

## **Working Paper**

# **Social and Solidarity Economy, Urban Communities and the Protection of Vulnerable Groups**

## **Introduction**

Since 2008, the European Union (EU) has become synonymous with crises: the economic crisis, the Eurozone crisis, and finally the refugee crisis. Especially the inflow of refugees to the EU since 2011, which dramatically increased in 2015 to reach a record high of 1.3 million people - mostly due to the civil war in Syria but also other conflicts in Africa and the Middle East - has placed Europe in a difficult situation economically, politically and socially. An understanding of the effects of the refugee crisis on European societies and labour markets cannot ignore what preceded that crisis. Following a short-lived fiscal stimulus (2008-2009), most countries introduced (in 2010) fiscal adjustments and sweeping austerity measures that ramped down public spending (see Ortiz et al., 2015). These developments have been most evident among the southern European countries such as Greece and Italy, in particular. In these countries, the economic crisis has had a profound effect on labour market integration not only of the native population but also of migrants. For instance, according to Eurostat, between 2008 and 2016, the unemployment rate of migrants increased by five percentage points in Italy and by 26 percentage points in Greece against a 17 percentage point increase for natives. In Switzerland, too, a country which has been widely seen as better dealing with the negative effects of the crisis than other countries, recent evidence shows that migrants have been more affected by the economic crisis than other vulnerable groups. And yet, this is not a crisis often talked about; it is a silent crisis – a neglected area of academic and policy attention (Giugni and Mexi, 2018).

As the economic crisis and social spending cuts bite deeper into the social body, European societies have further witnessed the weakening of solidarity policies for the social protection of the native-born unemployed, migrants, and newly arrived refugees. The challenge of protecting and integrating refugees, migrants and native-born unemployed persons into local communities has directed attention towards the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) (Utting, 2015). The SSE is generally understood as an umbrella term that refers to the production of goods and services by a broad range of organizations and enterprises that have explicit social and often environmental objectives, and are guided by principles and practices of cooperation, solidarity, equality and democratic self-management. The SSE as a movement attempts to assert social control over the economy by prioritizing social objectives above profit maximization, recognizing the key role of collective action and active citizenship for both economic and political empowerment of disadvantaged groups in society, and reintroducing notions of ethics, sharing, equity and

democracy in economic activity (Granger et al, 2010; Philips, 2012; Cornee and Szafar, 2013; Grasseni, 2013; Lamont et al, 2012; Tischer, 2013; Sahakian, 2014; Utting et al., 2014; Forno et al, 2015; Grasseni et al, 2015; Maurano and Forno, 2015; Utting, 2015). The SSE has been recognized by practitioners, academics and policy-makers to have the capacity and potential to reduce inequalities and reinforce democratic participation, solidarity, and social protection (UNTFSSSE, 2014; Fonteneau, 2015). Studies have shown that SSE organizations can be very resilient in times of crisis in different settings (Pencavel et al., 2006; Hall and Lamont, 2012; Lewis and Conaty, 2012; Meyer and Leal, 2013) and address the needs of vulnerable populations. Much of the growth of SSE activities in recent decades, notably in Europe, has centred precisely on the types of service provisioning that are essential for the integration of migrants and refugees. Particularly relevant in this regard is the prominent role of SSE organizations and enterprises in work integration of the native-born unemployed and other disadvantaged groups, and the provision of local-level “proximity services” associated with healthcare, care for the elderly and children, and education and training (Laville and Nyssens 2000; Borzaga and Defourny 2001).

Since 2008, the European Union (EU) has become synonymous with crises: the economic crisis, the Eurozone crisis, and finally the refugee crisis. Europe's multiple crises have cast a shadow over its democratic values, principles of solidarity and human rights, and what it truly represents (Kapartziani and Papathanasiou, 2016; Vimont, 2016). Especially, the inflow of refugees to the EU since 2011, which dramatically increased in 2015 to reach a record high of 1.3 million people - mostly due to the civil war in Syria but also other conflicts in Africa and the Middle East - has left Europe in a difficult situation economically, politically and socially. An understanding of the effects of the refugee crisis on European societies and labour markets cannot ignore what preceded that crisis. Following a short-lived fiscal stimulus (2008-2009), most countries introduced (in 2010) fiscal adjustments and sweeping austerity measures that ramped down public spending (see Ortiz et al., 2015). These measures have had undesirable and negative consequences on the population, society and economy and have contributed to weakening elements of solidarity and strengthening elements of conditionality and welfare retrenchment at the expense of the most vulnerable (see Ortiz et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2016; Armingeon and Ceka, 2013). As a result, there has been a significant surge in the inequality gap, social exclusion, unemployment and poverty rates (Eurostat, 2016). These development have been most evident among the Southern European countries such as Greece and Italy, in particular (Bonesmo Fredriksen, 2012; Statistica, 2017; Busch et al., 2013). In these countries, the economic crisis has had a profound effect on labour market integration not only of the native population but also of migrants. For instance, according to Eurostat, between 2008 and 2016, the unemployment rate of migrants increased by five percentage points in Italy and by 26 percentage points in Greece, against a 17 percentage point increase for natives. In Switzerland, too, a country widely seen as better coping with the negative effects of the crisis compared to other countries, recent evidence shows that migrants have been more affected by the economic crisis than other vulnerable groups, and yet this is not a crisis often talked about; it is a silent crisis – a neglected area of academic and policy attention (Giugni and Mexi, 2018).

As the economic crisis and the social spending cuts bite deeper into the social body, European societies have further witnessed the weakening of solidarity policies for the social protection of the native-born unemployed, migrants, and newly arrived refugees. This has been accompanied by a rise in xenophobia and populist politics that blamed migrants and refugees for the economic upheavals and the struggle of the local communities, while emphasizing their “otherness” and position as outsiders (Collet, 2011; Strang and Ager, 2010). A number of human rights and social justice questions related to who “belongs” to European societies, and whose social and economic rights are to be respected, were brought to the fore. Are hierarchies in the value of human lives within and between groups of citizens and non-citizens being accentuated (Fassin, 2009)? Who is excluded and who is included? Whose needs are given priority and by what means? European countries have seemed unprepared, logistically, economically, culturally and politically, to manage the multiple crises and their consequences (IMIN, 2015) in relation to not only humanitarian dimensions, but also xenophobia, work integration and extreme pressures on public services.

These questions in general, and the challenge of protecting and integrating refugees, migrants and the native-born unemployed persons in local communities in particular, have directed attention towards the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) (UNTFSSSE, 2014; UNRISD, 2016; Utting, 2015). The SSE is generally understood as an umbrella term that refers to the production of goods and services by a broad range of organizations and enterprises that have explicit social and often environmental objectives, and are guided by principles and practices of cooperation, solidarity, equality and democratic self-management (UNTFSSSE, 2014). The SSE as a movement attempts to assert social control over the economy by prioritizing social objectives above profit maximization, recognizing the key role of collective action and active citizenship for both economic and political empowerment of disadvantaged groups in society, and reintroducing notions of ethics, sharing, equity and democracy in economic activity (Granger et al, 2010; Philips, 2012; Cornee and Szafar, 2013; Grasseni, 2013; Lamont et al, 2012; Tischer, 2013; Sahakian, 2014; Utting et al., 2014; Forno et al, 2015; Grasseni et al, 2015; Maurano and Forno, 2015; Utting, 2015, Kousis et al 2016, Papadaki and Kalogeraki 2018, Petropoulou 2018). The SSE organizations and enterprises typically include multiple types of cooperatives, mutual health associations; fair trade organizations, certain types of foundation and service delivery, mutual associations, self-help groups, fair trade networks, community groups, organizations of informal economy workers and new forms of social enterprises producing goods and services that address unmet needs, mobilizing resources, engaging in collective provisioning and managing common pool resources. They also comprise various forms of social and solidarity finance institutions such as saving and credit cooperatives, complementary currency schemes and ethical banking among others (UNTFSSSE, 2014).

The SSE is increasingly seen as an important actor addressing basic needs provisioning, social inclusion, employment generation, local economic development, poverty reduction and environmental protection. As such, it is perceived to have the capacity to play a central role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and contribute to one of its

overarching principles: to “leave no one behind” (Utting, 2015). In this regards, the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSSE) identifies eight key thematic issues that reflect the potential and capacity of SSE to act as a means of implementation for the SDGs such as the transition from informal economy to decent work (SDGs 1, 4, 8, 10) (see Cracogna et al., 2013; UNTFSSSE, 2014; ILO, 2014; Wanyama, 2014; Mendell and Alain, 2015; Utting, 2015), greening the economy and society (SDGs 12, 13, 14, 15), local economic development (SDGs 7, 9), sustainable cities and human settlements (SDGs 6, 11, 14, 15, 16), women’s wellbeing and empowerment (SDGs 4, 5), food security and smallholder empowerment (SDG 2); universal health coverage (SDG 3) and transformative finance (SDG 17), subsequently contributing to sustainable development for planet and people. This model of social and economic development that balances economic, social and at times environmental spheres of development has been pursued for many years by several localities in Europe, such as the Lombardi region in Italy, where the origins of the Social Economy is most visible a manifestation of popular associative movements (Forno, 2009).

