



## JOINT POLICY BRIEF

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# Advancing a human rights economy through the social and solidarity economy: Pathways to the eradication of poverty beyond growth

The social and solidarity economy (SSE) offers a well-established approach to advancing a human rights economy and supporting the eradication of poverty beyond growth. By fostering participatory, inclusive and sustainable economic models, the SSE provides practical pathways to reorient economies away from profit-maximization as the organizing principle of economic life toward dignity, equality and well-being. Consistent with a beyond-growth perspective, this brief centres the attention on what the economy delivers in terms of human rights, environmental integrity and well-being. This joint brief by the [United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy \(UNTFSSSE\)](#), the [UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights](#) and the [Global Coalition for Social Justice](#) examines how the SSE can contribute to the forthcoming [Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth](#). The Roadmap is being developed under the [New Economies for Eradicating Poverty \(NEEP\)](#) initiative.

The brief does four things:

- › introduce the human rights economy as an emerging paradigm for aligning economic governance with human dignity, planetary limits and well-being;
- › highlight the SSE as a global framework rooted in solidarity, cooperation and participatory governance;
- › examine how the SSE can serve as a partner and delivery mechanism for advancing the objectives of the [Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth](#) (hereafter the "Roadmap"), particularly through its contributions to decent work, care, more equitable resource distribution, workplace participation and gender equity, and climate resilience; and
- › identify policy levers and actions that national governments, development partners and multilateral institutions may consider to strengthen the conducive environment for the SSE through short-, medium- and long-term measures.

### 1. The current context and the limits of growth-driven development

#### **Global socio-economic and environmental trends highlight the need to reassess how progress is defined and pursued.**

Although many economies have grown in recent decades, poverty reduction has slowed, inequalities have widened and environmental pressures have intensified. These patterns show that strategies centred primarily on stimulating economic growth, typically through investment attraction, market liberalization and productivity increase, have not consistently translated into improvements in people's well-being or in the realization of human rights.

#### **The disconnect between economic expansion and development outcomes has become increasingly evident.**

Substantial income and wealth disparities persist across regions, access to decent work and social protection remains starkly uneven, and climate and debt vulnerabilities constrain countries' capacity to convert growth into lasting development gains. These dynamics underscore the structural limits of development approaches that primarily rely on GDP increase as the main pathway to progress, followed by redistributive measures meant to mitigate any negative effects.

#### **Key multilateral discussions have acknowledged these challenges.**

Member States at the 2023 SDG Summit emphasized the need for measures of progress that look beyond GDP ([UN General Assembly 2023b](#)), while the [UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights](#) has shown that growth-led poverty-reduction strategies have not produced equitable or durable results.

This context has created space for approaches that place human dignity, environmental sustainability and well-being at the centre of economic governance, providing the foundation for the emergence of the human rights economy and informing broader debates on moving toward a beyond-growth paradigm for eradicating poverty. From this perspective, development strategies are assessed by their capacity to protect and enhance people's well-being. Particular attention is given to groups that have been systematically underserved by growth-centred development strategies including minorities, people in vulnerable situations and indigenous and tribal peoples.

## 2. The human rights economy and a beyond-growth approach

The human rights economy has emerged as a response to the limits of development strategies centred primarily on economic growth and GDP as the main measures of progress (UN General Assembly 2024b). Its central aim is to ensure that economic, social, political and environmental regulatory frameworks, policies and business practices are guided by the effective realization of human rights, well-being and environmental integrity. It calls for reorienting economic activity, trade and investment strategies toward the fulfilment of human dignity, the enhancement of well-being and the safeguarding of environmental integrity.

**A multidimensional understanding of poverty lies at the centre of this approach.** The human rights economy understands poverty as a condition rooted in social exclusion rather than merely in inadequate income. Building on the analysis of the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, it emphasizes that monetary indicators alone cannot capture the full extent of deprivation and highlights the essential role of sectors such as domestic work and care work, which are foundational for realizing economic, social and cultural rights yet remain undervalued in conventional economic systems.

