as Law 13298 on the Promotion and Protection of the Integral Rights of Children, Youth and Adolescents encouraged collaboration between government and civil society for socio-professional integration programmes (Ferraris, 2022^[34]). In Buenos Aires Province, partnership between municipal government and civil society led to joint programmes for vulnerable people (Buenos Aires Province, 2024^[35])¹². Partnerships can offer new ways of supporting individuals as the SSE brings territorial knowledge and relationships with community businesses (IDB, 2014^[36]; Jacinto, 2016^[37]) (Box 2.2). Different relationships that LAC countries can leverage with the SSE to jointly deliver policy objectives are displayed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Policy makers in LAC countries can partner with SSE entities to strengthen policy outcomes in employment

Partnership goals	SSE provides a service	SSE employs a vulnerable person for work integration	The SSE and government coordinate programmes
Description	Contract to achieve programme objectives	In-work training and/or job placement	Programme co-construction or coordination
Example	Public employment service procures intensive counselling service from an association for a young jobseeker	Work integration experience in a cooperative for a long-term unemployed job seeker	Public employment service consults local social enterprises to understand social challenges in a territory

Source: Author's elaboration.

Box 2.2. In Argentina, the SSE and civil society is a partner of subnational government to support young people into employment and community life

The Province of Buenos Aires works with civil society around youth policies

In Argentina, the Buenos Aires Provincial government collaborates with civil society organisations (CSOs), including SSE organisations (e.g. associative forms, cooperatives, grassroots organisations), for youth policies related to labour market integration through different channels. The Province can delegate the implementation of youth employment or training programmes to a CSO. CSOs benefit from the outreach of public institutions, such as schools, vocational training centers, or social services to connect with young people. CSOs can develop programmes that align with Provincial policies. These programmes, tailored to the needs of youth, may receive public funding under a model of "public-private shared management". CSOs can work to influence public policies, using their accumulated expertise from prior projects to contribute to broader public strategies.

The Envión programme

Envión is a social inclusion program aimed at supporting vulnerable youth. Envión establishes centers where the youth receive personalised training with the aim of improving their access to school, local jobs and social and cultural development opportunities. Services such as educational and vocational training, psychological and social counseling, and personalised mentorship are delivered by CSOs. CSOs ensure that local needs are met through the programme and provide feedback to the government with the aim of improving the programme or general policies.

Source: Jacinto, C. (2016). Redefining employability in training and labor insertion programs for young people: The role of Civil Society Organizations. In E. Faur (Ed.), *Rethinking social inclusion: Public policies and civil society in Argentina (1991-2016)*, Fundación Tzedaká – Capital Intelectual; Buenos Aires Province (2024). Envión. Retrieved from https://www.gba.gob.ar/desarrollo_de_la_comunidad/asistencia/envion.

The social economy can help facilitate transitions from informal to formal jobs

The SSE, and co-operatives in particular, can play a significant role in addressing the challenges posed by informality. In LAC, small-scale, often informal, entrepreneurship is prolific in many urban peripheries and rural areas. For these producers, cooperativism offers a starting point for entrepreneurs to upscale economic activity through association, or at times developing co-operative forms of joint self-employment (OECD, 2022^[38]). Multiple factors related to the structure of worker co-operatives encourage the formalisation process, including economies of scale and access to social protection programmes (Figure 2.4). Policies help co-operatives grow and formalise activity.

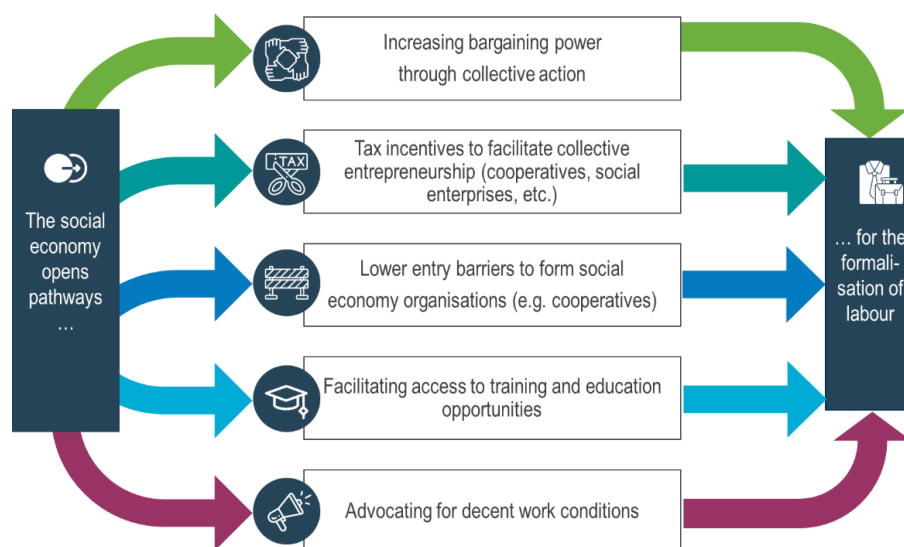
LAC countries have lowered the minimum number of people required to form a co-operative to facilitate their growth among small informal businesses. In 2016, Chile reduced the minimum number of people to form a co-operative from ten to five (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, 2023^[39]). In 2024, Costa Rica reduced the minimum from twenty to eight (INFOCOOP, 2024^[40]). By lowering barriers to entry, small groups of informal workers, often operating in the popular economy, have an avenue to progressively formalise their activity.

While tax incentives are used to promote co-operatives, wrap-around measures can help small-scale or young co-operatives to raise productivity. Productivity policies intended for SMEs can be expanded to the SSE. Productivity policies can include sectoral and value chain development. Policies can support co-operative internationalisation (OECD, 2023^[41]). Entrepreneurship policies can support access to international networks, trade fairs, and tailored advisory.