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The recent economic and refugee crises were a turning point for the growth of SSE, revealing new understandings for solidarity in several European societies. This has occurred in a context where there is increasing awareness that a “business as usual approach” (simply going back to the way things worked before the crisis) to address the rising unemployment coupled with the humanitarian crisis is no longer viable. A recent research on SSE organizations and their impact upon vulnerable groups in Europe conducted by the project applicant – the Institute of Citizenship Studies of the University of Geneva – as part of the EU FP7 LIVEWHAT project, shows that SSE organizations and practices have been turned into a significant buffer against the effects of Europe’s crises not only in crisis-affected countries (Greece, Italy) but also in countries less affected by the crisis (Switzerland) (Kousis, et al, 2016). The findings of this research show that, because of the economic and refugee crises, new SSE organizations were founded in European countries in order to respond to the emerging needs of the migrant and the unemployed populations. The founding ratio of SSE organizations peaked from 2008-2013 (more than 5% every year), with subsequent

decreases from 2014-15. The creation of almost half or more than half of the SSE organizations is observed in Greece (56.2%) and Italy (44.8%) followed by Switzerland (24.6%), Germany (22.4%), and the UK (17.8%) (LIVEWHAT synthesis report, 2016: 41). Approximately 15% of the SSE organizations have as beneficiaries the native-born unemployed people and the refugees/migrants [the elderly/pensioners (8.6%), women (8.2%) and minorities (5.1%) are SSE beneficiaries at a much lower frequency, see EU-FP7 LIVEWHAT report, 2016].

Acknowledging this potential, a team of researchers from the University of Geneva, the University of Trento and the University of Crete has studied the status and development of the SSE sector in three cities: Bergamo (Italy), Geneva (Switzerland), and Heraklion (Greece). This research project aimed to: 1). Examine how the SSE – by nature oriented toward solidarity and reciprocity – can effectively contribute to building solidarity for, protecting and integrating refugees, migrants, and the native-born unemployed within local communities and labour markets, and what enabling policy environments are required. The potentials, challenges and tensions involved in this regard within a context of austerity and welfare retrenchment, growing xenophobia and populist politics will also be assessed. 2). Generate evidence and policy suggestions to maximize the potential of SSE actors to integrate refugees, migrants, and the native-born unemployed into local communities and labour markets, and to create spaces and relationships of solidarity in times when integration can become a contentious issue. The main research findings are presented in the following sections.

### **The SSE sector in the three cities and countries**

The SSE plays a growing and critical role from local to global levels. By providing employment, social support, and informal safety nets – especially to precarious and vulnerable populations – the SSE entities are supported, or are about to be supported, by an increasing number of countries. Policy incentives and frameworks for advancing the development of the SSE at the national and regional levels are being implemented across Europe and all parts of the world. These build on networking and partnerships between governments and civil society. The fieldwork we conducted in the three cities shows variations in the ways the SSE sector has developed and operates in Europe. Below we present some key results per city.

#### **Bergamo (Italy)**

The global economic crisis has had a debilitating effect on the already fragile Italian economy. From 2008 to 2013, it registered a loss of 24% of Italian industrial production, alongside worsening public finances. In 2013, Italy was one of the biggest debtors in the Eurozone; the measures to restore the financial market's confidence and safeguard the Italian public budget from bankruptcy had high social costs, and led to severe cuts in public spending for social inclusion and social protection. The effects of these measures were particularly visible between 2010 and 2013 as

poverty rates and social exclusion increased above the EU average, affecting large groups of the population living in severe material deprivation.

Even the Italian labour market has been affected by the crisis, as demonstrated by the constant increase of the unemployment rate – and the youth unemployment rate – registered from 2010 to 2014. Also, temporary, precarious and youth unemployment all remain worryingly high, especially for women, currently at 32.4% (part-time employment) and 17.7% (temporary employment). In this unstable context, the refugee crisis of the last decade has particularly affected the country from a political, social and economic perspective. In 2015, the migration crisis reported a critical increase of asylum seekers in Europe and in particular in Italy (as a first entry point to Europe), registering 122,690 asylum applicants in 2016, of whom 121,185 were first applicants. Compared to 2008, in eight years the number had quadrupled, and in 2017 it was even bigger with 128,850 applicants. The Italian third sector, historically developed and rooted in the national territory, has faced in many ways the new needs emerged by the multi-dimensional crisis. The Italian Social and Solidarity Economy organizations (SSEOs) have traversed different paths, in some cases increasing employment and investment, in others encountering problems. The crisis has also given rise to some new organizations. In Italy, Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) is closely linked to the third sector and to the various types of organizations that compose it. Italian private and non-profit organizations passed through different phases in the last century to acquire legal form and define their role within the Italian welfare system.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the third sector in Italy appears to be composed by social cooperatives/social enterprises, voluntary organizations, associations, foundations charitable and social care public institutions. Beside these, in western societies, especially in the last two decades, new forms of cooperation between citizens sprang up as a result of the increasing desire for eco-friendly and ethical practices, and in order to respond to new environmental and financial challenges (Forno, 2013). A typical example of these informal kinds of organizations in the Italian context are the Solidarity Purchase Groups (GAS, *Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale*) and the DES (Districts of Solidarity Economy) among others. Besides those SSEOs formally recognised, there are also important informal forms of SSEOs which are obviously more complicated to study as it is difficult to find data and registers. In Italy, as in other European countries, it is possible to denote a strong limit for research and actions as the national statistics institutes rarely include in their surveys forms of organizations that do not have a recognised entrepreneurial nature (Borzaga et al., 2015). This limitation in official data contribute to the difficulty in defining boundaries of the sector and underline the fact that the classification of legal forms is insufficient (ibid).

Moreover, many of these alternative organizations are born almost in opposition with the world of social enterprise officially recognised, thus they do not even want to appear in official registers. Beyond cooperatives and social enterprises there is a specificity in SSEOs in Italy that is more linked to informal kinds of organizations that have particularly spread out in the last two decades, attracting attention both by scholars and public institutions. That is the case of Solidarity Purchase

Groups or *gruppi di acquisto solidale* (GAS) that are grassroots networks that collectively organize direct provisioning, mostly of food and other items of everyday use (Grasseni et al., 2013). These networks have found an alternative way to purchase food and goods by collective provisioning and direct contact with producers. Bergamo is a city in northern Italy that has experienced a deep process of de-industrialization and a population growth due to the influx of migrants (from 5.3% in 2004 to 13.8% in 2013). Moreover, it is a territory where SSEOs have a long history. The SSE sector is characterized by a wide range of actors, originating in the tradition of the activist social movements of the early twentieth century.

Also, here the crisis of 2008 had important consequences on the SSE sector. Overall, social cooperatives in Bergamo have demonstrated a high level of positive dynamism even in times of crisis. While some actors encountered several problems, other have been able to increase in dimension. In particular, social enterprises have been able to create innovation and to access long-lasting markets and sustainable developing models. The crisis seems also to have opened new opportunities for social cooperation, as in the case of those SSEOs combining social agriculture with social inclusion, sustainable production and environment awareness leading to the birth of a local bio-district, the *Biodistretto dell'agricoltura sociale*. Social cooperatives in Bergamo have demonstrated a high level of positive dynamism even in times of crisis and with different modalities compared to traditional cooperatives. In some cases, they increased in dimension and good occupational levels, showing their ability to face the crisis and prepare for a “recovery process”. This can be seen in the period between 2011 and 2014 when social cooperatives managed both employment loss and the opening of new job places. They also registered a positive variance related to economic performance between 2008 and 2014, in particular in the sector of social assistance. However, in the period 2011-2014, the ability of cooperatives to resist the crisis diminished as they had to depend more on third-party capital with the counterpart of a reduction of financial autonomy, thus envisioning that the anti-cyclical function can be put at risk in the long period by the ongoing indebt situation.

### **Geneva (Switzerland)**

There is no official definition or common understanding of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in Switzerland. The understanding of SSE largely depends on the region, language-area of the country and those actors involved (i.e. civil society or state actors). In the German speaking part of Switzerland, for instance, the concept of Common Good Economy (CGE) (*Gemeinwohler Ökonomie*) is more commonly used, while in the French-speaking part the concept of “Social and Solidarity Economy” is more prevalent. In Geneva, SSE, and in particular cooperatives, have a long history that dates back to the nineteenth century (Sahakian, 2013). However, the dominant market economy and increased competition have forced many of these organizations to relinquish much of their social mission to survive. The late 1990s witnessed a resurgence in interest in SSE, characterized with the emergence of new forms of SSE organizations that address the negative

consequences of economic development and other contemporary challenges (ibid). Subsequently, the sector, which was historically dominated by cooperatives and mutual society, has evolved to include new forms of organizations such as not-for-profit associations and foundations among others that have social and environmental objectives at the heart of their mission.

