



## **CIRIEC Commission on Social & Cooperative Economy - Research project**

7<sup>th</sup> July 2026

### **Working Group** **Public policies towards the Social Economy and international perspective**

**Proposed working group from CIRIEC International Scientific Commission on Social & Cooperative Economy,  
upon initiative of Rafael Chaves, Carmen Marcuello and Marguerite Mendell**

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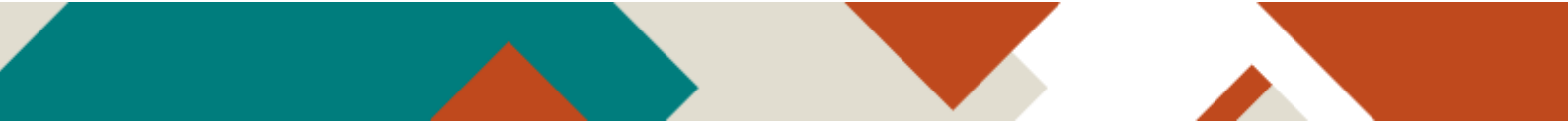
*This version is subject to further adaptation, based on comments to be received by interested experts and future participants of this working group.*

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## **Introduction**

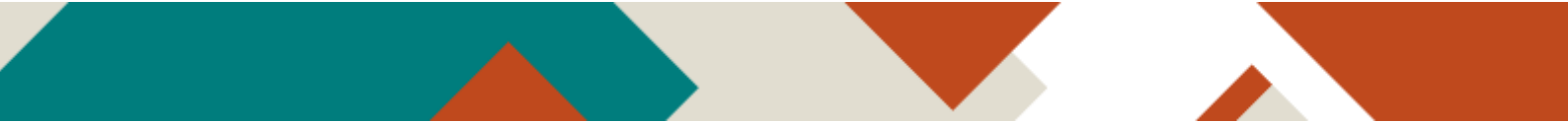
In 2013, CIRIEC, under the auspices of its International Scientific Commission on 'Social and Cooperative Economy', published a collective book entitled 'The Emergence of the Social Economy in Public Policy. An International Perspective'. It presented the work carried out by experts and policy-makers from Europe, the Americas and Asia as part of an international project in a context of a growing international recognition of the importance of the social economy and the nascent roll-out of public policies addressing it. It addressed issues such as which policies were emerging, why they had emerged in some countries and not in others, what their key characteristics and their objectives were from an international perspective. The book included several national and regional case studies and analysed their divergences and convergences.

Since the publication of this study, many governments at national, regional and local levels, together with major international organisations, have devoted increasing attention to the



social economy. This growing recognition has been reflected in the adoption of new policy frameworks, institutions and legal instruments across all continents. Notable examples of policies towards the social economy include the approval of national strategies and multiannual action plans in countries such as Spain, Germany, Ecuador and South Korea; the creation or strengthening of ministries and public bodies responsible for the social and solidarity economy in countries such as France, Brazil and Spain; the enactment of framework legislation in Mexico, Tunisia, Portugal, France, Poland, and Greece; and the adoption of major international initiatives, including the implementation of the European Commission's European Action Plan for the Social Economy; the Council of the European Union's Recommendation on the development of framework conditions for the social economy; the Declaration by the MERCOSUR Parliament of the Americas to promote the social economy through public policies; the African Union's Ten-Year Strategy for the Promotion of the Social and Solidarity Economy; the United Nations General Assembly Resolutions on 'Promoting the Social and Solidarity Economy for Sustainable Development' and the International Labour Conference Resolution on 'Social and Solidarity Economy and Decent Work'; the Recommendation on 'Social and Solidarity Economy and Social Innovation' by the OECD Council [Bonnici & Klijn, 2023; Duverger & Mendell, 2025 ; Chaves-Avila 2025].

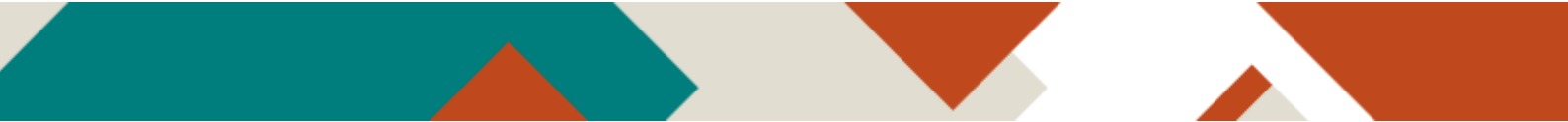
From an analytical perspective, over the last four decades, public policies promoting the social economy have undergone a profound transformation. Rather than constituting a homogeneous field, they currently encompass three broad *policy models or regimes* (Chaves, 2025). The first consists of *first-generation policies*, which emerged during the twentieth century and were primarily sectoral and compensatory in nature. These policies sought to repair the failures in the system, tackling fragmented social and economic problems through sector-specific policies by supporting particular social economy forms—such as agrarian cooperatives in the context of agriculture policy and nonprofit organisations in the context of social policy. A second model comprises *second-generation or transformative social economy policies*, which have expanded significantly over the last fifteen years. These policies no longer conceive the social economy merely as a corrective mechanism but as a strategic actor capable of contributing to inclusive prosperity, territorial cohesion, social innovation and the ecological and digital transitions. Consequently, they adopt more transversal approaches, combining legislation, multiannual strategies, co-production and co-implementation



governance between governments, civil society and social economy sector, a new wave of instruments (such as social public procurements, territorial development projects and social economy support ecosystems) and policy mixes that integrate the social economy into broader public agendas (Chaves & Gallego, 2020). Alongside these two policy models, a third and increasingly relevant trajectory has emerged in several countries: *the erosion or dismantling of social economy policies*. In contexts characterised by political shifts towards neoliberal or reactionary governments, transformative policies have frequently been eroded, redirected or dismantled through budget cuts, institutional downgrading, introducing ideational confusion, the abolition of specialised agencies, the repeal of legal frameworks or the replacement of collaborative governance arrangements with market-oriented approaches (Kuhnle & Selle, 1992 ; Pierson, 1994 ; Bauer et al, 2012). Rather than viewing these three policy models as successive historical stages, they should be understood as alternative trajectories that currently coexist across countries and territories, reflecting different political coalitions, institutional capacities and ideological orientations.