Workforce development and innovation policies can help the SSE and popular economy organisations advance towards formal activity. When a co-operative is of small size, as for other forms of SMEs, it inhibits investment in employee skills, a strong driver of productivity growth for small firms. High direct and indirect costs, such as training expenses and uncertain returns on investment, can be a barrier for SME investment in skilling programmes (Marchese, 2019^[42]). Although co-operatives' democratic structure encourages inward training, policy can encourage investment in worker skills. In Colombia, for example, 1988 Law 79 outlines that co-operatives must allocate one-fifth of surpluses to an education fund (OECD, 2022^[43]). SME workforce development policies can also include a digital dimension that encourage employees to adopt digital technologies (Kergroach, 2021^[44]).

Through legislation, co-operatives can also strengthen access to social security contributions. Legal frameworks tie co-operative status to social security contributions, such as pension contributions or occupational health and safety. Supervision systems are used to confirm if co-operatives meet regulatory requirements around social insurance and working conditions, preventing the misuse of co-operatives for subcontracting which is observed in some countries (OECD, 2022^[38]).

Figure 2.4. Pathways through which the social and solidarity economy contributes to reducing informality



Source: Conclusion drawn from OECD (2022), "From informal to formal jobs: The contribution of co-operatives in Colombia", OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Papers, No. 2022/07, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/28214bf5-en>.

3. **Places – Leveraging social capital to provide innovative solutions to spatial inequalities**

What is the issue?

Access to essential services is unequal across territories in Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC). Rural regions in Colombia such as Chocó, Vaupés, and Vichada have weaker health outcomes than urban regions, including the share of the population affiliated with the healthcare system and children with complete vaccination schemes (OECD, 2022^[45]). Socio-economic inequalities compound gaps in access to services. Many of the territories with the weakest access to public services also suffer from lower levels of economic development. In Mexico, GDP per capita was nearly 3.5 times higher in the 20% of regions with the highest GDP per capita relative to regions with the lowest 20% GDP per capita (OECD, 2022^[45]). Extreme forms of poverty persist in LAC, concentrating in vulnerable territories on the outskirts of major cities or in isolated rural areas.

Social innovation helps reduce gaps in access to essential services. Social innovation offers novel services, goods, and relationships that introduce solutions to persistent social problems. Social innovation is an inherently territorial phenomenon as it occurs to resolves issues faced by a community. Social innovation is a distinctive feature of the SSE. Local networks often drive social innovation in a specific territorial context. Groups such as agricultural or waste management co-operatives, neighborhood associations, and small solidarity-based productive units, bring solutions to issues such as resource management, weak access to markets, and homelessness.

In urban peripheries or rural territories in LAC, municipal or regional governments can stimulate, accompany, and help scale grassroots innovation. Tools include public procurement, social vouchers, and policies that develop the skills of those working in the SSE. They can also support the formalisation of informal entities into SSE forms such as associations, co-operatives, or social enterprises.

Regions and cities develop strategies for the SSE and social innovation

There is potential for subnational as well as national governments to develop strategies for social innovation to meet local needs. In countries such as Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, subnational governments have taken initiatives to support the SSE. For example, nine states out of 27 in Mexico have their own SSE laws, along with multiple Brazilian states (OECD, 2023^[13]). Regions and cities are uniquely positioned to support social innovation, as subnational governments can involve the SSE in resolving issues facing their constituency. Paired with national frameworks, subnational policy making on the SSE recognises the sectors' close ties to local economic activity, such as the circular economy, and territorial dynamics such as geographic isolation, housing shortages or homelessness.

In some countries, however, few subnational governments have devoted resources to the SSE, despite the important role it can play in meeting the needs of residents. Across the OECD, and

especially in Europe, cities (e.g. Barcelona, Brussels, Strasbourg, and Paris) and regions have enabled the SSE and social innovation to access resources and networks through dedicated strategies. Places promote social innovation through programmes that foster collaboration between actors, financing and political support for these initiatives.

Some regions and cities dedicate resources and strategic thinking to develop regional or local strategies. Regions in multiple OECD countries have dedicated substantial resources and attention to SSE strategies. In Quebec, Canada, the provincial government adopted a law on the social economy, which granted the government legal purview to support the SSE (Quebec Province, 2013^[46]). In Navarra, Spain, the regional government has created a specific department for Social Rights, the Social Economy and Employment, accompanied by regional plans to support the SSE (Navarra Government, 2024^[47]).

Cities and regions have also been champions of the SSE in multiple LAC countries. Compared to Europe, subnational policies in LAC countries tend to focus on supporting the economic potential of co-operatives and small productive units. For example:

- In Argentina, the Province of Buenos Aires operates a dedicated department for SSE development to promote social entrepreneurship and the economic activity of SSE entities (Province of Buenos Aires, 2024^[48]).
- In Brazil, federal states have or have had policies for SSE development. In the state of Ceara, for example, the regional government helps institutionalise the SSE, encourage entrepreneurship, support access to circular economy services, and stimulate territorial development (State of Ceara, n.d.^[49]).
- In Colombia, Medellin has had a policy for the SSE since 2011, as well as decade-long strategic plan (2016-2025) for its development that earmarks financial resources for SSE development and sets strategic objectives (City of Medellín, 2015^[50]).
- In Mexico, nine Mexican states have developed strategies and/or laws for the SSE. The state of Jalisco runs a programme to promote the SSE focused on financing projects that help fight poverty, in line with the state's social development strategy (State of Jalisco, n.d.^[51]). Mexico City administers an SSE programme that provides economic support and technical assistance to co-operatives in the city (Mexico City, 2024^[52]). The state of Veracruz passed a law that promotes the SSE (State of Veracruz, 2018^[53]).

Subnational strategies finance, structure, and provide a network for the SSE. City halls, provincial governments, and state government provide financing for activities such as training and education, strengthen value chains, perform regulatory reform, and build networks. In the city of Medellin, Colombia, for example, the 2015-2025 SSE plan devotes 30%, 40%, 10%, and 20% of its budget respectively to education and training for the SSE, measures to strengthen and accompany the SSE, SSE network development, and communication efforts around the SSE. The state of Ceara, Brazil, supports the SSE through actions that help structure the sector, such as through the creation of a sectoral council, registration, and product certification, while also deploying entrepreneurship development efforts around value chain development and support for commercialisation of goods and services produced by the SSE.