Today, many SSE organizations are grouped together under the auspice of the Chamber of the Economy Social and Solidarity *Après-Ge*, which is largely credited for the promotion and development of SSE in the greater Geneva region. *Après-Ge* defines SSE as “private non-profit or limited-profit economy, in various legal forms, the social and solidarity economy (SSE) brings together a multitude of local economic initiatives, which participate in the construction of a new way of life and to think about the economy: it respects ethical, social and ecological criteria and places the person before profit” (our translation), a definition that is commonly used by the Canton and City of Geneva, respectively (see *Service Agenda 21 – Ville durable*). While recognition of the importance of SSE organizations in safeguarding the rights and livelihoods of vulnerable communities has been steadily increasing worldwide particularly since the millennial, limited academic literature exists about the SSE in Geneva. In particular, questions on the potentials, tensions and challenges in integrating unemployed native communities, migrants and refugees into the labour market in Geneva through SSE is pertinent. This document aims to set up the scene for investigating such an inquiry by providing an overview of SSE in Geneva, the public policies put in place to support these organizations and the state of the literature on the topic.

### **Heraklion (Greece)**

SSE has been gaining increasing economic, social and political visibility in general, especially in countries struggling with challenging economic conditions. A noteworthy case is Greece. In this time of crisis recovery, the promotion of SSE in Greece is a significant ally supporting a significant part of Greek society facing the risk of poverty, material deprivation, or social exclusion. More specifically, over the last decade, Greece experienced an unprecedented economic crisis followed by large migrant-refugee inflows from 2015 onwards. The deep recession and harsh austerity policies implemented since then have influenced all aspects of social life since large parts of the population have suffered great loss of income, while Greek youth have witnessed one crisis after another from rising unemployment, poverty, fear and anger to pessimism regarding the future (Adam 2016).

One of the most crucial effects of Greece's economic crisis has been the enormous economic and social class re-ranking of large parts of the population (people have moved from the middle to the lower class). This outcome – alongside its socio-economic importance – has had significant implications for the rise and growth of SSE. New ecologies of (alternative) political creativity and civic agency” have started to gradually emerge, as Alevizou (2015) observes, “These have been channeled by larger, but also smaller-scale mobilizations, local assemblies as well as grass-roots



and solidarity initiatives, nurturing a culture that desires social change. Alongside the informal and community-based groups of solidarity, new more formalized SSE entities (enterprises and organizations) have also emerged, seeking to provide services in order to improve economic and social conditions in times of welfare state retreat (given the reduction in public funding and resources). This means that the broader SSE in Greece is at a relatively early stage, but it is growing dynamically. As a result of the state's failure to provide citizens in need with adequate social policies and services, there is evidence – as we have seen – testifying to the growth of SSE organizations. Emerging solidarity initiatives and grassroots groups mainly, embodying what Harvey (2000) describes as “new spaces of hope”. These new forms of micro-level solidarity are increasingly functioning as “shadow welfare state”. They seem to be filling in historically established “solidarity gaps” in clientelism-driven social welfare provision that have been further intensified by recent public policy choices. This undoubtedly calls for a rethinking of the relationship between macro-level solidarity and micro-level acts of solidarity (that is, between public actors and services and SSE actors are also on the frontline in the development of responses to urgent and pressing social needs) and its effects on citizens' resilience in times of crisis (Kousis et al., 2015). An examination of this relationship may allow for a better understanding of the possible synergies between SSE initiatives and state mechanisms and their potential impact.

Despite its history of cooperativism, mainly in the agricultural and farming sector, the literature and recent studies reveal a young and nascent SSE sector in Greece (with a significant number of SSE organizations having established themselves more recently), with significant potential. This can be best appreciated from a fiscal viewpoint and in the economic output generated by the SSE sector, which – according to most recent estimates – was €2.5 billion in 2012 and accounted for 1.4 per cent of national GDP vis-a-vis an average of five to ten per cent in other European Union countries (Nasioulas and Mavroeidis, 2013). Crucially, newly established SSE entities have been increasingly seeking to respond to some of the country's most significant crises, notably the economic and migration-refugee crises. This involves delivering mainstream services but also seeking to promote and advocate an alternative economic model. There is a breadth and depth to their activities and social aims, which look promising in that there is considerable potential across the full range of social groups (both native and migrant groups) in bouncing back from the adverse effects of the crises; but also challenging – while there are many similarities in scope, each segment and category of SSE entities also seem to have different priorities, modes of social contribution and impact, needs and obstacles to overcome. The combined effects of these could pose considerable barriers for the SSE sector in Greece in terms of working their way through and promoting new models of doing things in areas the mainstream has failed.

### **Interviews with policy-makers and stakeholders**

This section summarises the findings from a series of interviews with policy-makers and practitioners at local and regional levels (in Greece also interviews at national/Ministry level), who are involved in the design and implementation of policies for migrants, refugees, and the native-

born unemployed. The interviews aim to collect policy actors' views on central themes identified from a contextual analysis based on desk research and a number of aspects concerning crucial contextual and policy factors, such as: how existing public policies affect SSE growth; how European, national legislations and policies are being "translated" locally, what are the challenges "translating" and or implementing them, and their impact SSE organizations and practices; the ways in which local and sub-national policies and institutions could be transformed in order to sustain the innovative potential of SSE actors and their ability to forge solidarity ties and networks; the ways in which SSE actors may become more politically empowered; the types of claims they set on the political agenda; the dynamics of co-construction, and; what constitutes enabling SSE policies. We conducted 16 interviews in Bergamo, 14 in Geneva, and 15 in Heraklion. The sample in Bergamo includes two policy-maker assessors of Bergamo Municipality, one policy-maker in the province of Bergamo, one policy-maker from the Lombardy region, one policy-maker mayor of a provincial town, two from institutional organizations (city of Bergamo), one from the chamber of commerce of Bergamo, one from the provincial education center, three from trade unions (CISL and CIGL, local offices), three coordinators of local networks (voluntary ass. / social coop./ grassroots org.). The sample in Geneva includes mostly heads of units/departments, but also a couple of "street-level bureaucrats". Geneva being a city-canton, the sample includes actors from both municipalities and cantonal authorities. In addition, as SSE organizations are active in the whole urban area, the sample include the main periurban municipalities (Geneva, Vernier, Meyrin, Lancy, Onex, Carouge). The sample in Heraklion includes two ministry representatives (national level), one SSE federation representative (national level), one Heraklion regional unit representative, two Heraklion regional unit SSE advisory actors, two municipalities' representatives, two semi-public municipality entities on immigrant integration, one coordinator of a local SSEO network, one body supporting SSEOs (local level), two local representatives of an international organization, and one church-related representative (local level).

### ***Bergamo***

The results of the interviews in Bergamo can be summarized following the main aspects considered in our questionnaire:

- Many interviewees think that immigrants are particularly vulnerable in Italy since they are often lonely, without networks or with otherwise weak networks. The unemployed are also individuated as one of the main vulnerable groups in Italy, especially after the crisis. The interviewees further talked about other significant vulnerable groups in the local territory, in particular women and the elderly.

- In 2015, the Municipality of Bergamo activated a special program of *accoglienza diffusa* (the widespread reception program) for refugees and asylum seekers, involving many structures and associations of the provincial territory. The Municipality also activated social neighbourhood networks, called *reti sociali di quartiere*, which carry out mutual aid activities. The women's council has proposed a set of actions and research on integration.

In terms of job placement, the major syndicates' offices in Bergamo have set up special desks to help migrants in finding a job and managing bureaucratic practices. Moreover, they focus on realising the collaboration with the province for the activation of active labour market policies. In particular, their aim was to train people in accordance with companies' needs and in collaboration with the local SSEO networks. The local SSEO networks played an important role in this process, providing labour services such as consultancy and job training through specialised social cooperatives (i.e. *Mestieri Lombardia*). The Municipality activated special activities focused on training/education in collaboration with local public schools, involving families and young migrants.

Strictly connected to the issue of unemployment of vulnerable people are housing problems, as many unemployed face evictions. For this reason, the Municipality has set up a special family-work fund aiming at: supporting job-seeking or reintegration into the working world; allowing access to social educational services for the family unit; paying contributions for the payment of households or other problems related to the family's housing conditions. More broadly, the organizations perceive the state as distant from the people and everyday problems. The bureaucracy enhances the distance between the state and the citizens.

- The Municipality of Bergamo gives support to the SSE with funding through public tenders, which are open both to enterprises and SSEOs. In general, the interviewees recognize an important role in SSEOs but report a general situation of marginalization, in the sense that the role of these organizations it is not properly recognised by the institutions. Even with the economic crisis, the SSEOs in the Bergamo territory have maintained good levels of efficiency, especially the social cooperatives. The territory of Bergamo is recognized by interviewees as particularly fertile for cooperation. The third sector has expanded and, even with the crisis, it continued to develop in both thinking and operativity. Development is different regarding the typology of organization: new associations (and informal/community groups) have been founded; the majority of social cooperatives already existed before the crisis, and with new needs they began to provide new services/for new target groups. Although, negative signals have been reported regarding some organizations.
- The efficiency of SSEOs in providing basic needs (housing, food, education, etc.) is very well recognized by interviewees. In particular – in Bergamo – this happens through the work of certain historical/well established organizations of the local territory. According to the

interviews, the main limits of the integration process regard legislative constraints and lack of adequate public policies.

