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Danube4SEecosystem

**Enhancing the development of Social Economy by
engaging Local Public Authorities in the Social
Enterprises supporting Ecosystem for a more inclusive
Labor Market in the Danube Region**

Output 2.2

**Transnational D4SEE Skills Gap Assessment Tools for the SE
sector in the Danube Region**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AF	Application Form
A2F	Access to Finance
AN	Activity Number
ASPs	Associated Strategic Partners
BSO	Business Support Organisation
DR	Danube region
D4SEE	Danube4SEcosystem
ED	Economic Development
EGD	European Green Deal
ESF	European Social Fund
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
EU	European Union
EUSDR	European Union Strategy of the Danube Region
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
LPAs	Local Public Authorities
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLD	Policy Learning Dialog
PP	Project Partner
RMS	Regional Stakeholder Meeting
SEs	Social Enterprises
SEM	Search Engine Marketing
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
SO	Specific Objective

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1. Executive Summary

This document synthesises the main results of 9 National Reports on skills gap analysis and assessment tools (D.2.1.4) prepared by Danube4SEecosystem project partners and of the Report on skills gap analysis and assessment tools (D.2.1.5). It presents the different activities carried out in the first semester of the project and represents the second project output. This synthesis of transnational analysis corresponds to a project output (Output 2.2).

The **objective** of the **Output 2.2 Transnational D4SEE Skills Gap Assessment Tools for the SE sector in the Danube Region** is to provide insights on:

1. ***existing skills of Social Enterprises (SE) and Local Public Administrations (LPA);***
2. ***SE and LPA skills that need to be developed further;***
3. ***SE and LPA skills that do not exist at the organisation level and need to be developed.***

Overview data collected

Questionnaires were distributed in all the 9 countries the project is implemented in: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia. Total number of SEs that participated in the initial learning process that PPs performed is 231 SEs, and 78 LPAs. Also, PP performed 38 interviews.

The findings presented herein were obtained by carrying out a comparative analysis of data collected through the process of piloting the skills gap assessment tools. It also presents the results for supporting the development of the Capacity Building Programme for sustainable & resilient SEs and LPAs, based on a microlearning approach that will be implemented within the inclusive D4SEE Training Platform. Within the mentoring program, guidance will be provided to support strengthening key skills for specific SEs and LPAs defined through piloting 2 Skills Gap Assessment Tools.

Analyse conclusion SEs

Understanding what are the key issues and hurdles that SEs are facing was important for all PPs to be able to broadly approach the main goal: to support social economy actors and entrepreneurs to start up, to scale up, to innovate and to create jobs by engaging local public authorities.

Learning on SEs capacities regarding Finance literacy started with gathering information on how many SEs create profit. ***Out of 231 SEs, 64 % (147) SEs stated that they create a profit***, while 37% (86) of them don't create a profit by performing the business activities. When asked What financial resources they utilise, the majority indicated ***60% (138) that they are using public funds (European Union, national and regional programmes)***.

For those SEs that need additional financing to improve their business operations, most of them, **49% (114), stated that they didn't use but needed social banking and micro-credits (small loans).**

All these different financial instruments require different knowledge and skills. When asked to indicate what financial knowledge is needed, SEs specified: **Finance literacy** as most needed - 55% (127 SEs out of 231) stated that they need to improve skills related to the **risk management strategy**. Due to the current uncertainty, it is important to help SEs to prevent potential problems they may face. In this regard, it is important to motivate SEs to create a **Risk management** strategy, define the potential problems in business operations, and define concrete measures to prevent them.