**A further contribution of this framework is its challenge to long-standing assumptions about poverty reduction.** The 2024 Human Rights Council (HRC) report *Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth* of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights explains why strategies that rely on stimulating economic growth followed by redistribution have not produced equitable or durable outcomes. The analysis calls for development pathways that move beyond growth to address structural barriers more directly and prioritize human rights and well-being-based policy interventions.

**Work is now underway to translate this conceptual foundation into practice.** The forthcoming *Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth*, informed by consultations with nearly 200 institutions, civil-society groups and experts, will outline policy measures across five areas. These are: economic systems transformation; labour policies and the care economy; access to social protection and essential services; climate, environment and resources; and trade, finance, debt and global solidarity – underpinned by a transversal focus on governance and participatory democracy. Structured across short-, medium- and long-term horizons, the Roadmap aims to guide governments and international organizations in reorienting economic governance toward well-being, equality and environmental sustainability, providing a practical complement to the conceptual foundations of the human rights economy. This brief uses the Roadmap's five policy areas as the organizing frame for the proposed SSE policy levers below.

## 3. The role of the social and solidarity economy

The SSE plays an essential role in addressing the complex development challenges facing countries today. Rising public debt, persistent poverty and inequality, climate-related risks, the informalization of work and economies, and declining trust in institutions all underscore the need for development approaches that place well-being at the centre. SSE entities, such as cooperatives, associations, mutual societies, foundations, social enterprises, self-help groups and other entities operating in accordance with SSE values and principles (see Box 1), have been widely recognized for their capacity to address these challenges. Their potential to contribute to the achievement of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals has

been affirmed in recent UN General Assembly resolutions (UN General Assembly 2023a and 2024a).

**The SSE is an umbrella concept that reflects diverse traditions and realities across countries and regions.** Its values and principles are deeply embedded in longstanding cultural and community practices. In Africa, Asia and the Pacific and the Arab States, these draw on systems of solidarity, reciprocity and mutual aid such as *ubuntu*, *hui* and *jam'iyat*. In the Americas, solidarity-based practices predate the modern State, while in Europe the historical roots of the SSE can be traced back at least to the industrial revolution. Across regions, the SSE takes shape through diverse organizational models guided by shared values and principles, which continue to contribute to the provision of employment and essential products and services today (ILO 2022a).

### Box 1: Universal definition of the social and solidarity economy (SSE)

The SSE encompasses enterprises, organizations and other entities that are engaged in economic, social and environmental activities to serve the collective and/or general interest, which are based on the principles of voluntary cooperation and mutual aid, democratic and/or participatory governance, autonomy and independence and the primacy of people and social purpose over capital in the distribution and use of surpluses and/or profits as well as assets.

SSE entities aspire to long-term viability and sustainability and to the transition from the informal to the formal economy and operate in all sectors of the economy. They put into practice a set of values which are intrinsic to their functioning and consistent with care for people and planet, equality and fairness, interdependence, self-governance, transparency and accountability and the attainment of decent work and livelihoods.

According to national circumstances, the SSE includes cooperatives, associations, mutual societies, foundations, social enterprises, self-help groups and other entities operating in accordance with the values and principles of the SSE.

Source: ILO 2022b. Reasserted in UN General Assembly Resolutions 2023a and 2024a.

**SSE entities are distinguished from other economic actors by their values and principles.** A growing body of legislation and statistical frameworks has strengthened the common understanding of these principles, even as organizational forms remain diverse (ILO 2022a). Core values such as care for people and planet, equality and fairness, interdependence, self-governance, transparency and accountability and the attainment of decent work are expressed through principles of voluntary cooperation and mutual aid, democratic or participatory governance, autonomy and independence and the primacy of people and social purpose over capital in the distribution and use of surpluses, profits and assets.

**Although SSE entities have been on the agenda of the multilateral system since the 1920s, they have recently gained growing policy recognition and institutional visibility as more equitable and sustainable alternatives to prevailing economic models centred on profit-maximization.** This has been reinforced through national legislation, public policies and international cooperation. The establishment of the UNTFSS in 2013 further strengthened institutional visibility and collaboration on the SSE within the UN system.

