KNOWLEDGE HUB WORKING PAPER

Producing Statistics on Social and Solidarity Economy

Policy Recommendations and
Directions for Future Research

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The UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSE) was established to raise the visibility of the SSE in international knowledge and policy circles. We believe that SSE holds considerable promise for addressing the economic, social and environmental integrated approaches of sustainable development.

UNTFSSE brings together UN agencies and other inter-governmental organizations, as well as umbrella associations of SSE networks as members and observers. Task Force activities include organizing events at UN and other international conferences, dialoguing with policy makers, preparing and disseminating publications, and engaging in collaborative projects involving UNTFSSE members and observers. https://unsse.org/

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Opportunities and Challenges of Statistics on SSE

This is one of three papers commissioned for a research project of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSE) Knowledge Hub for the SDGs.

The project, Opportunities and Challenges of Statistics on SSE, aims to enrich discussions on statistics on the social and solidarity economy (SSE) both within and beyond the UN system. It provides policy makers with current information on SSE statistics and makes recommendations for their improvement.

Working Papers:

Producing Statistics on Social and Solidarity Economy: The State of the Art, by Marie J. Bouchard and Gabriel Salathé-Beaulieu (August 2021)

Mapping International SSE Mapping Exercises, by Coline Compère and Jérôme Schoenmaeckers with Barbara Sak (August 2021)

Producing Statistics on Social and Solidarity Economy: Policy Recommendations and Directions for Future Research, by Rafael Chaves-Avila (August 2021)

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Acronyms

ADDES	Association pour le développement de la documentation sur l'économie sociale
CEPES	Spanish Social Economy Employers' Confederation
CIRIEC	International Centre of Research and Information on the Public, Social and Cooperative Economy
COPAC	Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives
DIRCE	Directorio Central de Empresas (Spanish Central Business Register)
EC	European Commission
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EU	European Union
EURICSE	European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises
EUROSTAT	Statistical office of the European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GECES	Expert group on social economy and social enterprises of the European Commission
GDP	Gross domestic product
GSEF	Global Social Economy Forum network
ICA	International Co-operative Alliance
ILO/ OIT	International Labour Organization
INAES	National Institute for the Social Economy of Mexico
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
NACE	Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community
NPO	Nongovernmental organization
NSO	National statistics office
PNUD/UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SSE	Social and solidarity economy
SE	Social economy
SIRENE	Base Sirene des entreprises et de leurs établissements (French Central Business Register)
TSE	Third sector or social economy
UN	United Nations
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNECE -	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
UNTFSSE	United Nations Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy
WP	Working Paper

Acknowledgments

Summary

This paper is a guide for governments interested in developing SSE statistics in their country and for researchers interested in working on improving and developing SSE statistics. The first section details why the production of SSE statistics is so important for governments and SSE actors. It highlights that these statistics help to make visible and legitimize the SSE as a new field of public action, and contribute to a better design, implementation and evaluation of policies aimed at promoting the SSE. The next section identifies the main types of SSE statistics to be produced. The first are quantitative economic statistics on the SSE within the framework of conventional economic aggregates and standard methodologies. The second are statistics that allow the quantification of SSE impacts. The third are statistics allowing comparisons at different levels, and between SSE and other types of economic entities such as for-profit enterprises. The next section focuses on the producers of statistics. It points out that, in addition to national statistical offices, which should play a leading role, universities and research centres, as well as "umbrella" organizations, are also key producers of statistics that can work together. Obstacles in the production of SSE statistics are the focus of the following section. The main ones are technical skills, tensions that blur the field of SSE, lack of funding to carry out statistical work and, finally, the absence of a normative mandate to push governments and statistical institutes to undertake this statistical endeavour. The paper concludes with recommendations for policy makers interested in the development of SSE statistics, as well as an outlook on areas for future research.

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Introduction

With an aim toward making policy recommendations for the development of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) statistics, this paper highlights the original purpose of statistics, i.e. 'statistiks,' which means generating and using data for governments and their administrative bodies. The reference to 'statistiks' is particularly timely and necessary because, firstly, policymakers of governments at various levels in many countries have a great interest in SSE as a potentially useful means of generating social and economic development and welfare, and secondly, these policymakers often do not fully understand SSE, in terms of its scope, forms and nature.