There are many good practices for regional and local SSE strategies. Foremost, strategies should focus on a selected number of clear priorities to avoid capacity challenges, with secure sources of funding tied to objectives (OECD, 2020^[54]). Subnational efforts need to consider the national legal status of the different types of SSE entities. Regional and local strategies also need to embed policy thinking around the SSE in tandem with other social and economic priorities. Entities themselves also need to be involved in strategy development to ensure alignment of priorities and capacity. Finally, the creation of regional social economy councils or collaborations with universities can help subnational government measure the impact of local SSE activity. In Mexico, for example, the national government's NODESS programme

institutionalises and provides actions to support sectoral clusters of SSE entities (Government of Mexico, 2024^[55]).

Social innovation can be a component of subnational SSE strategies. Social innovation is typically local. Social innovation is driven by novel relationships and methods between actors seeking to resolve problems in their community. In Europe, initiatives such as circular economy programmes, social grocery initiatives and local job guarantee schemes have helped mitigate poverty or improve the reuse of materials based on territorial needs (Oosterlynck, Kazepov and Novy, 2019^[56]). In LAC, social innovation flourishes due to the very high level of civil society activity that seeks to respond to enduring social problems (ECLAC, 2010^[57]). Although cities such as Medellín include social innovation in their local SSE strategies, this pillar of SSE activity is not always prominent across local government approaches to SSE development in LAC.

Community-based initiatives in LAC provide a favourable environment for social innovation to grow and scale. OECD research on social innovation suggests a local “ecosystem” approach best encourages the growth of social innovation (OECD, 2021^[58]). Subnational governments can build a social innovation ecosystem composed of three pillars:

- Subnational policy can build favourable **framework conditions** for social innovation, including leveraging national legislation and regulations, promoting a social innovation culture and promoting collaboration among SSE actors.
- Subnational government can advance **policy implementation**, including measures that create a market for social innovations, as well as those that strengthen the quality and quantity of social innovation initiatives.
- Finally, policymakers can endorse **dynamics reporting**, which involves measuring impact and adapting social innovation to results and changes in external conditions and objectives.

Cities and regions in the OECD have developed an ecosystem approach to spur social innovation locally. In the Flemish Region of Belgium, for example, the regional government supports the Social Innovation Factory (European Commission, 2024^[59]). The Factory supports social innovators through knowledge, networks and access to financial partners. The City of Barcelona, Spain, implemented a social innovation strategy between 2021 and 2023 with three objectives, including access to rights, a new social model for the city and digital transformation (City of Barcelona, 2021^[60]). Finally, through public procurement, subnational governments in LAC can pair policy objectives with SSE development through public procurement strategies that are conducive to the SSE (Box 3.1).

Box 3.1. In countries such as Brazil and Colombia, government programmes encourage SSE development through the procurement of goods and services

Conducive frameworks and incentives can encourage SSE procurement

Social procurement entails the purchases of goods and services to create social value. According to an OECD report on social procurement, subnational government accounts for around 64% of public procurement spending, which in turn represents an average of almost 13% of GDP on average in OECD countries. Social procurement is an implementation tool for subnational SSE strategies, as it can provide financial opportunities for the social innovation in different sectors in which a City Hall of regional government seeks social impact, such as waste management, work integration, or agriculture. For the SSE, procurement is a precious resource to diversify funding which can be reliant on a few project-based sources or weak access to markets.

Procurement programmes for school lunches in the LAC region and social procurement in Colombia's 2022-2026 National Development Plan

In the LAC region, national and subnational administrations have deployed social procurement programmes, notably for school lunch programmes. Through these programmes, public administration purchase food for school lunches from small popular economy agriculture or co-operatives.

- In Brazil, 30% of purchases made for school made through the *Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar* (PNAE) come from family agriculture.
- In Chile, programmes such as the *Junta Nacional de Auxilio Escolar y Becas* involve quotas for local-sourced food in school meals.
- In Peru, the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion *Programa Nacional de Alimentación Escolar Qali Warma* purchases local produce for school meals.

In Colombia, the National Development Plan 2022-2026 broadened the regulatory framework for social procurement from the popular and solidarity economy. State entities can procure goods and services with popular and SSE entities in sectors as diverse as rural housing and small roads to food production and sanitation.

Source: (OECD, 2023^[61]), "Buying social with the social economy: OECD Global Action "Promoting Social and Solidarity Economy Ecosystems"", OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Papers, No. 2023/19, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c24fcd0-en>.

In LAC's rural territories, social innovation enhances access to public services

Unleashing the potential of social innovation can help overcome challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean's rural territories. Compared to urban areas, rural areas face a high level of outmigration, which weakens their capacity to attract people and skills needed for local economic activity. Sparse population and increasing pressures on public finances weaken access to public services and infrastructure such as health care, education and training, and transportation. In LAC countries, geographic barriers, extensive landmasses, and less developed transport infrastructure can accentuate the challenges of rurality. Social innovation – as a form of bottom-up innovation that seeks new and cost-effective answers to societal problems – has flourished in rural contexts, striving to maintain social inclusion and advance productive development in adverse conditions.

Social innovation in rural areas responds to specific spatial challenges. The SIMRA project, Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas, catalogued more than 300 social innovation experiences in Europe

and the Mediterranean basin in rural contexts (SIMRA, 2020^[62]; OECD, 2024^[63]). Projects tackle issues such as depopulation, sustainability of agriculture, forest management, the economic exclusion of women, or the integration of migrants. In the French overseas department of Guadeloupe, in the Caribbean, the VALAB project finances a farmer-led approach to shifting from vanilla monoculture production to more diversified ecosystemic forms of agriculture, providing more stable income to farmers and protecting threatened cultural heritage (SIMRA, 2020^[64]). In thirteen localities in rural Peru, a social innovation partnership between the CAF development bank and Agualimpia, an NGO, strengthened citizen knowledge of water management to improve access to potable water (CAF, 2021^[65]).

