Social Firms Europe
CEFEC
"a network for your social economy vision"

Newsletter #40

September 2026

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2026 CONFERENCE

Reuse, Innovation and Green Jobs: Unlocking Inclusive Business Models for the Future

The 40th SFE CEFEC Annual Conference took place in Bled, Slovenia, on 4–5 June 2026, bringing together CEFEC members, experts, practitioners and participants from across Europe. Hosted by CPU – Center ponovne uporabe, the anniversary conference focused on the theme "Reuse, Innovation and Green Jobs: Unlocking Inclusive Business Models for the Future."

Over two days, participants explored how the green transition and the circular economy can create new opportunities for inclusive employment and sustainable business development. Through keynote presentations, panel discussions, dialogue groups and study visits, the conference provided a space to exchange experiences, present practical solutions and discuss the role of social firms and social enterprises in building a more sustainable and inclusive economy.

A strong focus was placed on reuse, circular economy, green innovation and employment, with discussions looking at how environmental and social goals can be addressed together. The conference also created opportunities for CEFEC members to meet with participants from outside the network, exchange ideas and develop new connections for future cooperation.
The 40th anniversary provided a particularly meaningful opportunity to reflect on the development of CEFEC and the continued importance of its mission. The conference in Bled once again demonstrated that innovation and sustainability can go hand in hand with social inclusion, creating opportunities for people, organisations and communities across Europe.

Executive Committee Meeting on 3 June

The SFE CEFEC Executive Committee met in Bled, Slovenia, alongside the 40th CEFEC Annual Conference. The meeting brought together representatives of the network to discuss current activities, ongoing work and priorities for the coming period.
The Committee reviewed the development of CEFEC's activities, including the work of the different Working Groups, ongoing projects and opportunities for further cooperation. Discussions also focused on the network's membership, financial matters and ways to strengthen CEFEC's role and visibility at European level.
With the 40th Annual Conference taking place in Bled, the meeting also provided an opportunity to reflect on the conference programme and the continued development of the network. Particular attention was given to future activities and plans for the upcoming 2027 CEFEC Conference in Spain.

The Executive Committee continues to work towards strengthening cooperation between members, supporting the development of social firms and social enterprises, and promoting inclusive employment opportunities across Europe. CEFEC's mission is centred on supporting initiatives that advance the rehabilitation, training and employment of people experiencing social exclusion.

DAY 1 – CONFERENCE DAY

The first day of the 40th SFE CEFEC Annual Conference in Bled opened with an inspiring speech by Dr. Violeta Bulc, former European Commissioner for Transport, who set the tone for two days of discussion around innovation, sustainability and inclusive employment.
Her opening contribution was followed by a programme bringing together CEFEC members, social entrepreneurs, experts, policymakers and other participants from across Europe. Together, they explored how reuse, circular economy and green innovation can create new opportunities for inclusive employment and sustainable business development.

One of the highlights was the discussion on reuse as a driver for inclusive green jobs, bringing together perspectives from European institutions, social enterprises and organisations working in the circular economy.

Marin Zver, President of SFE CEFEC, shared practical experience from the reuse and social entrepreneurship sector, while Dr. Marinka Vovk presented insights from her extensive work in developing reuse systems and green employment opportunities in Slovenia.
The programme also featured Felicitas Kresimon, General Secretary of CEFEC, and Matjaž Malgaj from the European Commission, who contributed to discussions on the role of social economy organisations and European institutions in supporting the green and social transition.

Other contributions from experts including Jukka Lindberg, Juha Lehtikuja, Mojca Markizeti and Simone Schirru brought further perspectives on social economy, circular economy, sustainability, recycling and inclusive business models.

Through presentations, panel discussions and dialogue groups, participants explored practical questions around creating green jobs, developing new business models and ensuring that the transition towards a more sustainable economy also remains inclusive. The day also provided plenty of opportunities for networking and exchanging experiences between participants from different countries and sectors.

DAY 2 – CONFERENCE DAY

The second day of the 40th SFE CEFEC Annual Conference focused on taking the ideas discussed during the first day into practice. Participants had the opportunity to explore local examples of reuse, social entrepreneurship and circular economy, discovering how innovative approaches can create both environmental and social impact.

The programme of day 2 included study visits to organisations and initiatives working with reuse and social inclusion. A particular focus was placed on the work of CPU – Center Ponovne Uporabe, the host organisation of the conference, and its experience of combining reuse, circular economy and employment opportunities. Participants could see how activities connected with reuse can become a practical tool for developing skills.