Recent developments have consolidated the SSE as a key pillar of human rights and well-being-based development and sustainable livelihoods. At its 110th Session in 2022, the International Labour Conference adopted the Resolution concerning decent work and the social and solidarity economy, providing the first universal definition of the SSE. Building on this momentum, UN General Assembly resolutions 77/281 (2023) and 79/213 (2024) recognized the SSE's contribution to the SDGs and invited UN entities to strengthen their support for its promotion.

#### 4. The SSE as a key partner to advance the eradication of poverty beyond growth

##### The SSE plays a central role in advancing the human rights economy and the eradication of poverty beyond growth.

A pathway perspective helps clarify this role by distinguishing between the agents that initiate change, the processes through which transformation occurs and the outcomes these transformations aim to achieve (Naito, Zhao and Chan 2022). In this section, 'pathway' refers both to a change logic (agents, processes and outcomes) and to the action pathways set out in the 2024 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) [discussion paper on the human rights economy](#). Within this framework, SSE entities act as agents of change by embedding participation, equality and solidarity in their organizational practices. Their human rights and well-being-based approaches constitute the processes of transformation that foster inclusive production, redistribution and sustainable livelihoods. Together, these dynamics contribute to the outcome of a human rights economy that prioritizes human dignity, environmental sustainability and well-being over profit.

**The SSE is recognized as a key driver of well-being as it translates the principles of the human rights economy into practice.** The 2024 HRC report [Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth](#) identifies the SSE as the first priority in the transition toward a human rights and well-being-based economy. Through participatory governance and decision-making and the primacy of social purpose over capital, SSE entities advance the well-being of both their members and the broader public while helping curb dynamics that reinforce high inequality, such as wealth concentration and financial speculation. These features mirror the central principle of the human rights economy – the primacy of people and social purpose over capital – and challenges entrenched assumptions linking growth with well-being (UN General Assembly 2024b).

**The transformative potential of the SSE lies in its capacity to challenge key growth dependencies.** Growth dependencies have been defined as the conditions in which social entities require continued growth in order to avoid adverse outcomes (Janischewski et al. 2024). Shareholder-centred decision-making, understood as governance arrangements that prioritize shareholder interests, has been identified as a form of microeconomic growth dependency (KeyBer et al. 2025). By promoting workplace participation and multi-stakeholder deliberation, the SSE offers a pathway away from shareholder-centred growth imperatives. The participatory governance structures of SSE entities create space for economic arrangements that are less oriented toward profit-maximization and perpetual growth, prioritizing well-being. In doing so, they help lay the foundations for alternative economic models that elevate well-being indicators as primary measures of progress.

**As a process, the SSE advances key action areas of the human rights economy, providing concrete mechanisms to achieve the eradication of poverty beyond growth.** Within the broader pathway framework, these areas align with those

identified in the [OHCHR discussion paper](#). Specifically, SSE entities contribute to realizing economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development through participatory governance (Pathway 1); reducing inequalities and countering discrimination through inclusive practices (Pathway 3); reinforcing human rights in business operations through diverse organizational forms (Pathway 4); and strengthening care systems and environmental sustainability within production processes (Pathway 7) (OHCHR 2024).

**By advancing these interlinked domains, the SSE functions as both a driver and an enabler of well-being.** To fully realize this potential, the SSE and beyond-growth agendas must be strategically aligned so that the policy actions identified in the forthcoming [Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth](#) are coherent, mutually reinforcing and grounded in shared principles of participation, equality, care and the primacy of well-being objectives over profit-maximization.

#### 5. Policy levers, Roadmap alignment and next steps

**Translating this potential into practice requires coordinated policy action across institutions and time horizons.** National and subnational governments, development partners and multilateral institutions can mobilize a coherent set of policy levers, aligned with the Roadmap's five policy areas (see Box 2), to expand the SSE's contribution to development and well-being. These policy levers aim to scale up the SSE as a delivery mechanism for achieving development outcomes, while ensuring coherence across economic, social, political and environmental frameworks.

### Box 2: Alignment with the Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth

The policy levers below are structured around the Roadmap's five policy areas:



**Economic systems transformation:** SSE advances democratic governance, local value retention and inclusive financing frameworks.



