Preface

The OECD and the European Commission share the objective of building more inclusive economies and societies. By linking economic and social value creation, social enterprises play a key role in making this a reality. They can create new jobs, be a vehicle for efficient and effective service delivery, boost citizens’ participation in their local communities, and turn innovative ideas into action for the benefit of the common good.

While varying national definitions makes international comparisons difficult, national figures provide an indication of the importance of social enterprises. For example, in Belgium, social enterprises account for 17% of private employment. In France, the social and solidarity economy – which includes social enterprises – is made up of almost 200 000 entities in 2014, accounting for 10% of GDP and 2.38 million jobs. Social enterprises were resilient during the crisis: in places such as Italy, Belgium and France employment in them grew at a rate of 20%, 12%, and 0.8% respectively between 2008 and 2014, while employment in mainstream or private enterprises decreased during the same period.

Social enterprises can only meet their full potential if an enabling environment is in place to allow them to start-up, scale-up and flourish. This is why the OECD and the European Commission have a longstanding co-operation to improve the ecosystems for social enterprises. This joint work supports European Union Member States in their efforts to create favourable conditions for social enterprises, while also providing learnings for the broader OECD area. The recent Start-up and Scale-up Initiative by the European Commission confirmed and provided new impetus to this approach.

Many European Union countries have recently addressed this promising policy field with dedicated legislation or strategic frameworks, and many others are preparing or considering new actions. New social enterprise support organisations and networks are also emerging, while other already established networks are placing more importance on this issue. In short, the European social enterprise landscape is evolving rapidly.

In this context, there is a growing appetite to learn from others’ experience, with increasing requests for the European Commission and OECD to support this exchange. And because countries have different traditions and aspirations, there is also a diversity of policies, programmes and initiatives from which others can learn. The challenge, however, is making this pool of experience accessible for those looking for inspiration and guidance.

This joint publication of the OECD and the European Commission takes up this challenge, making use of the strengths of both institutions. It benefits from the analytical capacity and expertise of the OECD, which has built evidence on social enterprise policies over the past two decades. It draws from the political processes as well as funding programmes of the EU, which have worked as a catalyst to boost social enterprise related policies and initiatives in Europe.
The Compendium presents a rich collection of initiatives aimed at boosting social enterprise developments. It identifies key lessons, providing concrete pointers for policy makers – from how to raise awareness and visibility of what social enterprises are and the value they provide, to how to unlock and attract funding better suited to their specific needs. It also warns against piecemeal approaches, stressing that a coherent and inter-connected ecosystem is more valuable than just the sum of its parts. We hope that it will be a source of inspiration and a useful tool for policy makers across Europe and beyond.

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