The second day also continued the exchange around innovation and inclusion, with discussions connecting the conference theme to different areas of practice. Participants explored topics including innovative reuse models employing people with disabilities, youth green innovation, circular innovation and business innovation for green impact.

The conference programme concluded with the recognition of the SFE CEFEC Academy participants and their work, celebrating the ideas and achievements developed throughout the Academy. The Academy participants had the opportunity to present their social enterprise ideas and share the results of their learning journey with the conference audience.

This provided a meaningful conclusion to the 40th CEFEC Conference - celebrating innovation, new ideas and the next generation of social entrepreneurs, while reinforcing the importance of creating a greener and more inclusive European economy.

WINNERS OF THE 2026 AWARDS

At the 40th SFE CEFEC Annual Conference in Bled, three organisations were recognised for their innovative approaches to social entrepreneurship, inclusion, accessibility and sustainable development. The 2026 Awards highlighted organisations demonstrating how business can create positive social and environmental impact.

This year's ceremony was also an opportunity to highlight the diversity of work taking place across the CEFEC network and beyond. From social firms and employment initiatives to innovative approaches in the circular economy, the awarded projects demonstrate how social and environmental goals can be combined to create lasting impact.

Congratulations to all the 2026 SFE CEFEC Award winners and nominees!

🏆 Best Start-Up Social Enterprise 2026

ALTERRA ATELIER S.R.L. – Romania

ALTERRA ATELIER combines creativity, sustainability and social impact by transforming electronic waste into art, design objects and fashion accessories. The social enterprise aims to create a transparent and open model that gives discarded electronic materials a new life while creating meaningful employment opportunities for vulnerable people.

Their approach connects circular economy and creative entrepreneurship, showing how waste can become a valuable resource and how innovative business models can generate both environmental and social impact. ALTERRA ATELIER's products are handcrafted using e-waste, metal and textiles, with the ambition of developing a model that can be shared and replicated.

🏆 Experienced Social Enterprise 2026

KNOF Circular Reuse LAB – Slovenia

KNOF is a social enterprise focused on developing solutions that reduce waste and promote reuse and recycling. Its work connects circular economy, social innovation and inclusive employment, with activities ranging from reuse of textiles and furniture to the development of new products from recycled materials.

Based in Krško, KNOF operates a Circular Lab, where it develops and tests circular business models, works with partners on the reuse of industrial waste and creates new products from recycled materials. The organisation also runs reuse shops and supports the development of sustainable products and services.

🏆 Experienced Social Enterprise 2026

APASS – Access2Accessibility Movement SRL – Romania

APASS – Access2Accessibility Movement works to create a more accessible and inclusive society by providing solutions for people with disabilities in both physical and digital environments.

Its services include accessibility audits and consultancy, accessible digital documents and communication, tactile maps and signage, guidance systems and other accessibility solutions. Importantly, around 90% of the APASS team consists of people with disabilities, bringing direct lived experience into the development and delivery of their services.

Through technology, innovation and inclusive employment, APASS demonstrates that people with disabilities can be not only beneficiaries of accessibility solutions, but also creators and professionals driving accessibility forward.

Co-funded by the European Union

2024-1-DEO2-KA210-VET-000245605

Green Leaders

The 6th edition of the SFE CEFEC Academy took place from 1–5 June 2026 in Bled, Slovenia, as part of the Erasmus+ Green Leaders project. The five-day programme brought together 18 participants from 7 countries for an intensive week of learning, collaboration and innovation.

The Academy focused on helping participants develop their own green social enterprise ideas, combining sustainability with social impact. Through interactive workshops, teamwork, mentoring and practical activities, participants worked on transforming their initial ideas into more structured and realistic business concepts.

A strong element of the Academy was the opportunity to learn from experienced trainers, mentors and experts. This year, the programme was also enriched by the participation of CEFEC members beyond the organising team, who joined the Academy and shared their knowledge and experience with the participants. Their involvement strengthened the connection between the Academy and the wider CEFEC network, creating additional opportunities for exchange, mentoring and international cooperation.