**Labour policies and the care economy:** SSE promotes quality employment, fair conditions and gender equality through the introduction of workplace democracy, as well as of cooperative and care models.



**Access to social protection and essential services:** SSE expands inclusion through decent work, community-based care and social innovation.



**Climate, environment and resources:** SSE enables inclusive decision-making processes that prioritise social and environmental objectives over capital accumulation and production growth.



**Trade, finance, debt and global solidarity:** SSE promotes ethical finance, transparency and solidarity-based global partnerships.

## Core policy levers

- › **Decent work outcomes.** Promoting formalization, rights at work including occupational safety and health (OSH) and the extension of social protection through SSE entities to their workers strengthens labour rights and fosters inclusive employment.
- › **Participatory governance and social dialogue.** Ensuring accountability and member voice as well as strengthened dialogue with social partners enhances transparency, participatory decision-making and trust in institutions. By prioritizing collective purpose and long-term social value over short-term financial returns, such governance models offer a credible alternative to shareholder-driven growth imperatives.
- › **Inclusive services and care.** Expanding co-production models in care and social services strengthens both service quality and working conditions, particularly for women and care workers.
- › **Local value retention.** Encouraging shorter supply chains and community-based production supports community and local wealth creation, resilience and territorial cohesion while contributing to fair, equitable and more sustainable trade arrangements.
- › **Climate resilience.** Embedding a triple impact approach (social, environmental and economic perspectives) with SSE principles supports just transition strategies and more sustainable production systems.
- › **Gender equity.** Reducing pay and care gaps, supporting women's leadership and improving working conditions in female-dominated sectors advance equity and empowerment.
- › **Public procurement and finance.** SSE-aligned procurement rules, guarantee mechanisms and financing facilities within public and development finance institutions strengthen the enabling environment for SSE entities.
- › **Data and statistics.** Developing statistical frameworks aligned with the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) to integrate SSE modules into labour force and enterprise surveys.

## Translating levers into policy action

**The SSE provides concrete pathways for translating the vision of the [Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth](#) into actionable policy measures.** By embedding SSE principles across policy frameworks and implementation cycles, governments and partners can advance a human rights-based economic transformation that prioritizes well-being, while contributing to the reduction of the global ecological footprint.

**Short-term policy actions** could involve:

- › **Ensuring the legal recognition and visibility of SSE entities** through dedicated legislation, registries, mapping exercises and integration into national databases, thereby facilitating equitable access to finance, procurement and enterprise-support services (International Labour Organization [2022b](#) §9(b); UN General Assembly [2023a](#) §1).
- › **Establishing supportive frameworks for SSE participation in public procurement and recovery programmes,** including provisions and guarantee mechanisms that promote development outcomes (International Labour Organization [2022b](#) §9(h); UN General Assembly [2024a](#) §1).
- › **Introducing targeted fiscal and tax measures** that reflect the

specific nature and operations of SSE entities and incentivize decent work outcomes such as formalization, rights at work including occupational safety and health and social protection extension (International Labour Organization [2022b](#), §6(f) §7(b) (d); UN General Assembly [2023a](#) §1; UN General Assembly [2024a](#) §1).

- › **Promoting care and social service SSE entities** that strengthen co-production, improve working conditions, ensure access to affordable housing and advance gender equity through improved pay, representation and leadership opportunities for women (International Labour Organization [2022b](#) §6(e); UN General Assembly [2023a](#), 2024b).
- › **Designating national SSE focal points or coordination mechanisms** to enhance policy coherence across relevant ministries (labour, trade, finance, social protection, environment and others) and to facilitate institutionalized dialogue with SSE entities (International Labour Organization [2022b](#) §9).

