



Solid'R International: an example of a label to promote the social economy (multiple countries: Belgium, France, Italy and Spain)

What?

Private labels marking social economy organisations can expand their access to markets but also help public authorities reliably identify and support organisations seeking to achieve positive social impacts. The label Solid'R International was created in 2002 by the Belgian federation of social economy and circular economy enterprises RESSOURCES in order to distinguish social economy waste collectors from purely profit-driven firms. Predicated on the principles of ethics and solidarity, the label identifies companies that uphold social and environmental objectives while providing employment opportunities to marginalised workers. The label expanded internationally in 2018 and enterprises in Belgium, France, Italy and Spain have now adopted the Solid'R label.

Participating enterprises benefit from access to used goods through their Solid'R labelled collection boxes, which are publicised on the RESSOURCES website and, in Italy and the Brussels-Capital Metropolitan Area in Belgium, improved access to public support and procurement opportunities (discussed in next section). Solid'R uses an independent certification body to ensure that enterprises carrying the label achieve a threefold mission: promote the circular economy by diverting waste back into the market, create local employment opportunities and act in solidarity with local communities by reinvesting profits into communities.

Why?

Donation boxes and deposit spots for used clothes, books, furniture and other household items have become familiar sights in many cities around the world, and are often actively encouraged by public authorities. However, profit-driven private operators have begun to collect donated items for re-sale, creating public confusion about the final destination and ethical use of their donations. The Solid'R label provides public authorities with a way to easily identify social economy organisations who create meaningful social and environmental benefits to local communities. Likewise, social enterprises that adopt the label demonstrate to the public that their donations will be used in a socially and environmentally responsible manner and that the goods they purchase from enterprises with the label were responsibly sourced. This helps public authorities to support organisations with positive local impacts and enables organisations who adopt the label to expand market access through greater ability to collect used items and to participate in targeted public procurement opportunities.

Moreover, coordinating this type of initiative with the public sector serves to amplify its awareness-raising potential and can enable greater access to public procurement opportunities in certain countries and regions. For example, the label is cited in the Brussels regional policy strategies on the circular economy, which integrates

social economy organisations into a variety of public support programmes, identifies them as “privileged partners”, and allocates EUR 500 000 to support social economy work-integration programmes. Likewise, the label has proven attractive for social enterprises in Italy as a means to facilitate access to public support specifically designated for social enterprises. As such, enterprises that adopt the label can not only obtain more products, which enables them to increase production, but also increase their market access and benefit from direct public support.

Key Activities

Social economy organisations can voluntarily apply to use this label, which certifies that they uphold specific social and environmental ethics. Enterprises that adopt the label commit to upholding a range of social economy ethics including placing people over profit, supporting marginalised people through work integration and education, limiting the wage differential among employees to a ratio of 1:4, employing a democratic decision-making process and cooperating rather than competing with other members. Participants also commit to independent monitoring to ensure that they meet the criteria to use the label.

To obtain the label, enterprises must submit an application demonstrating that they meet the certification criteria. After the certification body publishes a compliance report, the assembly of members chooses whether to admit the applicant through a secret ballot process. Enterprises who adopt the label must obtain annual certification and agree to an onsite audit every three years to verify their performance.

The label is collectively managed by an international committee composed of country representatives selected by the social enterprises that have adopted the label in each country. Decisions are taken through a democratic and transparent process that enables participants to influence the evolution of the label.

Solid'R International provides a list of donation points where individuals can donate to certified organisations, which ensures that participating enterprises have access to used products and that used items are utilised in a socially and environmentally responsible manner.

Impact

To date, 25 social economy organisations across Europe have adopted the Solid'R label, 14 of which are located in Belgium, 9 in Italy and 1 in France and Spain respectively where the label expanded more recently. While most of the participating social enterprise waste collectors are active in the textile sector, the label applies to other type of used goods and materials.

Users who visit the Solid'R webpage can find over 40 donation points to donate books, clothing, furniture and other household items. In Belgium, enterprises using the label are allowed to place donation boxes in certain municipalities. Enterprises that have adopted the label collect roughly 80 000 tonnes of goods each year, of which nearly 50 000 tonnes are given a second life. While traditional and social economy organisations reintroduce waste into consumption cycles at the same rate, social economy organisations typically operate at a more local level. Enterprises that have adopted the Solid'R label employ over 4 500 persons, of which roughly 1 500 are participating in work integration programmes.

The label plays an important role in raising citizen awareness about the impact of their donations and helps them to make informed choices on where to donate used items. Likewise, the label enables policy makers to distinguish between various actors with different levels of environmental and social impact. By unifying actors within a common label, Solid'R facilitates cooperation among social economy waste collectors at the regional, national and international level, which amplifies their voice and boosts their market position.

References

- <https://www.res-sources.be/fr/solidrweb/> [1]

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Links

[1] <https://www.res-sources.be/fr/solidrweb/>