Regarding the skills that are needed for SE to be able to Assess and mitigate potential risks to its operations, reputation, and stakeholders, **42% (98) of the respondents stated that it is important to have insurance coverage for key risks (e.g., property insurance, liability insurance).**

For monitoring and responding to political frameworks or regulations that could affect SE operations, such as immigration policies or trade agreements, the majority, **53% SEs, declared they regularly monitor legislative and regulatory changes relevant to the industry.**

Strategies that SEs employ to mitigate the impact of global trends such as brain drain or talent migration on its workforce and competitiveness is for **majority 32% (73 SEs) diversity and inclusion initiatives to create an inclusive workplace culture that attracts and retains diverse talent**. In terms of skill that is needed for SEs to stay informed about broader socio-economic trends and potential implications for its business operations and market positioning for the majority, **53% (123), is participation in industry conferences, seminars, and networking events.**

Skills needed for running business operations are various, from **managing budgets** and **organising production, communication with buyers, suppliers, financial institutions, donors, to collaboration with teams**. Therefore, there is a need to develop both strong soft and hard skills for all employees to take the various responsibilities of the job. Some of the **key skills in running enterprises that SEs** indicated as a need are:

- **exploring new marketing/sales channels** - 65%
- **Search Engine Marketing (SEM)** - 65%
- **reporting on sustainable business** and fulfilment of ESG indicators - 64%
- **exploration of new markets** and/or customers - 62%
- **increase knowledge on commercial law** - 61%
- **availability of social (impact) investors and financial intermediaries** (e.g. banks) - 61%
- **green marketing** - 60%
- **data analytics** - 60%
- drafting and implementing a **marketing strategy** - 58%
- **establishment of market-based (business) relationships** with other public authorities / governments - 54%
- **Content Marketing** (email, videos) - 51%

Analyse conclusions LPA

Following the LPAs that have participated in the study was concluded that:

- 42,86% declared that their organisation has between 1-20 employees,
- 12,99% of the LPAs have stated they have between 21-50 employees
- 12,99% of the LPAs have between 51-100 employees
- 10,39% LPAs have between 101-200,
- 16,88% LPAs have more than 200 employees
- 3,9% of the participants stated that they don't know the number of the employees the organisation has.

Since the great majority of participant organisations have below 20 employees, the consortium was able to leverage the findings on existing skills. Moreover, since the percentage of LPAs with more than 200 employees is also significant (16,88%), the study was able to provide insights on the skill structure of such larger organisations.

The findings of the transnational analysis conclude that the top existing skills of the LPAs that filled in the questionnaires were:

- **Innovation and modernisation** - Ethical considerations and GDPR, Innovation and Adaptability; Cybersecurity awareness; Data Analysis;
- **Service delivery** - Cooperation and Teamwork, Strategic thinking, Budgeting
- **Good governance** - Policy analysis, Cross-cultural awareness

2. Introduction

Social entrepreneurship flourishes when a holistic policy ecosystem is in place – an appropriate regulatory framework means to ensure better access to market and finance and opportunities for skills development notably through business support structures as well as through better cooperation with local public authorities (LPA).

To fully exploit the principal potential of the cooperation between social enterprises (SEs) and local public authorities (LPAs) in the Danube region it is of paramount importance to increase the skills of the SEs and LPAs. Out of the many different SEs skills needed for the successful formation of an entrepreneurial approach is the ability to operate their business model in a way that makes them attractive for LPAs.

The SE ecosystem has developed over the years, however disparities between western and eastern countries in the Danube Region persists. The territorial challenges faced by social entrepreneurship in partner countries are related to low level of engagement of public authorities for implementing and supporting social economy at local level, missing networking and B2B connections, low number of innovative SEs, lack of programmes demonstrating social value to the general public.

Motivated by these challenges, the Danube4SEecosystem main objective is to jointly develop inspiring policies for social enterprises by involving local public authorities into the social enterprises supporting ecosystem in order to enhance inclusive employment in the Danube region while supporting the sustainable operation of social enterprises as interpreted on the basis of a broad definition, in order to strengthen their employment role at the settlement and regional level.

Output 2.2 „Transnational D4SEE Skills Gap Assessment Tools“ describes the results of **2 Skills Gap Assessment Tools tested in partner countries** and validated will describe in detail how it can be taken up in other DR countries. It aims to assess the skill levels of SEs and LPAs, identify the skills these organisations need and strategic objectives (LPAs); design solutions to close the skills gap. Solutions consider opportunities for upskilling or reskilling the existing employees through training, mentoring, and networking, as well as recruiting and retention methods.