- According to the interviews, the activities to which SSE actors should give priority in order to improve the situation of migrants/unemployed are: (a) sharing experiences/networking; (b) providing a single answer to the overall needs of the person who accesses their services. The Municipality of Bergamo tries to help SSEOs in doing networking, as there are some associations which directly ask schools how to make themselves known and be put on the internet. The interviewees talked about the difficulty in cooperating and communicating with immigrant groups. As an interviewee argued, to be more effective the operators of the social system should invest part of their time to having an overall perspective of problems. If everyone looks only at the individual level, energy is dispersed. The priority should be to have an overall vision. However, this is difficult in particular within organizations who only target migrants.
- As previously mentioned, the legislative instability and constraints of Italian policies decreases the effectiveness of SSEOs' actions. Moreover, the complex legal framework and bureaucracy limit access to social measures for some targets. A further difficulty is cuts in public funding and social policies, and the political model of intervention, which lack an overall understanding of people's needs and problems. In the Bergamo territory, some co-planning initiatives are already in action. However, collaboration with local administrations should be enhanced and extended to all typologies of SSEO (the majority of the collaborations with the institutions are held with social cooperatives). Consider such collaboration, different approaches emerged; the dividing line was the intensity of the relationship with the institutions, of relationship with the market and internal democratic life. A point of the debate was how effectiveness would be judged: as a failure if the purity of SSEOs' radicalism was compromised? A related issue from the interviews was how much SSEOs were willing to mediate to achieve higher social goals.
- According to the interviews, a political priority regarding the reception and integration of refugees should be set at national level. To manage the situation more effectively, a long-term perspective should be adopted, together with a cultural transformation in the approach to migrant inclusion, to favour the integration process. Regarding this priority, the internal networking of the SSEOs can be helpful in putting the people in need, such as migrants and refugees, in contact with those organizations that can help them. In this sense, helping SSEOs to be interconnected is helpful; their networking should be strengthened and sustained by the state and government. Some interviewees see education and training as the priority, as the axis from which to conceive of a wider social intervention program. Many interviewees have underlined the necessity of a change in the perspective of the state on people's needs and on SSE so that the legislative material becomes a supporting influence instead of an obstacle. To reach this goal requires greater participation of the state in the social processes, which means to be able to operate at the micro-level by listening to people to understand local needs.

## Geneva

The results of the interviews with policy-makers in Geneva are summarized in the following points:

- Migrants and the unemployed are vulnerable groups, but state social action is effective in supporting them.
- Some types of migrants are particularly vulnerable: illegal migrants, migrants without qualifications.
- The unemployed are vulnerable but “under control”: problems come mostly when they lose unemployment rights.
- There is an aggregation of factors of vulnerability (nationality; age; gender; education, etc.).
- The main issues faced by migrants are that: most don’t speak the language of the host society, a lack of social resources in facing administrative complexities, a lack of qualifications or non-recognition of their qualifications.
- The main issues faced by unemployed are: lack of social support, the injunction to find a job quickly rather than focusing on professional training for long-term reinsertion.
- The main limit of state action is: the structure of the labor market, which is mostly high-skilled and service-oriented in Geneva, which substantially limits the possibility of professional insertion of most migrants and the unemployed.
- State action to support migrants and unemployed can be improved but there is disagreement on the means of improvement (e.g. more prerogatives to the municipalities or to the canton?).
- The concept of SSE lacks clarity for policy-makers: it is not an operative concept in most cases.
- The associative sector is huge in Geneva: most policymakers conflate associations and SSE actors.
- Some policy-makers consider that limited profit is the main criteria defining SSE. Some policymakers stretch the concept of limited profit in order to include associations without a governing economic dimension.
- Most policy-makers consider that the SSE sector cannot work without state support, it is therefore seen as state-funded (even “assisted”) economy. The recurrent conflation with associations relies partly on this.
- There are some organizations (including SSE actors) gravitating around the social state, offering complementary services (it is not necessary that the state take care of these services, but it is good that some do instead), rather than offering subsidiary services (the state should take of these services, but doesn’t).
- SSE is not at the heart of the political agenda of the canton and the municipalities (except Meyrin and Geneva). However, SSE is considered as a potential partner to support vulnerable populations.

- In terms of professional reinsertion, SSE is perceived as useful because it offers activities and training to vulnerable groups (including migrants and the unemployed). However, the insertion devices of SSE actors are also considered as keeping these groups in a precarious situation. In addition, policy-makers consider SSE actors as not very efficient in terms of long-term stable professional reinsertion.
- For professional reinsertion, partnership with private companies (non-SSE partners) are seen as more promising by most policy-makers.

## **Heraklion**

The interviews provide important insights into the barriers and opportunities for the development of an effective policy environment or “ecosystem” to support SSE entities and actors. It is crucial to mention that all the interview respondents, while acknowledging the small size and impact of the SSE sector (since SSE in Greece has largely emerged over the recent crisis years), they view social precarity and the current challenging economic conditions in Greece as a reason why a vibrant SSE sector is needed in order to tackle unemployment and establish sustainable livelihoods for all vulnerable groups, including migrants and refugees. Among the positive impacts they identify are the potential of the SSE to empower vulnerable groups and local communities by creating new jobs, building strong solidarity ties, providing mutual aid at times when the public welfare state can no longer support disadvantaged groups to the extent required, as well as support democracy and volunteering. At the same time, certain barriers and limitations to long-term SSE growth are acknowledged. In particular, there is consensus amongst the interview respondents on certain obstacles pertaining to the following:

- Lack of policies and mechanisms to enable and support SSE entities to network among themselves but also with public authorities and/or other SSE bodies and support organizations at the local, national and European levels. Incentives for boosting partnership-building and networks amongst SSE entities and SSE support organizations across Greek regions have also been found lacking.
- Lack of support services, access to adequate financing to support both start-up and scale-up stages (with the exception of the newly established info centres in different regions cross Greece which is considered as a positive step), as well as financial incentives that take into account all the needs and specificities of the different SSE entities.
- Excessive bureaucracy and lack of a strategic vision and comprehensive policies and regulations to boost the long-term development and dynamism of the SSE sector, though the recent Law 4430/2016 is seen as a positive step forward.
- Lack of sufficient knowledge and understanding within Greek society and amongst national state agencies and actors, as well as local authorities and relevant bodies ,of what the SSE really

is and what it aims to do. This has often resulted in reinforcing or sustaining controversial public views about the sector e.g. that SSE entities are state-patronised.

- Existence of bogus (pseudo) SSE. Some of our interview respondents also referred to a broadly shared assumption that some enterprises are registered as Social Cooperative Enterprises (*Koin.S.Ep*) only to access state subsidies or tax incentives associated with that particular legal structure. Lack of real commitment to the goals and purposes of SSE entities has also resulted in many of them often simply become inactive, in the views of some of the interview respondents.
- Effective decentralization and joined-up initiatives to support the SSE across Greek regions have been found lacking, or where they existed the majority of our respondents said they were not aware of them. For instance, most local respondents had no clear view on whether their region was particularly advantaged or disadvantaged in terms of SSE growth potential vis-à-vis other regions. This may indicate a need for more in-depth understanding on the geographical advantages and disadvantages in the country, to generate a deeper understanding of the tailored policies needed to support different regions with differing socioeconomic needs and how the SSE potential can best be addressed.
- Lack of effective formal structures and mechanisms for collaboration and communication between SSE entities (and their networks) themselves as well as between SSE entities and state authorities at both national and local levels. This seems to have hindered the smooth flow of information and the exchange of experiences and learning between SSE actors and stakeholders at different levels, thus acting as a barrier to SSE growth.