Governments and regions can promote and scale existing social innovations in a LAC rural context. Framework conditions and implementation measure need to consider several gaps compared to an urban context (OECD, 2024^[66]).¹³ Subnational governments in rural areas in LAC may have limited capacity, both in terms of staff knowledge and financing, requiring national governments to consider capacity building options. Policies may need to consider ways to foster civil society linkages over long distances, given the weaker presence of civil society and the SSE may be less dense than urban areas. Policy to stimulate rural social innovation may also consider participatory processes for civil society to engage service delivery bodies to co-construct solutions. Regional governments, operating in tandem with the local level, may have a more prominent role to play in a LAC context to connect intra-regional social innovation.

4. Firms – Newer SSE forms support collective entrepreneurship

What is the issue?

The social and solidarity economy (SSE) is constantly evolving in LAC, shaped by the unique social, economic, and political contexts of the region. In recent years, there has been a surge in innovative SSE entities and community-based initiatives, some of which leverage technology such as platform co-operatives to foster community engagement, generate employment opportunities, and enhance local economic and social development (OECD, 2023^[67]).

SEE entities also participate in multilateral flows of goods and services, investment, and intangible assets. Some SSE entities go international to scale up their impact and reach a wider group or to strengthen their capacities to deliver their social mission for the existing target. For example, Mexico's National Institute of Social Economy (INAES) implemented specific initiatives (Box 4.1) to strengthen, link and generate SSE entities through inward internationalisation strategies including the importation and adaptation of organisational business models, the adoption of new technologies, and the promotion of knowledge and know-how transfer through collaboration via international multilateral networks for capacity building (OECD, 2023^[68]).

Box 4.1. INAES Rodando Juntas initiative (Mexico)

Rodando Juntas was a pilot project which was born out of the need to increase formal social protection, especially for self-employed and informal sector workers in the co-operative sector. It was carried out jointly with the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) as manager and investor, the InterAmerican Development Bank (IDB), the Ministry of Labour and Employment Promotion of Mexico City, and CoopCycle, an international federation of bicycle delivery co-operatives. CoopCycle's digital platform has a cycle-logistics tool that allows Mexican bike messaging collectives to deliver more efficiently and competitively. Since the software is protected by a reciprocity licence, which reserves its use to co-operatives, the requirement established by CoopCycle to license the platform was the commitment of the bike messaging collectives to form a co-operative and become legally constituted within a period of no more than two years. Two prominent inward-oriented flows were targeted to achieve these objectives: i) forming an agreement to disseminate and transfer knowledge and best practices; and ii) an international licensing agreement that allows bike messenger collectives to make use of CoopCycle's digital platform.

Source: Case study "Building capacities not co-operatives: an inward approach for the internationalisation of social economy policies in Mexico" for OECD Global Action PLP.

Social enterprises

Many countries around the world are increasingly recognising the contribution of social enterprises to economic and inclusive growth and sustainable development. Some form of legislation on social enterprises already exists in 16 EU countries, and explicit policies or strategies to boost their development exist in the other 11 EU countries (OECD, 2022^[69]). For example, in the European Union, based on national-level data, there are over 246 000 social enterprises with variation in legal forms among member states, of which almost 43 000 are *ex lege* and over 203 000 are *de facto* social enterprises (European Commission, 2024^[70]). These entities are active in a broad range of sectors, offering innovative solutions to pressing challenges (Box 4.2). For example, they help address demographic changes linked to ageing populations (e.g. Italy, Luxembourg); climate change; regional development, and revitalisation of remote communities (e.g. Slovakia, Spain); care activities, education, community development, environment and energy, social housing (e.g. France), and migrant integration (e.g. France, Spain). They are also active in work integration activities (WISEs, work integration social enterprises).

Box 4.2. What is a social enterprise?

A **social enterprise** is an entity, which trades goods and services, fulfils a societal objective and whose main purpose is not the maximisation of profit for the owners but its reinvestment for the continued attainment of its societal goals (OECD, 2022^[71]). It has the capacity for bringing innovative solutions to social problems, among which are social exclusion and unemployment (OECD, 1999^[72]). The OECD definition considers that social enterprises emerge from the social economy and extend the scope of the social economy beyond its traditional forms.

Source: (OECD, 2022^[71]), (OECD, 1999^[72]), (European Commission, 2011^[73])

In LAC, social enterprises build on grassroots efforts, including Indigenous organisations. These organisations typically leverage principles of collective and self-management, along with social capital to address the region's unequal economic and social dynamics. As a result, small businesses owned and managed collectively by beneficiaries have developed, providing a pathway to improve living standards through market-driven strategies. Among these entities are Indigenous and Community-Based Organisations (COM), which represent one of the oldest forms of organisations resembling social enterprises in the region and their origins can be traced back to the indigenous societies. Examples of such organisations can be found in Bolivia and Mexico, while similar patterns also exist in Chile, Ecuador, and Brazil (Luiz Gaiger et, 2019^[74]).

Additionally, it is common that co-operatives operate as de facto social enterprises in LAC. This refers to organisations that share the principles and mission of social enterprises in practice, albeit not legally formed as such. For example, in Colombia *de facto* social enterprises (Box 4.3) can be found in sectors such as the financial, savings, and credit sector; agriculture, livestock, and food industries, insurance, transport; social services and health, among others. The 2018 performance report published by Confecoop, the confederation of co-operatives in Colombia, underlines the relevance and impact of this type of organisations and indicates that co-operative services reach all 32 departments of Colombia through 3 205 active co-operatives accounting for nearly 6.3 million members and 139 093 direct jobs in the country.

