

SSE in France :

The social and solidary economy in France refers to a set of organizations and companies that have placed solidarity, cooperation, social utility and protection of the planet at the heart of their principles and activities. An economic model with a social purpose, the concept of SSE as we know it today in France was developed in the 1990s as an alternative to the dominant economic system centered around the notion of profit. It is in fact the result of the marriage of two concepts: the social economy and the solidarity economy specific to France. The first refers to a way of structuring organizations by giving priority to the men and women who compose it rather than to financial gain. Their management is collective and essentially democratic. The solidarity economy refers to organizations whose main objective is utility and social cohesion. Fighting against unemployment, exclusion or inequalities. They defend the idea of different production and consumption, for example by promoting fair trade. Of course, the two concepts are completely complementary. The birth of a social and solidarity economy was therefore logical. The social and solidarity economy weighs nearly 10% of French GDP or even 12% (gross domestic product), thanks to a fabric of more than 220,000 establishments. These employ 2.38 million people across the country (including 14% of all private employment) and can also count on the involvement of 22 million volunteers. A dynamic sector that produces social innovation, the SSE is mainly made up of small structures, since 87% of them have fewer than 20 employees. In France, it is law no. 2014-856 of July 31, 2014 which has enabled the full recognition of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) by giving it, among other things, a clearer and more complete legal status. The text recognized the SSE as a mode of entrepreneurship and economic development suitable for all areas of human activity” , while setting several other major objectives:

- Consolidate the network, governance and financing tools of SSE actors
- Empowering employees to act
- Cause a cooperative shock
- Strengthen local sustainable development policies

This law also made it possible to create a new “solidary enterprise of social utility” (ESUS) approval, which provides access to financing for solidarity savings. As mentioned, the actors of the social and solidarity economy are based on a base of common values which are humanism, solidarity, democracy, justice, equity as well as local and sustainable development. Founding principles derive from this, including limited lucrateness (profits must be reinvested as much as possible in the activity and the employees) or even democratic governance (everyone has a say in decision-making). The notion of social utility must guide all decision-making. By extension, SSE organizations and companies also aim to develop an economy that respects the environment. Sharing, human dignity and sustainability are therefore key... and linked. And for good reason, a society that does not ensure the protection of its natural resources cannot take care of the people who depend on them.

The social and solidarity economy concerns five forms of structures, statutes:

- Associations, governed by the law of 1901. They employ more than 2 million employees in France.
- Foundations, whether individual or corporate foundations. These non-profit organizations gather financial means to serve a cause of general interest.
- Mutuels, non-profit organizations present in risk coverage, in the field of insurance and health.
- Cooperative societies, very powerful in the agricultural world in particular, are made up of associate members and operate thanks to democratic governance where each voice has the same weight.

- SSE commercial companies, private companies that undertake to respect the principles of the social and solidarity economy. The law of 2014 has precisely made it possible to clarify this specificity.