## **Interviews with SSEOs**

This section reports the key findings from a series of interviews with SSEOs. In each city, we first mapped the existing SSEO sector and then conducted interviews with a selection of them. In order to be included in our mapping, SSEOs had to fulfil three main criteria: (1) produce some goods and/or services; have explicit social objectives; and (2) be guided by principles and practices of cooperation, solidarity, ethics and democratic self-management. In Bergamo, we selected 67 organizations following our research criteria, and 58 of them answered the organizational questionnaire. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and by mail (electronic or by post). In Geneva, the sampling process has two steps. First, we based our research on previous samplings (LIVEWHAT, TRANSSOL). All organizations fitting the definition were selected (77 organizations). During the face-to-face interviews (44), some other relevant organizations were mentioned by the interviewees (16). Therefore, they were included for a second step: we contacted by mail these 16 new organizations, plus the 33 organizations from the sampling that we did not interview. In Heraklion, the mapping list consisted of 46 SSE entities that met the mapping criteria. Interviews were conducted with 38 of them. All interviews were conducted face-to-face

## **Bergamo**

Italy has a long history of cooperatives, and the third sector features strongly from a normative point of view. This is seen in particular in the law in 1991 that recognized a formal role and fiscal advantages to social cooperatives. The crisis of 2008 reduced job opportunities and public loans in the third sector. This caused changes in different ways. For example, in the territory of Bergamo, the crisis took a positive dynamism: some cooperatives merged to cut the expense, others changed the services they offer, while new organizations also emerged. Looking at the collected data on the year of foundation, we can observe that 32 SSEOs were founded in Bergamo before the crisis, and 25 after the crisis - which corresponds to 44%. The Italian SSEOs seem to have a strict relation with their territory, in particular at local level. In fact, the data about the geographical areas of action show that almost all organizations are active inside the municipal territory (56), and in the provincial territory (42); 35% of them operate in the regional territory. Only a few organizations carry out activities at national level and/or abroad. This strong connection with the local dimension also emerges through other data on networking and political participation, presented later. In Bergamo, we can observe a predominance of voluntary/non profit associations (21) and social cooperatives (19); there are eight immigrant organizations (the majority registered as cultural associations), a soft but significant representation of foundations and religious groups, only two social economy enterprises and five informal groups (community groups / grassroots organizations). This framework respects the historical and social background of the Italian context linked to cooperativism and volunteering, and in particular of Bergamo.

The SSEOs in Bergamo are also marked by the characteristic of addressing a large number of people: 47% of them have more than 500 beneficiaries per year; 25% have between 100 and 499 beneficiaries per year. Concerning the target groups of this research, in Bergamo there are 14 SSEOs directing their activities to all three target groups: immigrants, refugees, the unemployed; and 11 SSEOs that only target immigrants, 10 target only the unemployed, eight immigrants and the unemployed, eight immigrants and refugees; six refugees only; one unemployed and refugees. This set-up reflects the local process of integration of new needs through existing organizations. For example, at the time of the refugees' crisis there was already a set of organizations (in particular associations and social cooperatives) well implemented in the territory. These structures have opened up their activities and services to refugees, while at the same time maintaining their commitment to previous targets (i.e. the precarious, poor and vulnerable people, the disabled, minors). The majority of SSEOs carry out activities concerning basic or urgent needs, such as education activities, the provision of accommodation or shelter and food, and providing clothes and medicines or health services. Examining singular activities of this kind, we notice educational or training activities comes first (80% do these regularly or occasionally) and in-kind support/relief/help line/aid/assistance services comes second (18 organizations declare these as their most important activities, corresponding to 30%). The sectors of employment and labor relations and of community development/ neighborhood or local demands are also relevant for the



Italian SSEOs. Income-raising entrepreneurial activities are the most important activity for seven organizations (ranking as the third most common single activity). Cultural activities are also frequently carried out, as the recreation and culture sector is one of those most frequently declared by the SSEOs, and more than half of them declared they hold such activities (regularly or occasionally). These data reflect the large number of cultural associations present in the territory, which are registered as cultural associations (the organizations comprising of immigrants are mostly formalized as cultural associations). In recent times, many have begun to introduce the provision of good and services. Those sectors of activity related to social and political integration issues also appear important to the SSEOs, in particular regarding immigration, the integration of migrants, ethnic concerns and discrimination issues and human rights. Looking at singular activities carried out, 60% of SSEOs are engaged in public meetings/assemblies. Even if more radical actions are not carried out by a large number of organizations, it is significant that there is a correspondence between these kind of activities and the temporal dimension: i.e. for organizations founded after the crisis, there are some that declare their most important activity to be, for example, blockade/barricade, or advocacy/lobby/interest representation, or the autonomous management of spaces. The greater number of organizations founded before the crisis, for whom the most important activity is the provision of in-kind support/relief/help line/aid/assistance services (14), is noticeable. Once more this shows the social and historical background of the territory of Italy in general and Bergamo in particular.

SSEOs appear to be solidly structured, since more than 80% of them are officially registered. This again is probably due to the long history of cooperation and volunteering that distinguishes the territorial area of Bergamo. It is interesting to notice that again the data compare with the temporal dimension: those organizations founded before the crisis have a tendency to be part of an umbrella organization/federation. Almost all the organizations are connected to formal or informal networks or platform of organizations. Many SSEOs have contacts with networks of associations (34) and social cooperatives (19); a large number are connected/part of a religious network (27) and with local SSE networks (17). Almost all organizations reported single organizations or foundations with whom they feel 'in network' (47). Moreover, in almost all cases, the SSEOs in Bergamo have: a written constitution (95%), a board / coordinating group (93%) and a chairperson (83%). It is very frequent that they provide committees / work groups for specific issues (79%) and they have general assemblies regularly (95%). A secretary and a treasurer is present in about 65% of organizations. All, or almost all, SSEOs have email, a postal address, an internet connection, computers and a phone number. A website is slightly less frequently reported than a blog / social media (the main thing being having a Facebook page). Italian SSEOs in Bergamo have intense contacts with institutions and public administrations. Fifty-nine percent of the organizations had at least one contact with a department/office of the municipality in the last two years. But there is a lack of homogeneity between the different territorial levels: participation in institutional processes is stronger at local or provincial level, a little lower at regional level and hardly present at all at national level and abroad. As shown in the previous data on the geographical area of action, there is a strong predominance of connections with local territory that is also evident in the data on

participation in decision-making processes: 48 organizations of 58 have participated once in a municipal decision-making process.

Interestingly, participation is low in the more traditional and institutionalized channels, while 58% of the organizations are involved in other kinds of participation. In fact, 33 organizations declare other kinds of participation: more than half take place in roundtables (59%) and one third participate in social neighborhood networks (33%). As for contact with the institutional department, participation in decision-making processes varies for the territorial level: outside the Municipality, there are 17 organizations that participate in the decision-making processes at the provincial and regional level, and only five at the national level. We observe a majority for the provincial level (50% of the organizations participate in regional roundtables) compared to the regional level (50% of the organizations participate in the regional roundtables). Data on the source of financing reveal that half of the organizations find the economic resources to carry out their activities thanks to the sales of good or services: 31 organizations declared this the most important source of financing. For the other SSEOs, resources come from donations (10%) and membership fees (10%), returns from events or campaigns for funds raising (6%) and grants from the Municipality (5%). These resources are also mentioned as second resources even if the 40% of the organizations declare having other kinds of secondary sources of financing. In 37% of the organizations, the second important source of finance is a mix of provincial and regional funding (12.5%) or regional and national funding (25%); and another 26% are composed of a mix of public and private funding. Four organizations declare self-financing as their main economic resource. Three organizations are financed by foundations. In 86% of cases, the main source that composes the total budget covers more than a half of that budget. In 48% of cases, the budget had increased over the last five years. In 88% of cases when organizations have a second main source of operating budget, it covers less than the 35% of that budget. This mostly remained the same over the last five years (40%), and for 20% of organizations it increased. Interestingly, as financing from the state has reduced, organizations tend to increase the return from sales of goods and services. In Bergamo, a good number of SSEOs can dispose of a large amount of financial capacity: 25 organizations have an annual operating budget range that is more than 200.000€ per year. The other organizations have budgets in a very low range (less than 1,000€) to 199.999€. There is a connection between the budget and typology of organization: all the social cooperatives have the bigger operational budgets (more than 200,000€/year); the voluntary associations move from very low budgets (less than 1.000€/year) to the bigger operational budget range (more than 200,000€ per year). The operational budget of the community groups/grassroots and groups of immigrants does not exceed 4,999€/year.

Overall, SSEOs in Bergamo show a resilient ability to inspire their employees' and members' participation in the organization's ideals and common values. SSEOs demonstrate their ability to support vulnerable groups such as refugees, migrants and the unemployed, which is driven primarily by social-benefit motives as opposed to capital accumulation, and by adopting practices that are largely people-centered. SSEOs aim to pursue combined social and economic objectives,

and they share specific operating principles based on participation, solidarity, mutual help, voluntary involvement and collective ownership.

## **Geneva**

As expected, association is the most common type of organization. Indeed, the canton of Geneva benefits from a very dense associative network, which is heavily state-supported. Second, foundations are a common type of organization. The interviewed organizations being almost all and for a large part state-funded, they choose associations and foundations as a juridical structure that allows them to benefit from state-funding. Even the organizations that self-define as a “social economy enterprise” are, in juridical terms, a foundation or an association. Collaboration among organizations is important in Geneva. Some collaborations are formalized through umbrellas. Indeed, almost half of the interviewed organizations are part of an umbrella. However, these umbrellas are often the national or international umbrella, or issue-specific umbrellas. Indeed, the collaborations of the interviewed actors between them occurs mainly within less informal structures, such as networks or platforms. 82.5% of the interviewed actors are a member of a network or platform. There are several recurrent networks/platforms, of which a large part of the interviewed organizations are members. Beside these strong and permanent structures, the coordination of actors to support migrants and the unemployed is mostly informal, punctual, and issue-specific.