Box 4.3. Colombia: *De facto* social enterprises in the absence of legal frameworks

In Colombia, it is common to find co-operatives operating as *de facto* social enterprises, i.e. organisations that are not legally constituted as social enterprises but share the principles and mission of social enterprises in practice. Colombia has identified a specific role for co-operatives and more broadly for the social and solidarity economy, to support transition to formal labour. Co-operatives alone account for 64% of social economy organisations, generate around 140 000 direct jobs and include almost 6.3 million members. The National Development Plan 2022-2026 acknowledges that strengthening the National Plan for the Promotion of Solidarity Economy and Rural Co-operative will contribute to decent work and rural employment. Since 1988, Colombia has adopted laws and regulatory decrees aimed at the formalisation, growth, monitoring, and control of co-operatives. The Law 79 of 1988 and the Law 454 of 1998 were fundamental for co-operatives and solidarity economy, as they established conceptual frameworks and rules for the regulation of these organisations and the overall solidarity economy.

Legislation introduced in 2020 to reduce the minimum number of people required to establish a co-operative from twenty to three, has made them even more accessible and easy to establish. Unlike for-profit enterprises, co-operatives are required to allocate at least 20% of their surplus to invest, through an education fund, in education, training and capacity building for their members and communities. In addition to the simplified process to create a co-operative compared to other firms, they also benefit from a specific 20% income tax regime compared to 35% for traditional enterprises. These factors, in addition to better working conditions and access to social security benefits, are important magnets towards formality.

Source: (Hernández Salazar, 2018^[75]) (ILO, 2019^[76]) (OECD, 2022^[69]) (OECD, 2022^[77])

Supporting the development of social enterprises could bring many benefits to LAC. Social enterprises are important drivers for job and economic value creation (CIRIEC, 2017^[78]). For example, in the United Kingdom, social enterprises employed roughly 5% of the national workforce in 2017 (Social Enterprise UK, 2018^[79]). Moreover, many social enterprises such as work integration social enterprises (WISEs) prioritise hiring vulnerable or marginalised groups who would otherwise struggle to find employment. Supporting the development of social enterprises can enable policy makers to tackle social challenges more efficiently than would otherwise be possible. For example, Spain promoted social enterprises as a way to offset the effects of the 2008 global financial crisis, fiscal austerity and high unemployment.

Platform co-operatives

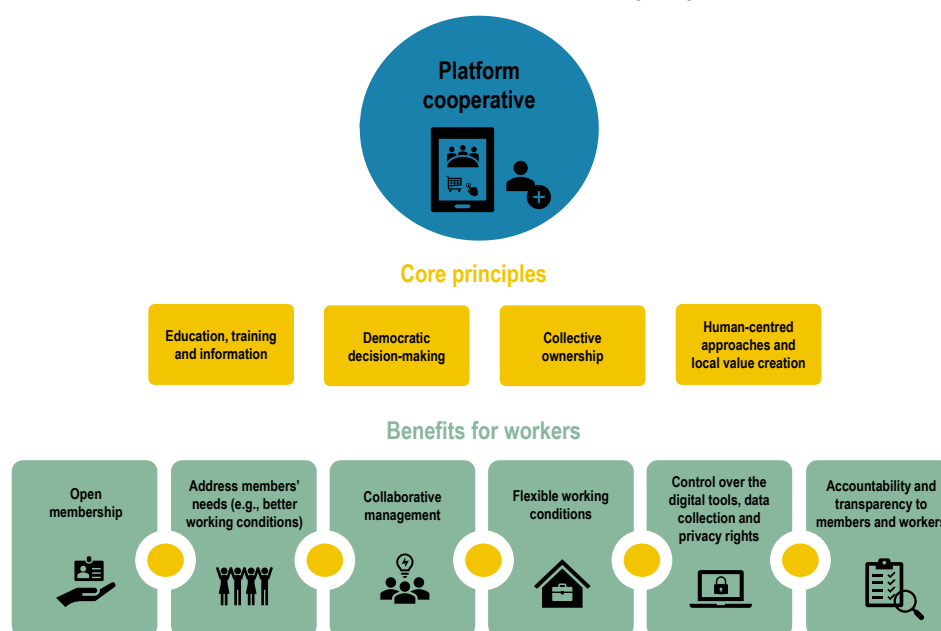
Platform co-operatives² have emerged around the world as alternatives, in reaction to the shortcomings of the sharing and gig economy. These co-operatives are digital interfaces and whose members have democratic ownership and control, whereas conventional platforms are owned by a single entity or private investors (Figure 4.1). They can be defined by two fundamental elements: the presence of a digital interface to intermediate the exchange of goods or services, and the principles of democratic

²The terms "platform co-operative(s)" and "co-operative platform(s)" are used interchangeably and thus mean the same. Both terms hold no designation as to the legal form of a co-operative as these terms can also refer to entities that adhere to the cooperative principles, irrespective of whether they formally adopt the legal form of a cooperative. Both terms hold no designation as to the legal form of a co-operative as these terms can also refer to entities that adhere to the co-operative principles, irrespective of whether they formally adopt the legal form of a co-operative.

ownership and control (Scholz et al., 2021^[80]). In LAC, in general, co-operatives are a fundamental part of the SSE, because of their important role in improving conditions for their members (e.g. housing, health insurance, microfinance), enhancing employment opportunities and creating solidarity among workers.

Figure 4.1. What is a platform co-operative?

A platform cooperative is **collectively owned and managed** by its members.
It uses a **website and/or mobile app** to intermediate the exchange of goods and/or services



Source: (OECD, 2023^[67])

Based on estimates, there are over 500 platform co-operatives worldwide¹⁴, active in many sectors (Scholz, 2020^[81]). **Based on estimates, there are over 500 platform co-operatives worldwide, active in many sectors** (Scholz, 2020^[81]). Their activity ranges from storage and management of data (Scholz and Calzada, 2021^[82]) to sectors such as culture, catering, cleaning, delivery, home services, care, transportation and tourism. For example, in Mexico, the co-operative project *Thlok Ciclo-logística* carries out deliveries exclusively by bicycle and offers a webshop and mobile e-commerce application. Its services are available to both individuals and companies. The project is supported by CoopCycle, a federation of co-operatives present in 16 countries (OECD, 2023^[67]). In Brazil, platform co-operatives came to the fore as alternatives to other platforms following events such the 2020 countrywide riders' strike (strike of delivery workers) and debates around decent work and workers' rights in the delivery sector (OECD, 2023^[67]).

