

RREUSE Feedback for the Call for Evidence: 2023 European Year of Skills

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RREUSE greatly welcomes the Commission's proposal for the 2023 European Year of Skills which also acknowledges the social economy's decisive role as a proponent of a socially fair and inclusive twin transition including in the field of upskilling and reskilling.

Social enterprises active in re-use, preparation for re-use, and recycling activities such as those of the RREUSE network are historical contributors to key circular activities, providing training and employment opportunities to underprivileged individuals with a low skills baseline. These opportunities allow for acquiring valuable manual skills crucial for an inclusive green transition, some of which are now in scarcity. These include identification, first quality checks, sorting when receiving goods, and dismantling, repairing, and functionality checks during the restoration process. Equally, social enterprises are also active in the digital transition. RREUSE highlights its members promote innovative digital tools in e-commerce, traceability and reporting software. Finally, a key component of work integration programmes and training at social enterprises is to improve psychosocial skills like self-motivation, problem-solving, and teamwork. Such skills are not only necessary for future job prospects but form the basis to develop well-being and facilitate lifelong learning.

While the contribution of social circular enterprises in the field of skills is remarkable, RREUSE stresses the momentum brought by the Year of Skills should be capitalised on to strengthen financial and legislative support to their social and circular innovations in the area. The current lack of data on green and digital skills runs counter to the even development of the ecosystem, which might struggle to efficiently communicate its impact, share best practices among the community or attract investors. More opportunities for collective engagement, including with the private sector, are needed alongside funding opportunities for social and environmental goals.

To foster a mindset of inclusive upskilling and reskilling, RREUSE calls for the Year of Skills agenda to be comprehensive of the following actions:

- Raising awareness on available European and national funding opportunities to support the upskilling and reskilling work of social economy actors, including under the EU Skills Agenda and Transition Pathway for the Social Economy.
- Designing ad hoc events for social economy actors in the area of skills across the EU. Such events can include networking sessions with philanthropies, microfinance investors, and national authorities, aimed at enhancing the visibility of the ecosystem, mutual learning, and sharing of best innovative social and circular practices. Some of the content

could touch upon engagements with the private sector in the area of skills or strengthening the role of facilitators to ease access to procurement opportunities.

- Addressing the lack of data on skills, which is particularly pressing in regard to skills necessary for a circular economy. The upcoming single-entry point website, the EU Social Economy Gateway, as part of the Action Plan on the Social Economy, should facilitate the dissemination of relevant publications from social economy networks and institutions. The future RREUSE 2023 report on circular skills can provide additional evidence-based data on the contribution social enterprises provide.
- Fostering the development and recognition of training and skills qualifications, with more harmonising rules. This is crucially needed to accelerate and professionalise circular skills development and, therefore, prevent a skills gap that could potentially slow down the transition to a circular economy.
- Promoting initiatives to adapt academic curricula to reflect green social entrepreneurship concepts, including social economy business models addressing re-use employment potential in the circular economy, climate change, and other environment-related issues.

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