

# Talent from the social economy for welfare and care sector



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The present article is the result of the European project Social Economy for Care supported by the European Social Fund (ESF). The project looked for opportunities in Flanders (Northern part of Belgium) and in Europe to bring the social economy and the care and welfare sectors closer together.

The common denominator between those sectors is work. The social economy considers work a lever in the life of people and creates diverse services and production in order to offer a sustainable career to people who are far removed from the job market. The care and welfare sectors need motivated, versed employees with a passion for patients and clients.

One of the starting points of this project was the insight that it is increasingly more difficult to fill vacancies in the care sector. VERSO for example, a federation of social profit employers, was able to place this point prominently on the agenda by calculating that the sector only in Flanders will annually need 46,000 new employees in the next ten years.

Another starting point was that certain tasks in care and welfare can sometimes be done by employees from the social economy if changes in how the team is organised are implemented. The specialised term for this is job carving: bundling various, low threshold tasks in a new function to support not only clients or patients but also existing members of staff.

LCM and IN-Z looked for what the social economy is already doing in this regard, and which forms of intersectoral cooperation forms exist today in terms of care and welfare.

In Flanders we found CM Midden-Vlaanderen and CM Limburg as partners for this. Together with them, we involved numerous local care and welfare facilities and similar actors who play a part for disadvantaged groups on the job market, such as companies in the local service economy, sheltered workplaces and workplace architects.

From a transnational perspective we could count on social entrepreneurs in Italy, Spain and Poland, respectively Asociación Bienestar y Desarrollo (ABD), Società Cooperativa Sociale “Insieme Si Può”, and Stowarzyszenie Wzajemnej Pomocy “Flandria” (SWPF).

This article will give you a taste of what we found in our search. Here below you will find a few extracts and political recommendations, as well as experiences from other countries.

## What does the social economy have to do with care and welfare?

### Working in niches

In the past decades the social economy has developed projects in the niches of care and welfare that enabled them to provide work to their employees and which they could use to fill in new needs. Most of those projects demonstrate the power of intersectoral cooperation.

Companies in the local service economy expanded their services a long time ago to home care and child care. The home care sector required caring employees that could supplement the work of informal care providers and volunteers. In particular women without a degree who wanted to re-enter the job market were able to find motivating employment. Up to this day they are fulfilling various tasks in the field of companionship and supervision.

Loneliness, emerging dementia and palliative treatment are often just around the corner. With their valuable work, often outside of normal working hours, they contribute an important part to dignified ageing of seniors in their familiar surroundings.



The childcare sector required neighbourhood orientated initiatives with a strong social function. These companies were able to succeed with a participatory function and mixed teams, in which one or two employees from the social economy were added to the regular supervisors. Up until today their contribution in this is essential because they bring hands-on expertise and are able to develop relationships with the parents much easier.

From home care and childcare, this has now expanded to elderly care, education, mental health care and care for people with a handicap.

### Together on one work floor

Employees from the social economy are increasingly appearing alongside regular employees from care, education and welfare in the same setting. Senior assistants are becoming transmural and doing work in residential care centres. We can also find child orientated employees from the social economy on the playgrounds of schools where they provide activities for the school as a whole and forge relationships with socially vulnerable parents.

Residential care centres often have many reasons to embrace the social economy. The ever recurring concern about the manner in which their residents experience the stay in the care centre being one of them. Supplementing the efforts of volunteers, employees from the social economy are responsible for the structural support of the regular care staff. They take on tasks in animation, meal distribution, mail distribution, transport accompaniment, etc. It only benefits the quality of life of the residents and the attractiveness of the residential care centre.



A similar trend relies on retrieving the logistic tasks that were outsourced before, such as the laundry and ironing service. Employees from local services take on these and other logistic tasks in a setting that does not exclude contact with residents but invokes it. Their presence and activity benefit the domestic feeling of the centre.

The broad schools of the social economy offer another source of inspiration for how you can work together on the same work floor. Broad schools are naturally intersectoral with connections between schools, welfare actors and local associations. When employees from local services are also responsible for the con-

tinuity of the broad school, you get an interesting dynamic between the schools, the social economy, welfare services and expert flanking education policy of the local management. As a result schools gain a meaningful leisure programme during lunch hours and after school hours, maintain better contacts with socially vulnerable families, have more satisfied parents and pupils, create a better image and more opportunities to make their educational project successful.

### Policy recommendations

The social economy is a sector like any other, in the sense that regulations also apply in the social economy, that support the practice but also hinder it from time to time. Although an advice from the competent administration often suffices to remove possible obstacles, sometimes a hard to remove obstacle will have to be dealt with. From our project we drafted therefore a number of policy recommendations in a separate publication.

We thereby also refer to general measures that can help those employers from social profit to recruit more employees from the social economy. Think for example of the target group measure for older employees (55 +).

The conjuncture also ensures that our project is not a unique and isolated laboratory. These days a number of other initiatives are arising in relation to social economy and care from very different perspectives.

These perspectives also lead to structural insights. From various policy recommendations that simultaneously emerge and that are worded complementary and empowering, we do expect some results. It is good that organisations know that the context is being worked on here and there in order to facilitate partnerships between the social economy and the regular social profit.

### In other counties...

Flanders is not an island, it is a region that fits in a wide European dynamic. We think some special focus and pride is in place here. We are the undeniable front runners with our accomplishments of the local service economy in the field of care.

The European project that allowed us to investigate relationships between the social economy and care from the perspective of the employer led us to the region of Veneto in Italy, to Barcelona in Spain and to Poznan in western Poland.

We found strong incentives in Veneto and Barcelona, mostly in the form of ESF projects, up to activation in local services, such as in personal assistance, transport, neighbourhood networks en homework support. The duration of those involved was mostly limited and to make service providing activities sustainable and worthwhile is a European wide challenge.

Barcelona and Poznan offered quite a bit of incentives to gainfully use the field expertise of men or women for vulnerable target groups. In Barcelona a service was started under the impulse of community action in which ex-addicts offered support to visitors of regulated tolerance areas, to provide for example HIV education. In another initiative vulnerable people were involved in the assessment of energy use in houses of people with a low income. In Poznan they work from a mutualistic perspective on mutual aid of local residents in situations where care is needed. A people emergency centre with a separate line for questions in connection to loneliness is seven days per week responsible for dispatching.

Opportunities in different regions and countries are in no way specific to a difference in needs and are only marginally specific to different opinions. The need for jobs was even greater with our foreign partners and the need for care was just as great. But the difference in opportunities is the killer in this field. Southern Europe is still dealing with the consequences of the financial and economic crisis and the austerity policy that was implemented then. In particular in the Catalan region the social domain appears to be strongly shaped by this. Social organisations even have the greatest difficulty to tie their project employees to them in a sustainable manner. Poland on the other hand has an old clause from the constitution that imposes free care. In reality this results into a supply of affordable care that is much too small and drives a large group of people towards the almost unaffordable private initiatives.

There are therefore plenty of reasons to take good care of the space offered by the regulations for social economy, care and welfare, to look for new synergies where possible and insist on less rules and policy innovations.

*More information:*

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UITGAVE VAN DE LANDBOND DER CHRISTELIJKE MUTUALITEITEN EN VZW IN-Z  
BRUSSEL, 2019

DEZE PUBLICATIE KWAM TOT STAND MET DE STEUN VAN HET EUROPEES SOCIAAL FONDS EN DE VLAAMSE GEMEENSCHAP