The main sector of activity is “employment” because a lot of organizations are active in terms of professional (re-)insertion. Indeed, several organizations benefits from state-funded “solidarity jobs” or “activities of reinsertion”: jobs paid by the state within non-profit organizations. The second sector is “migration” because several organizations are specialized in supporting migrants/refugees, often through administrative or juridical support. Education is the third sector, mostly because training (either language or professional training) is essential for socio-economic integration. Fourth are basic needs, that is, providing food, clothes, shelter, and emergency healthcare. Few organizations are specialized on this issue, without targeting particular some vulnerable groups. Fifth, non-material encompasses all the social and psychological support activities. Again, some organizations are specialized on this issue, without targeting particular some vulnerable groups. Finally, a couple of multisectoral organizations are active in all these sectors, without focusing on one specifically. Education is considered as the main activity by 25% of the organizations. This is the case because most of the organizations active in the sector of employment consider their main activity to be “professional training”. In addition, “professional reinsertion” not being a possible category, they were inclined to choose “education/training”. Furthermore, the category “other” includes mostly organizations working on “professional reinsertion”. Finally, only a few organizations are specialized in political activities (sending letters and lobbying). Both migrants/refugees and economically precarious people are the main target groups of the interviewed organizations. It should be noted that “economically precarious” is not restricted to the unemployed but rather encompasses several categories the (poor/economically

vulnerable; homeless; unemployed; precarious workers). “Vulnerable social groups” encompasses categories such as children, youth, the elderly, disabled, families, women, single parents, etc.). Almost half of the organizations have participated over the last two years in an institutional decisional process at the local level. Indeed, several municipalities are active in the fields of migration and unemployment, and work in collaboration with SSE organizations. Almost two-thirds of organizations participated in such processes at the cantonal level. That is the case because most of the important decisions regarding migrants and the unemployed are taken at this level. In addition, the canton is the major funding institution for SSE organizations. At the national level, participation is an exception: only a few large and powerful organizations have consulted at the national level.

In sum, the findings of the interviews with SSEO representatives partly deviate from the findings of the interviews with policy-makers and stakeholders. Though policy-makers said that SSE is low on their agendas and they generally seem not to really comprehend what the SSE is, the interviews with SSEOs shows high collaboration and connectivity of SSEOs with several municipalities active in the fields of migration and unemployment, and works in collaboration with SSE organizations. Also, the findings show high levels of participation of SSEOs in decision-making processes concerning issues of migration and unemployment at the cantonal level. These findings point to a large discrepancy between policy-makers perceptions and real practice that requires further investigation.

## **Heraklion**

Those people involved in the SSE and overall sector as a whole, as the case of Heraklion reveals, have an alternative vision of how economic and social goods should be provided. This can be understood in the egalitarian and democratic organization of these SSE entities, and seen in the dynamism in the number of SSE entities and organizations that have established themselves more recently. As confirmed by the interviews with both policy-makers and the representatives of SSE entities, there is a correlation between the recent economic and migration/refugee crises and the emergence of urgent needs related to e.g. the provision of food, shelter, medical services, clothing, and emergency support to groups in need (e.g. the unemployed, women, children, refugees). Thus, the SSE sector in Heraklion has been found to be growing over the crises years as a response to unmet social needs, and the limits of traditional social and employment policies to tackle social exclusion.

In terms of SSE emergence, the number of SSE entities in Heraklion making their appearance during the crises years was more than double that of the number of SSE entities pre-existing the crises. SSE entities in Heraklion are also diverse, not only in their type/form, but also in their social objectives, activities, thematic sectors or areas of action, and target groups. In terms of types and form, those with highest frequencies, meeting our criteria in being part of our sample (namely targeting refugees/ migrants and unemployed/ economically precarious) are social cooperatives

and voluntary associations/NGOs/non-profit organizations followed by immigrant groups/organizations and community groups and grassroots initiatives forming a significant part of the SSE landscape. In addition, our study brings to surface certain specific thematic sectors or areas in which SSE entities are most active. In particular, education, recreation and culture, immigration and ethnic concerns and media and communications, hold the highest frequencies. Given the great need Greek society faces following the crises, SSEOs seem to focus mostly on covering basic and urgent needs of the vulnerable groups (92.1%). Next and also with a very high percentage (84.2%) we see the economic integration of those populations (community development, job finding, labor claims, etc.). This seems consistent with the view of most policymakers that the peak of the economic crisis 2011-2014 gave rise to more movements/initiatives aiming to address the parallel humanitarian crisis and cover the state's inability to do so. In the same vein with regards to the activities of the SSE entities, educational and training actions are the most prevalent, followed by the provision of services related to the welfare system. Concerning their scope of action, most SSE organizations/entities have found to operate at municipal, provincial and regional level, while a minority works nationally or internationally (including EU level). A percentage of 18.4% limits their scope to the neighborhood level (mainly the local cultural associations focusing on the wellbeing of a certain community/area).

Regarding the size of SSEOs interviewed, both in terms of membership and number of beneficiaries, and in terms of operational budget and resources, most entities are relatively small. Almost 40% of a SSEOs interviewed are comprised of fewer than nine active members, namely those members regularly engaged in the organization's activities. Medium sized organizations constitute 35% of the sample, so having up to 99 active members, while the remaining 21% of organizations are large or very large (up to and more than 500 members). Significantly the difference between the total and the active members of the organizations is considerably high, since many of the individuals seem to be typically subscribed without having regular presence in the organization's operation or actions. This in many cases is due to the fact that many individuals involved in solidarity actions were initially unemployed, but later on were absorbed into the labor market. On the contrary, the number of people who benefit from the organizations' activities seems particularly high compared to the their actual size in terms of membership (and budget, as you can see below), since almost half of the SSEOs in our sample (44.7%) have more than 500 beneficiaries. The term *beneficiaries* is mostly appropriate for the grassroots initiatives / voluntary associations / foundations which seem to focus more in the social benefit of our target groups, while in terms of social cooperatives and social enterprises the collective benefit is more prevalent, namely the benefit of their own members. For instance, in terms of combating unemployment, establishing a social enterprise/ cooperative was in many cases perceived as a working-alternative.

In terms of resources and budget, only 18.4% of the SSEOs interviewed own the space they use. The remaining 81.6% either rents or is given a space by certain institutions (e.g. school/university infrastructure, foundations' grounds). So far, none is given a space by the local/regional authorities. On the other hand, the Region of Crete was mentioned many times in terms of funding or other

kind of support (e.g. hosting an event). Still, SSEOs seem to derive their income mainly from their membership (in the form of fees) and from donations, either of individuals or of companies (in the form of sponsoring). Next come the returns from sales of their goods and services; and only 15.7% of the SSEOs have as their main source of income grants from the local, regional, national or EU level. However, despite the hard economic circumstances of Greece, two thirds of the SSEOs interviewed either increased their income or stabilized it in terms of their main income source, while only 13.2 % lost part of their main source of income during the last five years preceding the research (2014-2019). As far as their organization is concerned, most SSEOs (32 out of the 38) had a written constitution and a management body (Board), while 30 of them (78.9%) had a chairman/woman, a secretary and a treasury – a finding which suggests a high level of formalization/institutionalization among organizations. In terms of their democratization, 73.7% of the organizations take their decisions through a general assembly. And despite the lack of other resources as well of an adequate budget for their operation, the vast majority of organizations (92.1%) appeared highly advanced with regards to social media use (it is considered an easy and cheap way to organize and communicate their actions). On the other hand, 42.1% of the SSEOs interviewed do not have their own internet connection, or their own computer. In the same vein, almost half of the organizations (47.7%) declare an operational budget under 10,000 euros annually, namely less than 850 euros per month, while 23.7% falls into the next category of between 10,000 and 50,000 euros annually. Regarding the participation of SSEOs in the institutional process, the local level (municipality) seems to be more prominent although the contact between the organizations, and the institutions/departments of each Municipality are mostly occasional. Regular contacts to all levels are limited to 18.4-26.3%. The absence of any contact, though, is more evident in the case of political parties or individual politicians. Only 18.4% maintain regular contacts and this seems to be with a certain political party/politician of the region.

Moreover, out of the 38 organizations, only five SSEOs have organized/taken part in campaigns to increase election turnout either in general or in local elections. On the other hand, almost half of the organizations (47.4%) have members who were candidates in the latest elections (local and regional of May, 2019). Overall, our study attests to a diverse breadth of types of SSE entities, areas, and forms of activity. This is challenging in terms of the type of support SSE entities and organizations would need in order to grow and to be sustained. While there are common features (most SSE organizations are relatively small and recently established), there are different goals, priorities, funding needs and networking and collaboration weaknesses to overcome. This finding may help Greek policy-makers design more targeted, specialist, and tailored measures to support the diverse universe of SSE entities that are active at regional and local levels, as “one-size-fits-all” SSE government support may prove difficult to work. What is crucial to mention is that the findings of the interviews with SSE entities in Heraklion confirm all the findings of the interviews with policy-makers and stakeholders concerning the main barriers for growth that the SSE sector is currently experiencing – including: limited availability and access to funding and financial tools; a broader lack of understanding of the goals and features of the SSE within society and amongst policy-makers; lack of efficient structures of collaboration and connectivity with other SSE or

public entities locally and (cross-) regionally. Other important barriers mentioned by the SSE respondents also include: confusing legislation concerning the establishment of an SSE entity; ineffective public policies that are not substantially contributing to the development of SSE entities; lack of skills on how to manage and run a successful SSE entity as well as lack of available opportunities for skills training and skills acquisition and; suspicion towards public authorities (all levels) accompanied by lack of trust and collaboration. The latter is particularly important when recognizing the fact that for successful partnerships and networks to emerge, national and regional governments need to acknowledge the crucial role of SSE entities in empowering local communities and in directly filling the gaps in public welfare provision within communities. This assumption should go hand in hand with the need for creating long-term conditions for mutually engaged relationships and collaborative trust amongst the broader ecosystem actors.

