

## Feedback to the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) - mid-term evaluation

### CALL FOR EVIDENCE

The European Social Fund+ is a key funding instrument for re-use and repair social enterprises in Europe. On the ground, it supports the RREUSE network's social enterprises in their missions of combating poverty and promoting social inclusion, employment and skills development in the circular economy. Thanks to ESF+, social enterprises like R.U.S.Z. (Austria) set up vocational training for mechatronic engineers who had not completed their primary education. Solidança (Spain) launched a 12-month labour insertion and training programme targeting women suffering from domestic violence and the transgender community.

The Employment and Social Innovation strand (EaSI) of ESF+ also plays a foundational role in networks like RREUSE. EaSI enables RREUSE to create indispensable fora to discuss and promote social innovation, policy interventions, and gather data on behalf of its 33 members across 30 countries. In turn, RREUSE supports the EC in implementing key initiatives such as the Social Economy and Circular Economy Action Plans, the Social Pillar, and the 2030 Headline Targets.

Amid the mid-term evaluation, RREUSE wishes for 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 funding for both social and environmental goals.** The EU Social Economy Action Plan reports the social economy's need to access funds for environmental goals (p.17). As key experts in putting people first in the re-use, repair, and recycling sectors, members note ESF+ should invest in areas such as green jobs adaptation for marginalised groups and align with circular economy objectives.
- **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 allowing support for broader target groups.
- **Safeguard social economy's access to EU funding.** Social enterprises of the circular economy compete with the private sector's increased interest in circular activities. As their core mission is to pursue social and environmental goals and reinvest any profit into its missions, RREUSE joins other EU networks in calling to earmark at least 10% of relevant EU funding such as ESF+ to ensure a level playing field and long-term support for social economy enterprises.
- **Raise awareness of funding opportunities.** European networks play a crucial role in knowledge transfer to national social economy actors, including available EU funding opportunities. However, members noted a lack of transparency on ESF+ funding allocation at the national level.

The EC's new Social Economy Gateway is a positive step forward for awareness raising that should only be strengthened with more national framework information.

- **Better support inclusive skills opportunities.** Despite skills being a major ESF+ priority, re-use and repair social enterprises find challenges in accessing support for work-based approaches to circular training. Future skills investments should better recognise informal and non-formal training, which is often more accessible for target groups than formal education opportunities.

RREUSE is an independent non-profit organisation representing social enterprises active in the field of re-use, repair and recycling, with 33 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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