



► ILO Brief

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The ILO and the social and solidarity economy in Latin America and the Caribbean

Promoting decent work and social justice through cooperatives and other SSE entities

Key points

- This document provides an overview of the ILO's recent and ongoing work on the social and solidarity economy (SSE) in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- It reflects the ILO's constitutional mandate to promote social justice and decent work through cooperatives and the broader SSE, taking into account the diverse realities and needs of its Members, the varying levels of SSE development, and relevant international labour standards.

Introduction: The ILO's global mandate on cooperatives and the broader SSE

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has a longstanding mandate to promote cooperatives and the broader social and solidarity economy (SSE), established in its 1919 [Constitution](#) and reaffirmed through various instruments, notably the [Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation, 2002 \(No. 193\)](#).

More recently, this global leadership has been reinforced by:

- The 2022 International Labour Conference [Resolution concerning decent work and the social and solidarity economy](#), the first global tripartite agreement to include a worldwide definition of the SSE and to outline the values and principles that should guide its

development. It recognizes the SSE's potential to promote decent work and strengthen inclusive and resilient economies and recommends concrete actions for ILO Members and the Office to support the growth and contribution of the SSE to sustainable development.

- The [2023](#) and [2024](#) United Nations General Assembly Resolutions on the SSE for sustainable development, strongly inspired by the ILO's principles and recommendations.

Beyond its historical mandate, the ILO brings unique value through its tripartite approach and social dialogue, enabling governments and employers' and workers' organizations to jointly define inclusive and sustainable policy frameworks for the SSE.

The ILO also plays a leading international role as the Chair of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy ([UNTFSE](#)), allowing it to articulate

SSE priorities within the multilateral system. Additionally, through its participation in the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives ([COPAC](#)), the ILO contributes to positioning cooperatives, and the SSE more broadly, within sustainable development agendas, reinforcing coherence and international advocacy. These actions are aligned with both the [UN Secretary-General's report on the SSE](#) and the aforementioned UN General Assembly Resolutions of 2023 and 2024, which invite Member States, UN agencies, international financial institutions and other stakeholders to promote the SSE as an integral part of sustainable development.

Furthermore, the [International Year of Cooperatives 2025](#) represents a key opportunity to enhance the visibility and impact of cooperatives and, more broadly, the SSE at both global and regional levels, including in [Latin America and the Caribbean](#).

The SSE not only contributes to decent work and social cohesion — it is also recognized as a key driver of the 2030 Agenda. [Recent thematic reports by COPAC](#) have documented how cooperatives are advancing progress on several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These

► [Definition of the Social and Solidarity Economy](#)

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.

connections demonstrate how cooperatives offer practical, integrated solutions to social, economic and environmental challenges.

Regional context: Trends, challenges and opportunities for the SSE in Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean has a long and diverse history in the field of cooperatives and the SSE in general, often linked to the traditions and experiences of indigenous peoples. Over the centuries, there has been a strong tradition of community organization; a contemporary reflection of this is the concept of *buen vivir* (*good living*), based on solidarity, harmony with nature and cultural diversity, incorporated into the constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia.

The region has also been an important contributor to the conceptualization of the SSE, through academic work, strong grassroots organizations, and the inclusion of the SSE in national legislation. In fact, some of the most progressive SSE laws in the world [originate from the region](#), offering a global reference framework for [good practices](#).

Currently, the SSE in the region takes on various forms and terms depending on the national context: “social economy,” “solidarity economy,” “popular economy,” “social sector,” or “third sector.” In all cases, there has been dynamic growth in cooperative and SSE initiatives, driven by the need to strengthen community resilience and promote sustainable local development. In this context, the SSE plays a key role in the formalization of employment and the promotion of labour rights, contributing to the implementation of international labour standards and the ILO’s mandate to promote decent work for all.

Many countries have adopted SSE policies and laws, and there are regional and subregional organizations actively promoting the SSE. However, challenges remain, including:

- Fragmented regulatory frameworks .
- Limited statistical visibility of the SSE, including cooperatives .
- Insufficient institutional support and weak coordination among SSE entities .
- Gaps in the implementation of SSE principles and values .

- Difficulties in scaling initiatives and building strong networks .

Guided by the 2022 Resolution and the 2023–2029 [strategy and action plan on decent work and the SSE](#), the ILO is well positioned to support its constituents in overcoming these challenges and seizing the opportunities offered by the SSE. This includes improving understanding of local realities and needs, as well as strengthening capacities to promote decent work in and through the SSE in a coherent manner.

Strategic actions and initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean

The ILO's work on the SSE in Latin America and the Caribbean is organized around three interrelated pillars, defined in its strategy and action plan. Its implementation is carried out in close collaboration with ILO constituents — governments and employers' and workers' organizations — as well as key SSE actors, including various international organizations active in this field.

Improved understanding of realities and needs related to decent work and the SSE

The ILO collaborates with Cooperatives of the Americas (regional branch of the International Cooperative Alliance), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), UN Women, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), and other partners to develop studies and share good practices on the SSE's contribution to areas such as [transition from the informal to the formal economy](#), [care provision](#) and sustainable development. A regional study on decent work and formalization in the SSE is underway, alongside initiatives to strengthen statistics on cooperatives and, more broadly, the SSE.