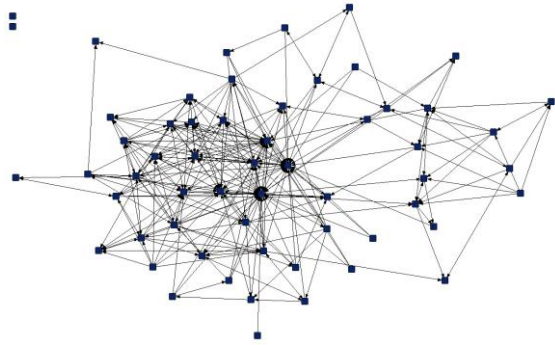
### **Organizational networks**

This section moves from an attributional to a relation logic, providing a graphical representation of the horizontal networks that links the SSEOs studied in each city. As any other kind of organizations, SSEOs belong to a “multiorganizational field” where they are connected to each other in a variety of ways. Our questionnaire included a series of questions aimed to study not only the characteristics of organizations, but also the relationships among different initiating groups. The latter allows the analysis of social networks to investigate the dynamics that take place on the meso-level, as well as to highlight the existence of inter-organizational relationships among SSE actors. In addition, we analyzed the ties between SSE organizations and political authorities at different territorial levels to establish the potential of the various SSE organizations as important players in the system of local governance. Through a comparison of different kinds of repertoires of action within the same locality and an analysis of the repertoires of actions on the same target groups in different contexts, it is possible to understand how the structure of relationships influences the capacity to carry forward a public stance, how the structure of relationship is shaped by different contextual opportunities as well as actors’ capacity to influence the institutional processes (Eggert and Pilati 2014). Specifically, following standard practice in social network analysis, we investigated four types of links: collaboration in projects, sharing of resources and/or information, personal links through individual members, and sharing of core members. Below we show how these four networks look like in our three cities.

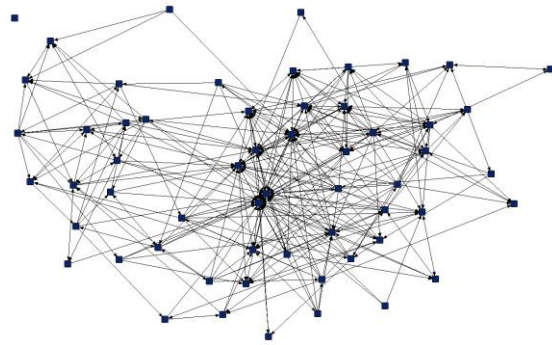
### **Bergamo**

Collaborations

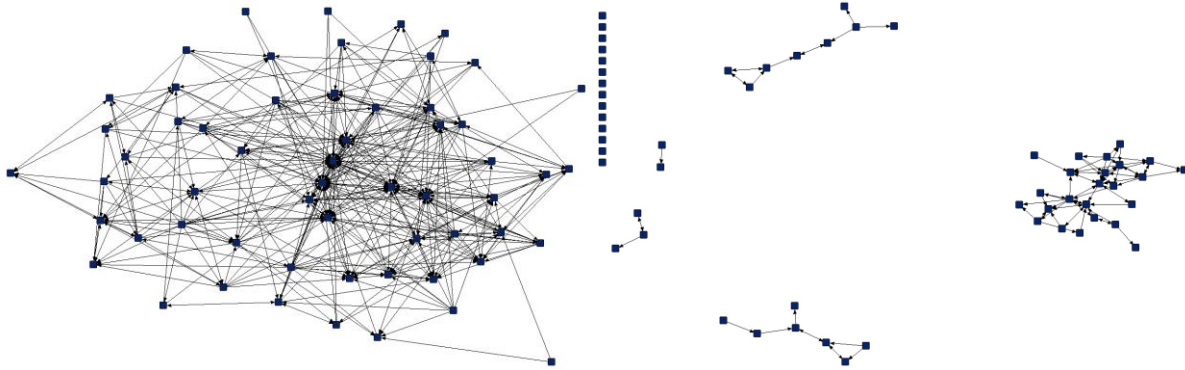
Shared resources and/or information



Personal links through individual members

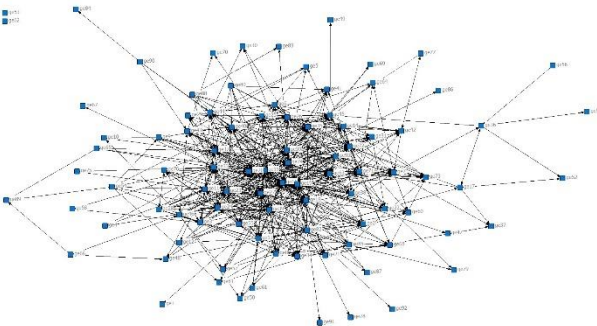


Sharing of core members



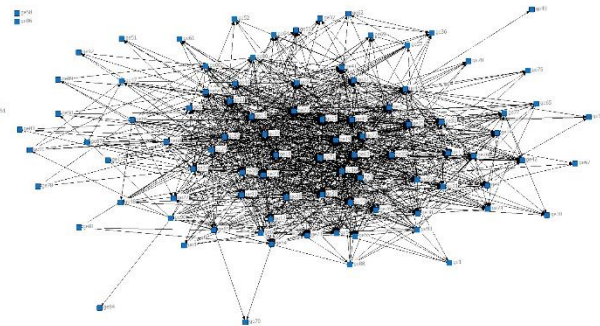
**Geneva**

**Collaborations**



Personal links through individual members

**Shared resources and/or information**



Sharing of core members





component we can observe how several organizations hold a more dominant and central position in the network. These organizations represent well-established actors, which were all already active before the crisis. Beside these organizations, other SSEOs seem instead to be part of a different and more loosely interconnected cluster, made up of generally smaller and younger organizations. In general, if more established actors seem to have acquired a central role on the issue, due to their long time experience and more structured organization which also means more institutional contacts, the crisis appears also to have stimulated the emergence of a new generation of organizations which, as seen before, also characterize for a more direct action repertoire.

In Geneva, we observe highly interconnected network with various key actors that share information and resources through platforms and initiatives. Central organizations in the three former networks (within the inner central core) correspond to well-established actors in the care giving services provision to vulnerable groups. These central organizations share several decades of experiences across sectors of immigration, employment and general social services/charity. They provide what could be considered as transversal services (e.g. education, training, and social support). Besides these SSEOs, additional organizations within the networks central core represent sector/target-oriented organizations focusing on immigrant gender issues, employability and cultural integration. These central organizations connected to younger actors and less known SSEOs have acquired a central role as policy migration frameworks are changing, giving opportunities for activity niches within the field. Therefore, a closer look into the city collaboration and personal links networks shows a grouping tendency, translating in a growth spurt of the network core. Compared to the three former networks in both cities the network concerning shared core members is more fragmented and presents a higher number of isolates. This network identifies the presence of strong ideological affinities between organizations, therefore, the fragmentation of the network is partly related to the nature itself of the tie considered.

In Bergamo this network has five main components, while in Geneva the network concerning shared core members has one major component as observed for the other types of ties considered. In addition, rather than many isolated components, this network presents four more smaller components. This represents a division among organizations due to the changes in the current migration policy framework. As for the previous networks discussed for Geneva (collaborations, personal links, shared resources) most of the SSEOs are embedded in a strong pattern of relationships, these organizations tend to share spaces and platforms for the development of their activities, which translates into the sharing of aims and goals, as well as core members across organizations. However, as stated before the policy changes have given a structural opportunity for the financing of new activities targeting migrant's employability. Precisely, the four additional components in the Geneva network, represent new organizations in the field with a specific target-focus, responding to the new institutional priorities of the sector.