This diversity of models across different countries calls for a new generation of comparative research on social economy policies. The challenge is, first, to document the emergence of these policies and, second, to explain their different development trajectories and the factors that determine their success, resilience, or decline. Why do some countries institutionalize transformative second-generation policies, while others remain limited to fragmented first-generation approaches or experience a reversal in their policies? What institutional capacities, governance mechanisms, political coalitions, and ideological frameworks enable these policies to survive changes in government and adapt to constantly evolving socioeconomic challenges?

Addressing these questions requires advances in empirical studies, documentation of new policy tools, budgets actually allocated to these policies, institutional arrangements developed as co-production and co-implementation between civil society and governments, the role played by the different government levels (international, national, regional and local), advances in the evaluation of these policies, as well as advances in the tools for analysis based on the theory of policy trajectories, institutional resilience, and policy change. From a perspective that values the positive contribution of the social economy to general well-being, the goal is to identify the conditions under which social economy policies become resilient



public institutions, capable of generating long-term public value despite changes in political cycles.

As a backdrop, the hypothesis is that social economy policy is gradually evolving into a full-fledged area of public policy (Chaves, 2025), comparable to already established areas such as industrial, agricultural, or social policy, with its own legislative frameworks, specific institutions, multi-year strategies, and governance mechanisms. A new, stable, cross-cutting, and resilient sphere of government action, capable of generating long-term public value and withstanding changes in political cycles.

## General objectives

1. To comparatively analyse the emergence, institutionalisation and evolution of social economy policy as a distinct domain of public policy, identifying different policy trajectories—expansion, consolidation, stagnation, erosion and dismantling—across diverse political, institutional and socio-economic contexts.
2. To identify the institutional, political and governance conditions that enable social economy policies to become effective, resilient, sustainable and capable of generating long-term public value.

## Specific objectives

1. To analyse how institutional capacities, governance arrangements, policy mixes, political coalitions and ideational frameworks shape the design, implementation and resilience of social economy policies.
2. Analyze the institutional and discursive strategies that explain the resilience or dismantling of these policies.
3. To assess the effectiveness and public value of different policy models and instruments, using different evaluation criteria adapted to the specific characteristics of social economy policies.
4. To develop an international typology of social economy policy regimes based on their level of institutionalisation, governance capacity -including the mode of co-governance with civil society and Social Economy sector, their ideational density, resilience and sustainability.

5. To formulate evidence-based recommendations for strengthening the institutionalisation, effectiveness and long-term resilience of social economy policy as a permanent and cross-cutting domain of government action.

## Project organisation

### Coordinators:

- Rafael CHAVES, University of Valencia, Spain
- Margueritte MENDELL, University of Concordia, Canada
- Carmen MARCUELLO, University of Zaragoza, Spain.

Case-study papers should analyse public policies for the social economy, primarily at the national level, while also considering regional, local and supranational levels of government, as well as the interactions between them within systems of multilevel governance. To ensure meaningful international comparison, the collection of case studies should provide a balanced representation of three broad policy trajectories: (i) countries where social economy policy remains weakly institutionalised, largely absent or fragmented; (ii) countries where social economy policy has evolved towards consolidated second-generation or transformative policies, becoming an increasingly autonomous and cross-cutting field of public policy; and (iii) countries where previously established social economy policies are experiencing processes of erosion, retrenchment or dismantling. Each case study should examine the institutional, political and ideational factors shaping these trajectories, paying particular attention to policy design, governance arrangements, institutional capacity, policy mixes and resilience to changing political contexts. In addition to country case studies, comparative, cross-national and theoretical papers that contribute to the conceptual development of social economy policy as a distinct public policy domain are also welcome.

Working languages: English (+ possibly French and Spanish for publications)

Composition of the group: Call for interest and for papers within the Ciriec network (including field experts).

Publication of the work: Several outlets are foreseen:

- A Special issue (2027/2028) of Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics
- CIRIEC Working Papers (peer-reviewed)
- A Book with empirical studies, possibly

Proposed timetable (2026-28):

- **July-October 2026:** kick off, selection of the case studies, preparation of the theoretical chapter, methodology.

July-September 2026: Launch of the call to participate (ongoing possibility to join the project)

October 2026: Online meetings of the Working Group (agreeing on the interview grid, approaching the stakeholders, exchange about first findings, ...)

5-8 October 2026: 35th International Congress of CIRIEC (Montreal, Canada): Workshop, presentation of papers in process (3rd October)

- **November-December 2026:** preparation of the case studies

December: Launch of the Call for Papers in the Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics (call closing on 1 March 2027)

- **First semester 2027:** revision of the papers, Workshop

March 2027: Workshop (with the APCE potential contributors)

- **Second semester 2027/ First semester 2028:** preparation of the final publication and possible additional events

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