Operating from the grassroots, platform co-operatives initiate local collaborations to provide services and infrastructure, thereby contributing to local development. They can help local development in general through expanding social innovation and favouring alternative approaches, such as community wealth building. They can mobilise local actors, including public authorities, social economy entities, SMEs, researchers and citizens, and facilitate their collaboration, which contributes to successful local development approaches (OECD, 2001^[83]). For example, the French car-sharing co-operative network Citiz is supported by local authorities through various channels, including the provision of capital, commitment to use, financing of installations, and support for development and communication.

Platform co-operatives have the potential to address some of the shortcomings of conventional platforms, in particular improving working conditions. This way of operating holds the potential to improve working conditions (International Cooperative Alliance, 2022^[84]) while yielding additional benefits such as enhanced worker retention, worker well-being, improved productivity, better compensation and greater worker autonomy over labour conditions (Scholz et al., 2021^[80]). Furthermore, platform co-operatives actively pursue positive impacts on working conditions by mutualising costs or promoting equitable income distribution (European Commission, 2022^[85]).

In Brazil, projects such as the Platform Co-operative Observatory and the businesses providing platform work have gained visibility (Grohmann, 2022^[87]). In 2021, a study by Unisinos University highlighted that in Brazil, platform co-operatives are relatively new and are slowly emerging either out of institutionalised cooperativism, with the legal co-operative format or as projects that take on the values of platform co-operatives, while opting for different legal forms (Silveira, Wegner and Queiroz Silva, 2021^[88]).

Community-based initiatives

In some countries, there is also a growing recognition of the engagement of communities in local economic and social development. In Mexico for instance, regulated for the 1934 land reform, *ejidos* are state-owned agricultural lands that are farmed, individually or collectively, by communities who benefit from the usufruct. These organisations are recognised as being part of the SSE in the Mexican law on the social sector of the economy (OECD, 2022^[89]).

Energy communities, or community-led energy projects, are also increasingly popular in LAC as a way to create resilient and inclusive electricity systems. Countries like Chile have launched initiatives to support these efforts, including the Energy Commune (Comuna Energética) and Energy Community (Comunidad Energética) programmes. The Energy Commune initiative, inspired by successful European models, empowers municipalities to form collectives that engage residents in renewable energy generation, energy efficiency, and education (Agencia de Sostenibilidad Energética, n.d.^[90]). Brazil and Costa Rica have a long history of citizen-led energy co-operatives that have improved electricity access in rural areas since the 1960s. Recent legislation, such as Brazil's Resolution N. 2 (2021) and Costa Rica's Law 8345 (2003), has enhanced the operational framework for these co-operatives, allowing them to integrate various renewable energy sources and adopt participatory governance models (IEA, 2024^[91]). Another example of community-led projects is RevoluSolar in Brazil, which provides solar energy to families in Rio de Janeiro's favelas and the Amazon. This co-operative model, funded by public and international partnerships, allows members to join at no cost and benefit from reduced electricity bills through net-metering, while contributing savings to support further initiatives. RevoluSolar also engages community members through training and enhancing the reliability of electricity services (IEA, 2023^[92]).

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is an innovative farming model that fosters a mutually beneficial relationship between farmers and consumers based on fairness and transparency. In a typical CSA arrangement, consumers purchase a share of a farm at the beginning of the growing season, providing farmers with funding to cultivate their crops. In return, consumers receive a regular supply of fresh, seasonal produce. This model exists worldwide, known by various names such as Teikei in Japan, AMAP (Association for the Maintenance of Small-scale Agriculture) in France, and Reciproco elsewhere. Despite the different names, the core principle remains the same: creating a direct connection between producers and consumers. CSAs have garnered attention for their potential to positively influence food choices and health. For example, in Brazil, there is an increasing engagement in community-supported agriculture (CSA), since introduced in 2011. The dual impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and recent food crisis has increased the opportunity to expand CSA (Inter-American Foundation, 2023^[93]).

Social finance and impact investing

According to the World Economic Forum, impact investing in Latin America has experienced exponential growth over the past 10 years, increasing by over 10 times to reach over USD 25 billion (World Economic Forum, 2021^[94]) Investors are increasingly looking for ways to put their funds into ventures that generate social and environmental benefits alongside financial returns. This includes funds targeted specifically at social enterprises or projects with measurable social impact. Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil stand out for their economic strength and the relatively advanced integration of impact finance within their markets (International Development Research Centre (IDRC), 2016^[95]).

The landscape of impact investing in LAC comprises a diverse range of actors, including philanthropic foundations, development finance institutions, venture capital firms, and social enterprises. Investors are recognising the value of supporting local businesses and community-focused initiatives. Recent years have seen the development of various financial instruments tailored to social impact. These include social impact bonds, community investment funds, and blended finance models that leverage public and private capital to achieve social goals. Investors are increasingly aligning their strategies with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. In LAC, this alignment has fuelled investments in sectors such as renewable energy, affordable housing, healthcare, and education.

The impact investing market in LAC is still evolving, with limited access to reliable data on impact metrics and a lack of standardised practices across the sector. Varying regulations across countries hinder cross-border investments and create complexities for international investors. Many social enterprises require support to enhance their business models and operational capacities to attract investment. Providing training and resources for these organisations is crucial. To maximize the potential of social finance and impact investing in LAC, stakeholders need to work together to address these challenges. This includes scaling up educational efforts aimed at both investors and entrepreneurs, promoting transparency in impact measurement, and fostering environments conducive to innovation. Furthermore, collaboration between government, private sector, and civil society can help create a supportive ecosystem that not only attracts investment but also drives sustainable development across the region.

5. Going forward – Implementing the OECD Recommendation in LAC

Capitalising on the full potential of the social and solidarity economy through framework conditions

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are increasingly using the social and solidarity economy (SSE) as a tool to achieve a wide range of policy objectives. The social and solidarity economy is more and more recognised for playing a major role in building inclusive and sustainable economies and societies more broadly.