Co-funded by the European Union

2024-1-DEO2-KA210-VET-000245605

Green Leaders

An important moment came on the third day of the Academy, when participants had the opportunity to present their developing business ideas directly to the SFE CEFEC Executive Committee. This gave them a valuable chance to receive feedback from experienced professionals, discuss the potential of their ideas and gain new perspectives on how to further develop their social enterprises.

The Academy was also enriched by the involvement of CEFEC members beyond the organising team, who joined the programme and shared their knowledge and experience with the participants. This created an even stronger connection between the Academy and the wider CEFEC network and provided additional opportunities for mentoring, exchange and international cooperation.

The week concluded during the 40th CEFEC Annual Conference, where the Academy participants presented the results of their work and received recognition for completing the programme.

The 2026 Academy once again demonstrated the value of bringing together people from different countries and backgrounds to learn from one another, develop new ideas and create solutions for a greener and more inclusive future.

Networking & Projects

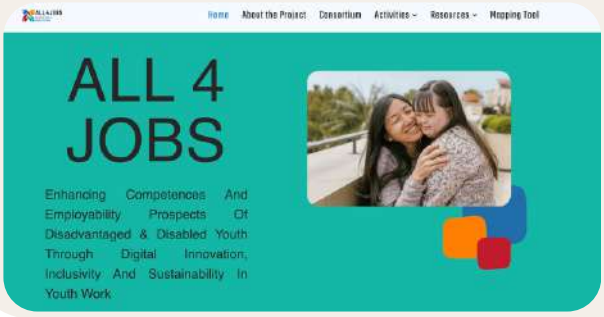
All4Jobs

Co-funded by the European Union

ALL4JOBS INCLUSIVE SKILLS, BRIGHT FUTURES

2024-1-IT03-KA220-YOU-000248804

The All4Jobs project continues to bring partners together to develop new approaches and tools supporting inclusive employment and better access to the labour market.
As part of the project, a training programme will take place in September, bringing partners and participants together to develop their knowledge and exchange practical experiences. CEFEC will be taking part in the training, contributing to the exchange of ideas and learning from the experiences of organisations involved in the project.
The training will be another opportunity to strengthen cooperation between partners and further develop the project's resources and solutions for more inclusive and accessible employment opportunities.



LINK

Partner organizations of the project:

SHANNARA Cooperativa sociale

CHRISTOS STELIOS IOANNOU FOUNDATION NICOSIA 1981

AMICOS .org

digi-hub LEARNING For Inclusive & Sustainable Learning

GAL NAPOCA FOROLISSUM

Green Leaders

Co-funded by the European Union

Green Leaders

2024-1-DE02-KA210-VET-000245605

CEFEC organised the Final Green Leaders Forum in Brussels on 24–25 June 2026, marking the successful conclusion of the Green Leaders project.The event brought together Green Leaders, project partners, experts and other stakeholders to reflect on the project's achievements.

The first day included a visit to the Textiles Recycling Expo 2026, offering participants the opportunity to discover innovative solutions in textile recycling and sustainability. On the second day, the Final Green Leaders Forum was organised in a hybrid format, featuring expert contributions, testimonials from young Green Leaders and a presentation of the project's key results and achievements.
The Forum provided a final opportunity to share the green social entrepreneurship ideas developed during the project and discuss how the knowledge and partnerships created can continue beyond the project's formal conclusion.

🌱 GREEN LEADERS Featured by SALTO-YOUTH

We are happy to share that the GREEN LEADERS project and its results have been recognised and featured by SALTO-YOUTH.
The project's approach to combining green entrepreneurship, social inclusion and youth development was highlighted as an example of how young people can be supported to develop sustainable and socially responsible ideas.
This recognition is a great opportunity to further share the project's outcomes and make its resources accessible to a wider European youth work community.

Partner organizations of the project:

🇵🇱 Folkowisko: Celebrating Folk Culture and Community in Poland

On 7 September 2026, our Polish member Zachodniopomorski Uniwersytet Ludowy (ZUL) organised Folkowisko - a vibrant celebration of folk culture, music, traditions and community.
The event was held as part of the Festival of Folk High Schools from across Poland, bringing together Folk High Schools, their members and local communities from different parts of the country. It was an opportunity to meet, exchange experiences, share traditions and celebrate the role of Folk High Schools in strengthening local communities and lifelong learning.
With music, activities, conversations and shared experiences, Folkowisko created a warm and inclusive space for people of different generations and backgrounds to come together.
We are happy to see our members actively contributing to stronger communities, lifelong learning and social inclusion - values that connect us across the CEFEC network.