**Medium-term policy actions** could involve:

- › **Integrating SSE-specific financing mechanisms within national development and public financial institutions,** including tailored facilities and blended-finance instruments backed by social performance guarantees (International Labour Organization [2022b](#) §9(h)).
- › **Extending social protection coverage to workers in SSE entities,** including self-employed and informal economy workers transitioning to formal SSE entities (International Labour Organization [2022b](#), §6(f); UN General Assembly [2023a](#), §9).
- › **Developing local and regional programmes prioritizing SSE-based procurement and partnerships,** supporting shorter supply chains, community wealth building and territorial resilience (International Labour Organization [2022b](#), §9(f)(h)).
- › **Strengthening statistical systems on the SSE,** developing ICLS-aligned modules integrated into labour force and enterprise surveys to inform evidence-based policymaking and localization efforts (International Labour Organization [2022b](#) §9(n) §16(c); UN General Assembly [2023a](#) §1 [2024a](#) §4).
- › **Supporting a transformative agenda for gender equity through the SSE,** including women's leadership development, pay-equity reviews and dedicated access to finance for women-led SSE entities, particularly in care and social services (International Labour Organization [2022b](#) §6(d) §7(f)).

**Long-term policy actions** could involve:

- › **Aligning trade, industrial and employment policies with SSE principles,** recognizing SSE entities as partners in a just transition, in developing measures of circular economy, as well as fair, equitable and sustainable trade and production strategies (International Labour Organization [2022b](#) §7 (c)).
- › **Integrating the SSE into national budgeting and development-financing frameworks,** reinforcing its role in advancing a human rights economy (International Labour Organization [2022b](#) §7(d)).
- › **Promoting institutionalized, cross-ministerial and multi-stakeholder platforms** linking SSE entities, private-sector networks and public institutions to strengthen democratic governance, accountability and policy coherence to support an SSE sector that advances development and well-being beyond growth (International Labour Organization [2022b](#), §9 (g); UN General Assembly [2024a](#), §4).

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## About the policy brief

This policy brief was jointly prepared by the Secretariat of the UNTFSSSE, chaired by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Office of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights and the Global Coalition for Social Justice<sup>1</sup>. It builds on the Special Rapporteur's 2024 Human Rights Council report A/HRC/56/51: Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth and contributes to the development of the Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth. The brief highlights the role of the social and solidarity economy as a strategic partner in advancing a human rights economy and provides policy insights to inform the Roadmap's recommendations on economic system transformation.

## About the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights is an independent expert appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council to monitor, report and advise States and other stakeholders regarding the links between poverty, human dignity and human rights. The mandate was first established in 1998 and seeks to ensure that the voices and experiences of people living in poverty are reflected in global human rights debates and policy processes. Operating under the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Special Rapporteur engages with governments, international organizations and civil society to promote rights-based approaches to poverty eradication and social justice. The current mandate holder is Mr. Olivier De Schutter, appointed in 2020.

## About UNTFSSSE

The UNTFSSSE promotes the social and solidarity economy (SSE) for sustainable development. It operates in accordance with the values and principles of the United Nations, bringing together, as members, relevant entities of the United Nations development system and intergovernmental entities with a mandate to promote the SSE and engaging, as observers, international non-governmental organizations whose purpose is to represent, produce and share knowledge on, or promote the social and solidarity economy or any of its components.

## About the Global Coalition for Social Justice

The Global Coalition for Social Justice is a voluntary, multi-stakeholder platform that aims to strengthen collective action in support of social justice worldwide. Hosted by the ILO, it brings together governments, employers' and workers' organizations, international and regional organizations, development banks, enterprises, civil society organizations and academia to address social justice deficits and accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Decent Work Agenda. Through dialogue, partnership and concrete joint initiatives, the Coalition seeks to enhance policy coherence and foster a more balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, with a particular focus on reducing inequalities, poverty and social exclusion.

## For more information

### United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy

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### UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

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### New Economies for Eradicating Poverty

A global initiative led by the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, and home of the *Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth*

Website: [neep-poverty.org](https://neep-poverty.org)

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### Global Coalition for Social Justice

Website: [social-justice-coalition.ilo.org](https://social-justice-coalition.ilo.org)

<sup>1</sup> The brief was drafted by Stephanie Villadiego De La Hoz, from the UNTFSSSE Secretariat, and Arthur Boutiab and François Denuit, from the Office of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, under the guidance of the participating organizations.