The 2022 OECD Recommendation on the Social and Solidarity Economy and Social Innovation provides a comprehensive and innovative policy framework that can further capitalise on the full potential of the SSE and establish the conditions for this area to develop and thrive. The Recommendation is built around nine building blocks (Figure 5.1) which embed a holistic approach to finding concrete solutions to barriers and challenges that may hold back SSE organisations. In doing so, it can help countries, regions and cities understand how their SSE ecosystems in different country contexts could perform better and be adjusted where necessary. The Recommendation also seeks to raise the visibility of good practices, learnings from international experience, and reform processes and measures at all levels of government to facilitate change where and when needed.

Figure 5.1. Nine Pillars of the Recommendation on the Social and Solidarity Economy and Social Innovation



Implementing the Recommendation in Latin America and the Caribbean

Leverage civil society to promote a social and solidarity economy culture

LAC's thriving civil society offers opportunities for the SSE to develop further. LAC countries increasingly acknowledge efforts of civil society in different ways, including through policies that recognise specific forms of civil society initiatives. For example, in Argentina *Clubes de Barrio y de Pueblo*, play a role in addressing social challenges. Countries such as Colombia recognise and offer support to “pre-co-operatives” to help organise, structure, and launch economic and social activities. Public communication campaigns can further help to spur the interest of citizens in activities such as volunteering, collective entrepreneurship, and associative engagement.

Amplify the policy momentum through institutional frameworks for the SSE

Policies for the SSE are developing rapidly in LAC countries, offering opportunities for international mutual learning. Multiple countries have created formal bodies to support its development, ranging from the Instituto Nacional de la Economía Social (INAES) in Mexico to Ecuador's National Institute for the Popular and Solidarity Economy (IEPS) and Superintendence of the Popular and Solidarity Economy (SEPS). These institutions deliver on the multiple conditions needed for the SSE to flourish, including building sectoral networks, providing skilling opportunities, financing, and superintendence.

As the policy momentum around the SSE is growing, “one-stop shops” already created in some LAC countries are an opportunity to delineate and allocate roles and responsibilities for SSE development across levels of government. This already happening in countries such as Paraguay and Uruguay, where national institutions exist for the co-operative sector. In Brazil and Costa Rica, Labour Ministries house SSE responsibilities. Moreover, in countries such as Colombia and Mexico, subnational governments have invested policy-making efforts into the SSE.

Consider legal and regulatory frameworks

Legal and regulatory frameworks can help, when deemed necessary, to identify and recognise the SSE and its forms. Examples include Mexico and Uruguay, which passed legislation that recognise the SSE (or “popular” and solidarity economy) in its different forms, such as co-operatives and specific forms such as *ejidos* (Mexico). In other countries such as Chile and Peru, specific laws regulate SSE forms such as associations or co-operatives which benefit from recognition. LAC is reflecting on the recognition of social enterprises as part of the SSE. **National legislation is not required to recognise the SSE as countries can adopt policy-based or subnational approaches.** For example, in federal countries such as Brazil and Mexico, subnational governments play a pivotal role in creating policies on the sector.

Boost access to financial opportunities

Different sources of public financing are available to the SSE in LAC countries. To be effective, public funding strategies can consider an all-of-government approach as different parts of the state support the SSE, ranging from contracting from public employment services (e.g. work-based vocational training in the SSE in Chile) to tax incentives recognised by legislation (e.g. co-operative legislation in Colombia). Financial opportunities can be staggered based on social value proposed by a group of SSE entities. For example, parts of the SSE that provide work integration for vulnerable people can receive different levels of wage subsidies if the jobseeker has disabilities, or if he/she presents other forms of disadvantage. Countries with public agencies in place, such as Ecuador’s IEPS, provide a one-stop shop for access to financing and entrepreneurial support opportunities.

Support access to public and private markets

LAC countries facilitate the SSE’s access to both private and public procurement. Through procurement, public bodies and businesses could buy goods and services from the SSE, supporting the sector’s growth and achieving social aims. In LAC, many countries, regions, and cities already incorporate social objectives into their procurement. Procurement’s social objectives can take different forms, such as the recruitment of vulnerable individuals. In Colombia, for example, processes introduced in the National Development Plan 2022-2026 promote procurement from the popular economy. Countries can further encourage or require public bodies to include social objectives in their procurement and dispense training for officials around tendering processes with the SSE.

Private firms in LAC also purchase goods and services from the SSE as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Countries undertake certification efforts that allow procurement officials to best evaluate competitive tendering and businesses to recognise SSE-produced goods and services. Governments can also facilitate access to private markets more broadly, including consumer markets and market value chains.

Develop skills and collective entrepreneurship

LAC countries are building access to skills and entrepreneurship training for SSE workers. Some LAC countries already operate dedicated business support programmes for all forms of the SSE. Business support and skilling programmes could be made accessible to rural and urban areas, adapted to the specifics of managing an SSE, and affordable. Some countries can opt to adapt existing vocational training or business support programmes to the SSE. In Colombia, for example, the National Training Services (SENA) provides business support for workers in the agriculture co-operative sector. SENA’s rural branch – CampeSENA – is an example for other LAC countries in tailoring training programmes to a rural context. In other instance, as in Ecuador’s National Institute for the Popular and Solidarity Economy (IEPS), an SSE-specific body provides training for the sector’s workers.

Build capacity to measure impact and monitor activity

Policies increasingly support, encourage, or require social impact measurement of SSE activities.

Policies such as procurement or other forms of financing include reporting requirements for beneficiary organisations. Conditions require SSE organisations to present a measurement of the non-market impact of their activities. Public funding for the SSE, such as in regional or municipal strategies, can also ring-fence funding to help local SSE entities measure the impact of their activities. For example, local strategies can help co-operatives and social enterprises to better measure the positive effects of work integration on the vulnerable people they hire. In LAC, growing regional standards and protocols for impact measurement in the SSE could encourage intra-LAC cross-border investments and trade in the sector. Different methods exist to measure social impact, ranging from social return on investment to monetisation techniques (OECD/European Union, 2024^[96]).