SFE CEFEC General Secretary - Study visit in Suceava

From 30 July to 4 August, Felicitas Kresimon, General Secretary of SFE CEFEC, visited the CEFEC Secretariat in Romania, creating an opportunity to strengthen cooperation and connect with members and partners in the region.

Together with Petru Vasile Gafiuc, President of Organizația Institutul Bucovina and Development Manager of SFE CEFEC, and Alina Bîrsan, Operational Manager of SFE CEFEC, the team visited Suceava General Hospital to learn more about its work and explore opportunities for future cooperation.
The visit also included a meeting with AO AREAP, a CEFEC member from the Republic of Moldova, providing an opportunity to discuss ongoing activities and exchange experiences.

The team also visited OAZA, a protected housing facility managed by AREAP in Brânzeni, Edineț District. The centre provides accommodation and social inclusion services for people with disabilities, supporting independent living and integration within the local community.

The visit was a valuable opportunity to see the work of our members and partners first-hand, exchange knowledge and identify opportunities for future collaboration. CEFEC continues to strengthen its European network by connecting organisations, sharing experience and supporting initiatives that promote social inclusion and employment.

SFE CEFEC at the European Disability Forum General Assembly

Social Firms Europe CEFEC, represented by Anna Barbara Sum from BAG Inklusionsfirmen, was pleased to take part in the European Disability Forum (EDF) Annual General Assembly in Limassol, Cyprus.

The Assembly brought together representatives from disability organisations across Europe to discuss key priorities for the coming years. Gunta Anča, Chairperson of the Latvian disability NGO umbrella organisation SUSTENTO, was elected as the new EDF President, together with the new governing bodies for 2026–2030. We warmly congratulate the new leadership and thank Ioannis Vardakastanis for his outstanding leadership and dedication over the past years.

A particularly important milestone was the election of two persons with intellectual disabilities to the EDF Board for the first time: Soufiane El Amrani from Inclusion Europe and Joachim Busch from Deutscher Behindertenrat. Their election represents an important step towards more inclusive representation within European disability advocacy.

The Assembly also addressed a range of important issues, including the European Commission's Disability Rights Strategy, the next EU Budget, the European Disability Card, passenger rights, employment access, healthcare and inclusive education.

CEFEC looks forward to continuing its cooperation with EDF and partners across Europe to promote inclusive employment, participation and stronger disability rights.

New Member Organizations

Senik Center is a community-based organisation from Slovenia focused on holistic wellbeing, sustainable living, experiential learning and social activation. They cooperate with the Employment Service of Slovenia in workplace training programmes and with CPU Reuse Center in practical learning and inclusion activities.

WEBSITE

Radu Alexa from Romania is a new member of SFE CEFEC network. He brings over a decade of experience in the NGO sector, with a particular focus on social inclusion, disability rights and social entrepreneurship.

Radu has actively participated in several CEFEC Conferences and has established strong cooperation with our Romanian members, including the Bucovina Institute and ACDC. He also took part in the 2025 SFE CEFEC Academy in Mainz, Germany.

Dr. Harri Kostilainen from Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak), Finland is a new member of the SFE CEFEC network.

Harri is a Senior Advisor in Research, Development and Innovation, specialising in social entrepreneurship, social innovation and social enterprise ecosystems. His work combines research and practical development to support more inclusive and socially sustainable solutions, particularly in the social, health and employment sectors.

He is involved in several European initiatives and research activities focused on strengthening the social economy and social enterprise development.

New Member Organizations

Veera Semi from Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak), Finland is a new member of the SFE CEFEC network.

Veera works as an RDI Specialist, focusing on social entrepreneurship, social innovation and the development of responsible business models. She is also involved in European cooperation and initiatives supporting the development of social enterprise ecosystems and the social economy.

Her work includes research and practical development around social impact, inclusive entrepreneurship and European social economy policy, as well as international projects such as the European Social Innovation Campus.

Șerban Raia from Romania is a new member of the SFE CEFEC network.

Șerban is a psychologist specialising in cognitive neuroscience and social innovation, with experience in developing inclusive learning and support environments. He currently works with the Bucovina Institute.

His work combines social entrepreneurship, youth empowerment, non-formal education and creative approaches to learning. Șerban has also been involved in mentoring young people and developing programmes supporting their personal and professional development.