In collaboration with its partners in the UNTFSSSE, the ILO supports the development of SSE statistics and impact measurement, leading [technical working groups on SSE statistics](#) and the economic contribution of cooperatives. These efforts complement [the roadmap](#) adopted at the 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (2023), offering countries harmonized methodologies to make visible the real contribution of the SSE to employment, GDP and social cohesion.

At the national level, research and mapping exercises are helping governments design evidence-based policies.

In [Guatemala](#), the diagnostics and mapping of the SSE enabled the adoption of [a national action plan](#). In [Bolivia](#), [Colombia](#), Peru and [Chile](#), [diagnostics](#), [mappings](#) and sectoral roadmaps are being developed in the SSE in areas such as [the care economy](#), aquaculture and other sectors linked to the rural economy, with the aim of guiding formalization strategies. These actions not only enhance the visibility of the SSE, but also demonstrate its role as a driver of inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Increased capacity to promote decent work and the SSE

The ILO has launched a [massive open online course \(MOOC\) on the SSE](#), whose four modules offer perspectives on its various dimensions.

Through [tools](#) such as [Think.COOP](#) and [Start.COOP](#), and their adaptations to [the care economy](#) and the [aquaculture](#) sector, the ILO supports national and local institutions in equipping communities with the skills to create and manage cooperatives in various sectors. In Costa Rica, these tools were transferred to the National Institute for Learning (INA) and the Ministry of Labour. In [Peru](#) and [Chile](#), they are being used to strengthen aquaculture cooperatives and promote the transition to formality in rural areas. In [Bolivia](#), Think.COOP and Start.COOP have supported cooperative development in the mining sector. The [My.COOP Managing your agricultural cooperative](#) has supported agricultural cooperatives in [Peru](#), among others.

Capacity-building also supports innovation in the care economy, with cooperative models underway in [Colombia](#), Honduras, and Bolivia, among others. In [Mexico](#), a guide for creating and managing green cooperatives has been launched, while a tool on occupational safety and health in agricultural cooperatives has been translated into Spanish and Portuguese. In [Colombia](#) and Panama, pilot experiences using artificial intelligence (AI) tools are being carried out to support small producers in community-based, sustainability-focused initiatives. The MAIA knowledge base (Micro and Small Enterprise AI Advisory) includes ILO tools to promote associativity and cooperative development.

In the Caribbean, institutional strengthening in sectors such as agriculture ([Suriname](#)) and fisheries ([Guyana](#)), both in collaboration with the FAO, as well as partnerships with universities ([Trinidad and Tobago](#)), are providing local actors with tools for resilience and sustainable livelihoods. These efforts ensure that SSE entities are both viable enterprises and key providers of decent work.

A central aspect of SSE sustainability in the region is [access to adequate financing](#) and supportive public policies, agreed through social dialogue. Faced with declining public budgets, ILO constituents are exploring options such as balanced public-private partnerships, dedicated funds, reserved contracts and inclusive public and private procurement mechanisms, aligned with decent work principles and the autonomy of SSE entities. The ILO, in collaboration with its international partners, facilitates the exchange of good practices and evidence, helping SSE entities strengthen their sustainability, expand their community reach and reinforce their contribution to decent work.

Enhanced coherence on decent work and the SSE

The ILO facilitates dialogue among governments, employers' and workers' organizations and SSE networks to promote legal and institutional coherence. Policies to advance the SSE and cooperatives are progressing in [Dominica](#) and Bermuda, while Barbados has made significant contributions to the global debate by promoting the SSE at the UN General Assembly.

At the regional level, the ILO participates in platforms such as the Ibero-American Network for the Promotion of the SSE ([RIFESS](#)), contributing to coherence and regional exchange, and events such as the [Caribbean World of Work Forum](#), held in Trinidad and Tobago in July 2025.

The International Year of Cooperatives 2025 will also be an opportunity to raise the visibility of the SSE, with joint events in [Chile](#) and other countries, highlighting its contribution to decent work, social justice and sustainable local development.

Together, these pillars ensure that the SSE is visible, resilient, and supported by a conducive environment that responds to the region's diverse realities. The initiatives

show that when backed by evidence, capacity and coherent policies, the SSE can deliver concrete results: more formal jobs, stronger community resilience and a fairer, more sustainable future of work.

Looking ahead: Partnerships for the International Year of Cooperatives 2025 and beyond

The International Year of Cooperatives 2025 presents a unique opportunity to showcase the transformative role of the SSE in promoting decent work and sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Building on recent progress, the region is well positioned to lead globally by:

- Enhancing the visibility of the SSE through robust statistics and research.
- Promoting cooperative and associative models that generate quality jobs in sectors such as care, rural economy and the green economy.
- Integrating the SSE into national policies and regional strategies as a driver of inclusion and resilience.

The ILO calls on governments, employers' and workers' organizations, SSE actors, and development partners to seize this moment to consolidate partnerships and mobilize investments. By working together, the region can ensure that the SSE is not only recognized but also strengthened as a central pillar of inclusive and sustainable development.

The ILO will continue to act as a catalyst, working alongside its constituents and allies to ensure that the International Year of Cooperatives 2025 serves as a springboard for lasting progress in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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