Inform policy through data on the SSE

LAC countries are producing more data on the SSE. Data collection requires defining the SSE and its different components for official statistics, so as to collect data on the sector in household of labour force surveys. For example, some countries, such as Portugal, have created satellite accounts in their national accounts dedicated to the SSE. Argentina maintains statistical records on the popular economy through the National Registry of Workers in the Popular Economy (ReNaTEP). ReNaTEP is an example that could be reproduced in LAC countries that do not currently collect data and support entity registration. Territorial data and statistics on the SSE such as on employment, business turnover, and wages is important to make policies based on sectoral dynamics. Research funding can also be granted to explore statistical methods of measuring the SSE.

Stimulate social innovation through partnership

LAC countries encourage partnerships between public, private, and non-profit actors. Social innovation often takes the form of new territorial relationships that emerge to resolve a defined social challenge. Civil society or the SSE is often at the forefront of identifying a territorial challenge, such as energy supply in low-income neighbourhoods or a drought that threatens co-operative agricultural production in a rural area. Subnational governments can act as leaders to convene civil society with other stakeholders to help socially innovative solutions emerge. In Mexico, the NODESS policy formalises territorial alliances between SSE actors to find solutions to collective needs, ranging from financial challenges, youth issues, and sustainable energy, to culture, well-being and gender. Governments can create adaptable local level frameworks like NODESS to stimulate social innovation.

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¹ In Chile, more than 25% of workers hold informal jobs, while in Brazil and Costa Rica, this figure ranges from 36% to 43% respectively. The prevalence of informal employment exceeds 50% in Argentina, Colombia and Mexico and surpasses 65% in Peru.

² The resulting plurality of organisations, purposes, practices, business models and legal entities that have emerged across OECD member states and beyond makes it challenging to develop a common definition of the SSE and clear delineation of its scope. Among the diverse notions, the SSE is the most encompassing term and is increasingly used by practitioners and academics, as well as at the international level.

³ For example, social innovation could include solutions to long-term unemployment that involve the co-creation of jobs in SSE entities around the skills of unemployed people, rather than immediate market needs. Social innovative practices such as fair trade, ethical finance, organic food movements and circular economy practices are examples which have often been subsequently mainstreamed and adopted by the rest of the economy (OECD/European Commission, 2022^[131]) These innovations contributed to social and economic transformation and have led many countries to initiate policies, strategies, action plans and legal frameworks to support it. (OECD, 2020^[7]).

⁴ Some countries have also developed and recognised unique SSE entities. For example, in Mexico, ejidos are public agricultural land operated jointly by a group of farmers, while in Argentina, Clubes de Barrio are social inclusion-oriented sports clubs.

⁵ Longstanding SSE organisations, such as co-operatives, have operated in primary sectors such as agriculture and mining in LAC for decades. Recent years have seen the rise of innovative models to address new social and environmental challenges in sectors such as care, domestic work and waste management.

⁶ The popular economy combines traditional resources and capacities for labour, technology, organisation, and commerce to give rise to activities oriented toward securing subsistence. Popular-economy organisations can fulfil a social mission by ensuring the survival of social groups overlooked by the market economy, strengthening collective identities and fostering the inclusion of grassroots social actors in local public spaces (Polanyi 2001, 1977; Gaiger 2016).

⁷ Luis Razeto Migliaroi identifies at least three forms of popular economy organisations/activities: (1) *Labour for personal benefit*, performed by independent workers who create goods, provide services, or sell on a small scale, be it at home, on the street, in the public square, on public transport, at community fairs, or other places where people gather. In a study of self-employed workers in Chile, three hundred distinct informal “occupations” were identified. (2) *Family micro-enterprises*, operated by one to three people, preparing goods or selling on a small scale, using their living space or an adjacent space for a workplace and store. Micro-enterprises have become so widespread in the popular districts of the big cities of Latin America that it is normal to find them in one of every four or five homes. (3) *Popular economic organisations*, refer to small groups or associations of people or families who collectively manage their scant resources so as to develop activities that generate income or provide services to satisfy the basic needs of work, food, health, education, housing, etc. on a basis of cooperation and mutual aid. Solidarity workshops, housing committees, “buying together,” community utilities, “building together,” family gardens, and community development programs are some of the most widespread types. The popular economy combines traditional resources and capacities for labour, technology, organisation, and commerce to give rise to activities oriented toward securing subsistence. The popular economy thrives and expands by seeking out interstices and opportunities in the market, finding ways to make use of benefits and resources

provided by public services and subsidies, and inserting itself into projects promoted by non-governmental organizations

⁸ More recently, the notion of social enterprise has been added to recognise entities that trade goods and services, that fulfil a social objective and whose main purpose is not the maximisation of profit for the owners but its reinvestment for the continued attainment of its social goals.

⁹ Data from the Global Action countries (EU countries, Brazil, Canada, India, Korea, Mexico and the United States), other OECD countries, South Africa and countries in the Asia Pacific.

¹⁰ In Hungary, where the gap is highest, the share of women in management in SSE entities is over 70%, while it is less than 40% in the wider economy (OECD, 2023^[14]). There is also variation in the types of SSE entities with women as leaders. In Portugal, for example, women are most frequently leaders in Misericórdias (74%), a form of religious social care institution, followed by associations (63%), co-operatives (55%), mutual societies (38%) and foundations (23%).

¹¹ The majority reside in LAC countries such as Colombia, which hosts 2.9 million Venezuelans, and Peru, which hosts 1.5 million.

¹² For example, Envi3n establishes local offices for young people to participate in workshops and activities that support their involvement in community life and employment.

¹³ See sources in (OECD, 2024^[63]), "Assessing the framework conditions for social innovation in rural areas", OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Papers, No. 2024/04, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/74367d76-en>.

¹⁴ PlatformCoop Directory, Internet of Ownership website, <https://ioo.coop/directory>, provides a directory of platform co-operatives around the world.