Heraklion presents fewer organizations and, compared to the previous cities of Bergamo and Geneva, the overall network structures is quite different. This is evident as the networks are both

more fragmented and present a higher number of isolated organizations. The networks also appear less centralized as there is no major organizations clearly prevailing over other organizations in receiving ties (cf. the indegrees of organizations, that is, the number of incoming arrows). However, a grassroots initiative appears to be one of the most central organizations in every network aspect that we examined especially in that of project collaborations among organizations. This is probably due to initiative's refusal to receive resources by state, church, NGOs or other institutional actors, which led them to collaborate with other organizations in order to access the necessary resources for their activities. Moreover, concerning the network of personal links among individuals, a voluntary and a grassroots organization appears equally central, maybe because they conduct the same type of activities (providing food and basic goods). The network of shared members shows one major component and one small component. However, most organizations in this network are isolated from one another. This may suggest that organizations generally tend to interact because of shared interests rather than because of ideological affinity. In detail, the network of shared resources and information is the most advanced of all, as only three organizations are isolated. This practically means that organizations tend to collaborate in order to gain access to resources they do not possess. On the contrary, the network of shared members is the one with the higher number of isolated organizations, which is an indication that they do not have similar ideology/perspectives. However, a shared membership network is dependent on organizational type, as all of the grassroots initiatives share their members while the majority of the cooperatives do not.

## **Conclusion**

Over the previous ten years, certain countries adopted painful fiscal policies with severe socioeconomic implications, especially for vulnerable groups. The situation has been aggravated by weak welfare protection and inadequate social safety nets especially for low-income citizens of the native population, but also of migrants and refugees. Drawing on the cases of Bergamo, Geneva and Heraklion, our study has found that the SSE has contributed considerably to supporting and protecting vulnerable groups such as refugees, migrants, and the native-born unemployed within local communities and labour markets; it has effectively mitigated tensions between groups as they compete for (scarce) resources and services, and it has built solidarity relationships in times of austerity thus, making "integration" in times of crisis a less contentious issue. Overall, our study shows that SSE entities and actors are seeking to combat some of the country's most crucial challenges, primarily unemployment and social protection, but they are also seeking to demonstrate and advocate an alternative economic model and vision of egalitarian socioeconomic organization. As discussed in this report, while social solidarity groups cannot and should not replace the more institutionalized forms of social protection, the fact that vulnerable groups can resort to such SSE initiatives while public support structures are weak, shows that solidarity conveyed via SSE entities is an untapped potential for further future development. This is promising and demonstrates the potential for policy and practice to boost the SSE sector both nationally as well as regionally and

locally. What is clear from the interview findings is a strong belief that the SSE sector, despite its current weaknesses, can have considerable potential in the years to come. To this end, a number of proposals and ideas have been discussed with the respondents during the interviews which we have synthesized and used as a basis to draw the following conclusions and recommendations:

### ► **SSE beyond being just a buffer against crises**

Our study shows that the effects of the recent economic crisis – unemployment, exclusion, inequality, poverty – have obliged citizens to rethink the way local communities meet social needs. One product of this rethinking has been the rise of new SSE entities – formal and informal groups with primarily social objectives – which were found to complement other channels of providing goods and services. This includes the reintegration of vulnerable groups into working lives and the extension of social welfare and protection by providing goods and services to address emerging urgent needs. SSE entities are generally perceived as being different from the public economy and from the conventional for-profit economy. Driven primarily by social benefit motives as opposed to capital accumulation, these organizations are seen as being largely ‘people-centred.’ They aim to pursue combined social and economic objectives and share specific operating principles based on participation, solidarity, mutual aid, voluntary involvement and democratic engagement. Yet, our study has shown that if SSE entities are not simply to be a response to crisis, but effective means to expand and diversify according to each society’s needs and dynamics, then policy-makers must put in place comprehensive strategies and ways to learn and adapt to complex and changing circumstances, and not least to external pressures and shocks. This also involves the ability to produce new goods, innovative services and processes that meet social needs or create new social relationships and collaborations. Seen in this way, the recent growth of SSE entities presents the opportunity to plan more comprehensive and democratic economic and social policies which comprise production inclusion, social equality, and poverty eradication within a wider model of welfare pluralism.

### ► **The need for enabling policy environments**

Our study shows that disabling environments associated with SSE funding, weak initial conditions, assets and competencies, have rendered some SSE entities and organizations not only inherently fragile but also amenable to those populations at the bottom of the ladder in terms of endowments and capabilities. At the same time, limited capacities of state institutions, including local governments, to craft and implement enabling policies, and weak governance arrangements and spaces for the co-construction of policy have impacted on the possibilities of designing, implementing collaborations to solve problems. Hence, in crafting synergies and collaborations, the issue is how to ensure that the SSE actor’s ‘voice’, or their seat at the table, actually translates into them becoming a player who can effectively influence decision-making processes. Periods of crisis are accompanied by recovery plans and plans for reforming systems that contributed to the crisis. In this time of crisis recovery; therefore, the promotion of SSE actors in decision-making

structures and of SSE considerations within policy frameworks is a significant tool for achieving social inclusion and cohesion, from local to national levels.

More particularly, the growth of SSE entities and development of the SSE sector often requires public policies to recognize the particularities and added value of the SSE in economic, social and societal terms (e.g. forms of governance, outreach of vulnerable groups). It requires that public policies for supporting the SSE entities are dynamic – constantly evolving in response to changing social conditions – as well as demand the strong and active participation of civil society in their planning, execution and monitoring. Bearing in mind this, the main concern at the outset should be that policies created to support the development of SSE entities at the national and local levels must be oriented towards:

- recognizing SSE entities as a social actor in public dialogue;
- developing and delivering effective technical assistance for SSEs;
- facilitating access of SSE entities to appropriate technologies, assistance etc.;
- raising awareness about the role and activities of the SSE sector;
- facilitating access to finance and making available funds to finance projects;
- providing capacity-building to SSE participants, education of trainers, educators and public administrators.

Also, to be more effective, public policies for the SSE must be conceived as a result of citizens' collective action (“co-production”). Crucially, creating overall ‘enabling policy environments’ raises some issues. For example, how to institutionalize SSEs in governmental structures; the centrality and interfaces of the SSE in other policies; and, how to establish permanent and effective mechanisms for SSE participation in policy management. This should be treated cautiously so to avoid antagonistic relations between SSE and state actors emerging. In this respect, meeting the main challenges for a policy and legal framework supportive of the SSE entities requires:

- a major institutional role for the SSE;
- adequate legislation (with less bureaucracy), regulations and norms;
- tools for impact assessments of SSE services and operation at local level;
- better integration of policies among different government levels (sectoral and regional);
- a reinforced dialogue between SSE actors and the political decision-makers.

### ► **The importance of partnerships and networks**

The SSE cannot be developed or sustained by isolated organizations and enterprises. Networking and partnerships are key factors in building a strong, recognized and visible SSE. More particularly, SSE entities need to root themselves in community, mobilize various stakeholders and build strong alliances with social partners and public authorities. While this process requires a lot of effort on the part of SSE actors, for successful partnerships and networks to emerge, national and regional governments need to acknowledge the crucial role of SSE entities in the provision of goods and

service because of their capacity to mobilize resources from the community and within the marketplace to achieve public benefit. The capacity of SSE entities to produce innovative solutions to complex problems should become the focus of territorial policy and of interventions aiming to support the SSE entities and local communities in creating strategic planning processes and collective projects. Admittedly, developing strong partnerships and networks is not an overnight miracle; it requires a long-term vision and a strategic plan that allows different stakeholders to work together successfully. On their end, SSE entities and actors need to step up their efforts to network among themselves at the local, national and European levels. Through their federations and networks, they may enhance their representation and collaboration capacities. On the part of policy-makers, efforts are required to determine what is required to create strong networks and partnerships with SSE entities, adapted to the specific realities of a region and SSE potential. For instance, networks that practice inclusiveness are expected to be the most successful in developing new public policy and creating development tools for the emerging SSE entities. Networks that can bring together a wide variety of SSE entities and other stakeholders will, in the end, manage to initiate social dialogue with government and other social partners. Further on, international experience shows that the strongest networks are those that are based on local and regional structures, that are rooted in communities and territorial realities. Such networks will benefit from the support of a wide range of partners and their contribution to socio-economic development and inclusive growth will be clearly demonstrated in the field. Put it differently, encouraging, promoting, and supporting networks and partnerships may play an enriching role in reinforcing peer learning among SSE actors and policy-makers – locally, regionally or nationally – and, more broadly, even across Europe.

### ► SSE as a vehicle for empowerment and the need for common understanding

Empowerment is an important factor that allows individuals and communities to have a voice and be represented. Empowerment can be built through a variety of processes and mechanisms. Our study shows that participation and membership in SSE entities contribute to an empowerment process, individually and collectively. Participants and beneficiaries gain empowerment through their active involvement in the participatory decision-making process within the organization and outside the organizations when they bargain with external stakeholders. At the collective level, SSE entities also contribute to the empowerment process of individuals and communities by demonstrating that all individuals can become active and productive economic and social actors. Nevertheless, more sustained efforts are required to build and establish a common understanding about the necessity of an SSE-oriented policy-making especially at local, regional, and national levels. SSE actors need to comprehensively understand the features as well as the barriers and enablers for an enabling SSE ecosystem when designing measures and policies to support the SSE sector. This needs to be accompanied by a deeper understanding within wider society about the opportunities and benefits of the SSE, and how such an environment can open new opportunities, address unemployment, and establish relationships of solidarity and social support beyond periods of crisis.

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