Șerban already has a strong connection with CEFEC, having participated in the 2025 SFE CEFEC Academy in Mainz and contributed to the CEFEC network.

Our growing membership brings together new ideas, experiences and perspectives, strengthening collaboration and creating new opportunities across the European social economy.

Welcome, Sergi Alegre Calero!

We are pleased to welcome Sergi Alegre Calero from Spain as the new President of SFE CEFEC. Sergi succeeds Marin Zver, who led the organisation during the previous term.

Sergi Alegre represents Fundació Catalana de l'Esplai. He holds a PhD in Contemporary History and brings extensive experience in education, public administration, European cooperation and community development.

The next SFE CEFEC Annual Conference will take place in El Prat, Spain, the home of Fundació Catalana de l'Esplai. We look forward to bringing CEFEC members, partners and participants together in El Prat in October 2027 for another opportunity to exchange ideas, strengthen cooperation and explore new developments in the social economy.

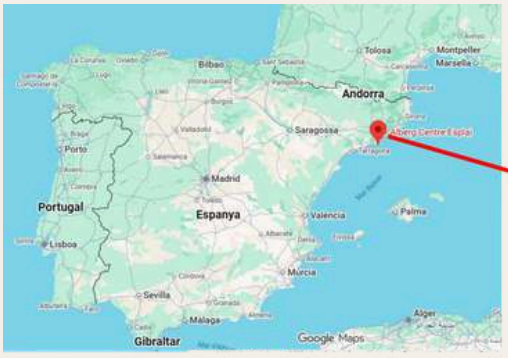
MEET OUR NEXT CONFERENCE HOST

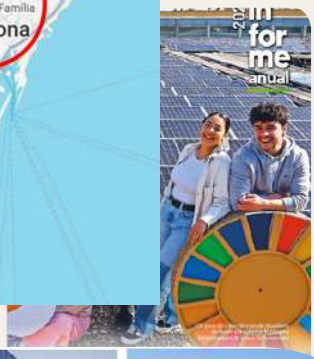
Fundesplai
Fundació Catalana de l'Esplai

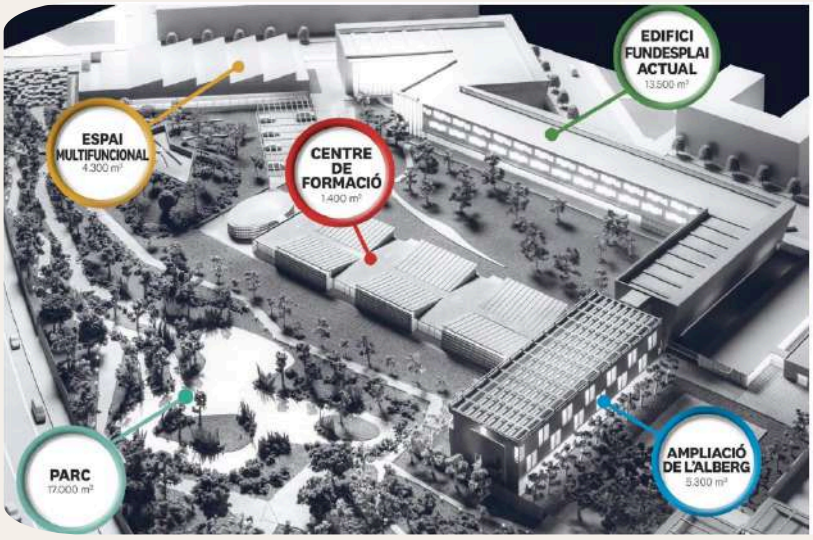
In 2027, the SFE CEFEC Annual Conference will take place in El Prat de Llobregat, Catalonia, Spain, hosted by Fundesplai – Fundació Catalana de l'Esplai.

Fundesplai is a non-profit organisation with more than 50 years of experience in education, social inclusion and sustainability. Its work focuses on children and young people, families, the Third Sector and environmental education, with activities ranging from non-formal education and youth leadership to socio-labour integration, volunteering and environmental initiatives.

The organisation's headquarters, Centre Esplai, has been located in El Prat de Llobregat since 2007. It is a community action and educational centre that hosts training, conferences and events, as well as socio-educational and community activities.







STAY TUNED FOR MORE INFO!

LINZ APPEAL

Linz Appeal – 2025 Country Reports

THE SITUATION IN CEFEC MEMBER STATES

New!