Not all societal problems are put on the policy or political agenda. Only certain problems recognized by or brought to the attention of people in and around government become the subject of policy and political discussions. And statistics or systematic indicators are one of the key elements constituting the process of problem recognition for policymakers. Despite their inevitable simplicity and bias, statistics provide quantitative accounts of a phenomenon, its evolution, as well as its relative contribution in solving the main problems faced by a government (e.g. unemployment, poverty, environment, economic growth, etc.). And this is the main challenge of SSE statistics today: to build these statistics and to build them in a rigorous and useful way.

The rigorous construction of statistics needs to address several issues that will be studied in this paper:

1) Why and for whom are SSE statistics important;

2) What kinds of statistics are needed;

3) Who should be involved in the production of SSE statistics;

4) Which policies need the support of SSE statistics.

The process of constructing SSE statistics is not without difficulties and limitations. Therefore, in addition to these four issues, the paper also analyzes the main obstacles to constructing SSE statistics, such as institutional, political, and economic barriers and technical and methodological obstacles and limitations (see Bouchard and Salathé-Beaulieu, 2021). The first and perhaps main obstacle in the construction of SSE statistics is its very entry into the world of official statistics. This world uses national statistical standards in terms of definitions, concepts and methodologies. However, national statistical standards may be poorly adapted for what are still unstable concepts, such as SSE. Indeed, the very field of the SSE presents discursive and sometimes ideological tensions, in spite of the serious advances in defining its perimeter. Other concepts defining SSE in various ways do exist, contributing to increased ambiguity and controversy (Chaves and Monzón, 2018). They include social enterprises, solidarity economy and non-profit entities. All of these concepts, including that of SSE, have several definitions in different national settings, in terms of identifying the characteristics and the entities that are or are not in scope. This also blurs the boundaries of SSE from an international perspective. One could wonder what forces are at play in this situation, what agenda it could serve to prevent the progression of the statistical construction of the SSE field. In this context, we need to think about the political challenge of SSE statistics and about ways to put SSE on the political agenda.

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Once the previous hurdle has been overcome, the main challenges in the construction of SSE statistics are, first of all, to capture the field of the SSE within the established statistical framework, with its official statistical language (e.g. international standards, satellite accounts, etc.), in order to make it visible and comprehensible with its own established tools. Once the SSE has been made visible and comprehensible within the existing official statistical framework, the next challenge is to innovatively develop new vocabulary and instruments of the statistical language in order to produce new indicators and methodologies.

The examination of those issues above will enable us to advance recommendations for governments that wish to build good SSE statistics. Finally, as research is very important for improving SSE statistics, this paper proposes tasks for future research.

This paper is based on the review of recommendations to policymakers and researchers for producing statistics on SSE made by experts from international agencies (e.g. ILO, UNDESA, UNSD, EC, EUROSTAT), national statistics offices (e.g. Brazil, Canada, France, Portugal, Romania, South Korea and Spain), SSE umbrella organizations (e.g. EESC, ICA, UNTFSSE, Social Economy Europe) and academic entities (e.g. ADDES, CIRIEC, EURICSE, Johns Hopkins University). All these references appear at the end of the paper.

1   Why are SSE statistics important?

Why do statistics matter? And more specifically, why do we need statistics on the SSE? Statistics are essential in guiding policy processes, in order to make rational and evidence-based decisions. The World Bank stated, "In simple terms, statistics are the evidence on which policies are built. They help identify needs, set goals and monitor progress. Without good statistics, the development process is blind: policy-makers cannot learn from their mistakes and the public cannot hold them accountable" (World Bank, 2000:vii).

In particular, statistics are critical to making evidence-based *private and public assessments and decisions*. They provide valuable information for assessment and decisions to stakeholders such as policymakers at the different levels of government, leaders of private entities, representatives of interest groups, the media and researchers. Statistics are also a crucial input in the *policy-making cycle, which involves all the policy stakeholders*, from agenda setting, diagnosis of the issue, the choice of policy objectives and means, and, finally, the evaluation of the implemented public policies, in order to provide feedback for another policy cycle.

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