

## RREUSE ANSWERS THE CALL FOR EVIDENCE ON THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND 2014-2020 EX-POST EVALUATION.

The European Social Fund has been an invaluable tool to guarantee social economy enterprises work for inclusive jobs and training in the circular economy. RREUSE members who were ESF beneficiaries for the 2014-2020 period (e.g. national networks Re-use Austria and AERESS in Spain) addressed the following ESF thematic objectives: promotion of sustainable, quality employment (8), promotion of social inclusion, combating poverty, and discrimination (9), and improving skills and supporting the development of education and training systems (10).

Overall, members acknowledge the crucial ESF support for fairer job opportunities and living standards for over 110,000 workers - of which several in work integration programmes - in more than 1,100 social enterprises of the wide RREUSE Network.<sup>1</sup> ESF joins other European Social Fund Plus initiatives - including EaSI - representing a lifeline for social enterprises and their European and national networks' crucial role in coordinating, collecting data, and ensuring representation on the policy-making stage.

RREUSE encourages ESF to build upon its good track record. However, it notes the following recommendations for better social enterprise support:

- **Address social enterprises' obstacles in accessing both social and environmental funding opportunities.** The EC 2021 Social Economy Action Plan attests social economy's need to access funding opportunities for environmental goals (p.17). RREUSE members noted there is a higher scope for ESF to invest in areas such as green jobs adaptation for marginalised groups. As key experts in integrating a human-centered approach in the re-use, repair, and recycling sectors, they emphasise the need to direct social innovation support in the circular economy and align ESF with national circular strategies.
- **Guarantee a flexible approach for social enterprises to meet target groups' needs.** The work integration workers within social enterprises come from different backgrounds at risk of social exclusion, with needs that can be difficult to predict. Members stressed ESF should have more flexible criteria to reinforce social enterprises' expertise in offering tailor-made opportunities to their target groups and offer higher social innovation support.
- **Safeguard social economy's access to EU funding.** Social enterprises of the circular economy find it increasingly hard to compete with the private sector's increased interest in circular actions. As their core mission is to pursue social and environmental goals and reinvest any profit into their activities, earmarking relevant funding would help ensure a level playing field. RREUSE joins other EU networks in calling to earmark at least 10% of relevant EU funding for social enterprises and other social economy actors in

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<sup>1</sup> RREUSE (2023), Member Impact 2022 (Available [here](#)).

streams such as ESF+, Life, Horizon, and the ERDF.

- **Raise awareness of funding opportunities.**

European networks play a crucial role in knowledge transfer to national social economy actors, including what concerns EU funding opportunities. However, some members stress the limited information on national authorities' EU fund management. The EC's new Social Economy Gateway is a positive step forward for awareness raising and transparency that should only be strengthened with more national framework information.

RREUSE is an independent non-profit organisation representing social enterprises active in the field of re-use, repair and recycling, with 32 members across Europe and the USA. Our main vision is for Europe to support the role of social enterprise in a circular economy, providing meaningful work and training opportunities to thousands of vulnerable members. RREUSE's primary mission is to help tackle poverty, social exclusion and a throwaway culture by promoting policies, best practices and partnerships that support the social enterprises working in environmental services for local and inclusive job creation.

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