Social Firms Europe CEFEC is proud to present the updated Part B of the Linz Appeal, first launched at our 2007 Conference in Linz.

The Linz Appeal is CEFEC's call to action for more Social Firms and Social Enterprises across Europe, creating meaningful employment for disabled and disadvantaged people. It sets out shared definitions and country-specific insights that guide policymakers and practitioners alike:

- Social Firm – a business created for the employment of people with a disability or disadvantage, combining market activity with a clear social mission.
- Social Enterprise – a business created primarily to promote the economic and social integration of disabled and disadvantaged people, often combining training, rehabilitation, and commercial activit.
- Social Cooperative – a legal structure for a company that is owned and managed democratically by its members.

Part B of the Appeal compiles country reports from our members, updated every two years. The 2025 edition highlights significant progress at cultural, social, and legal levels across Europe. While "Social Firm" remains the core guideline, many countries also embrace the broader term "Social Enterprise."

👉 Explore the updated Linz Appeal here: The Linz Appeal Research

Linz Appeal PART B
Country Reports - Update 2025

This is an update of Part B of "The Linz Appeal 2007", brochure printed and online https://socialfirmseurope.eu/social-firms/research/ , which gives an overview of the Social Firms movement, summing up aims, beliefs, strategies and serves as a manual to organizations and countries who wish to spread Social Enterprises.

At its Conference in Linz 2007, **CEFEC** promoted its core message in the so-called LINZ APPEAL.

The Appeal, which is in two parts, set out CEFEC's view on the reasons why there should be more social firms for disabled and disadvantaged people in Europe, produced good practice guidelines and collated overviews of the social firm/social enterprise sector in members 'home countries.
Social Firms Europe CEFEC has a constant interest to clarify the most used terms from the social economy field and every two years is doing research to update the legislation and the information related with social firms among the European countries.

Part A

CEFEC members agreed on a clear definition of the terms **Social Firm and Social Enterprise Social Cooperatives** which has been and is still a guideline for creating work for the named target groups: CEFEC encourages the creation of work for its target groups in the open labour market and welcomes whatever actions and programmes lead to this aim:

Definition of a Social Firm
„A Social Firm is a business created for the employment of people with a disability or other disadvantage in the labour market.
It is a business which uses its own market-orientated production of goods and services to pursue its social mission.
A significant number of its employees will be people with a disability or other disadvantage in the labour market.
Every worker will be paid a market wage or salary appropriate to the work – whatever their productive capacity is.
Work opportunities should be equal between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged employees. All should have the same employment rights and obligations.
The term „cooperative" should be confined to a legal structure for a company which is owned and managed democratically by its members."

1

Definition of Social Enterprise
„A Social Enterprise is any business which is created primarily for the purpose of promoting the economic and social integration of disabled and disadvantaged people.
Its activities would include training and rehabilitation as well as commercial activity".

Definition of Social Cooperative
"A social cooperative, is the legal structure for a company, which is owned and managed democratically by its members".

Part B

This part contains the country reports of our members, which are being updated every other year. Here is the latest version of 2025!

There has certainly been progress at a cultural, social and legal level in most European countries regarding the status, spread and numbers of social firms/social enterprises.

We have found that the above given definition of a „social firm" is the valid guideline.

However, in addition to the traditional use of the term „Social Firm" other expressions are used, mostly the term „Social Enterprise".

We have also found that there is growing awareness of more and more green economy within social firms for disabled and disadvantaged persons and two thirds are actively taking steps and measures to reduce their CO2 footprint.

We thank all contributors! Comments are welcome to the coordinators Christiane Haerlin, Alina Birsan & Weronika Margula, under <socialfirmseurope@gmail.com>

In 2025 and 2026 we managed to develop with support of Bucovina Institute team, a series of podcasts with several Social Firms Europe CEFEC members, and we are very happy to continue with this tradition in 2026. So, we are very excited to share with you these recordings, with:

- Irene Lezier, 5th edition of the Academy participant from Italy
- Alessia Wolf , 5th edition of the Academy participant from Italy
- Rudi Bettin , 5th edition of the Academy participant from Italy
- Marin Zver, 5th edition of the Academy participant and 2025/2026 SFE CEFEC President from Slovenia
- Ela Petra Kiric, 5th edition of the Academy participant from Slovenia

Click on the yellow button to view & listen!

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