The Output 2.2 will help in:

- identifying **challenges** and **means to support a better collaboration** at ecosystem level **between SEs and LPAs**;
- analysing the **challenges faced by SEs during the pandemic** and the support they require to become more resilient and sustainable;
- creating a **social enterprise skills gap analysis** which will **map social entrepreneurial risk management skills, digital skills, innovation management skills, social and environmental impact within the business model, as well as main barriers in accessing public support**.

- creating a **comparative analysis of existing local public administration skills** performed in PP countries with the aim to define the best practice that could be replicated in different countries
- analysing the **skill gap associated with digitalization** and the **implementation of the European Green Deal**, in an effort to provide future-proof jobs and skills training for the green transition;
- **assessing the cooperation and exchange of information** between different organisations that impact the D4SEE ecosystem, such as institutions and service providers responsible for employment, health, education and social services, as well as income support, to ensure a holistic and coordinated approach to supporting employability, with special focus on vulnerable groups.

3. Methodology

The Danube4SEcosystem surveys on Social Enterprises (SE) and Local Public Authorities (LPAs) in Danube Region was carried out in the period in May 2024, between SEs and LPAs. The questionnaire assessment tools were in digital format and developed via Google Forms. There were several mediums/channels to perform assessment via email, or website, and by interviewing target audience. The interviews were conducted in person and/or online via the Zoom platform, guided by a protocol of research questions about the social enterprise model, legal and regulatory framework (government policies), challenges and opportunities, skill development, and future developments.

This output provides a summary of the current skill levels, based on assessments and interviews. Also, it provides a comparison of the current and desired skill levels, highlighting the gap and their impact, as well as a prioritisation of the most critical skill gap. Within this output, a set of action plans to close the skills gap will be defined.

4. Target groups

The Danube4SEecosystem survey on Social Enterprises (SE) and Local Public Authorities (LPAs) in the Danube Region was carried out in May 2024, between SEs and LPAs. The questionnaire assessment tools were in digital format and developed via Google Forms. There were several mediums/channels to perform assessment via email, or website, and by interviewing target audience. The interviews were conducted in person and/or online via the Zoom platform, guided by a protocol of research questions about the social enterprise model, legal and regulatory framework (government policies), challenges and opportunities, skill development, and future developments.

The target groups of assessment users were the following:

- Local public authorities (LPA): Municipalities, employment agencies, national, regional, and local authorities. Local public authorities represent an important target group for the project. Their role in the development of the social economy ecosystem is strategic and will be at the core of implementing the project.
- Representatives of the social economy (SE): The social economy includes a variety of businesses, organisations, and legal entities, such as social enterprises established as cooperatives, non-profit associations, foundations, LLC, entrepreneurs, and other legal entities that aim a social impact with their business models.

On the Project level, email invitations to the online survey were sent several times to 1703 SEs and 570 LPAs. The final sample size of fully completed questionnaires of SEs was 231 and 78 questionnaires of LPAs. After collecting the questionnaires, PPs performed 23 personal interviews with SEs and 29 personal interviews with LPAs.

Table 1: Number of SEs and LPAs that participated in the piloting of skill gap assessment tools

Country	Total number of contacted SEs	Total number of contacted LPAs	Number of collected questionnaires of SEs	Number of collected questionnaires of LPAs	Number of performed interviews of SEs	Number of performed interviews of LPAs
Romania	451	73	14	12	5	4
Hungary	125	99	28	16	2	2
Slovakia	554	200	72	8	4	4
Croatia	95	26	10	13	2	2
Czech Republic	160	30	27	5	1	3
Austria	50	100	16	2	1	4
Serbia	100	20	20	10	2	2
Republic of Srpska	14	10	13	7	2	2

Slovenia	154	12	31	5	4	6
TOTAL	1703	570	231	78	23	29

5. Skills gaps assessment of social entrepreneurship (SEs)

This chapter provides a summary of the key findings from the questionnaire that served as the data collection tool on needed skills for SEs. Areas that were subject to assessment are in the field of SEs' finance literacy, SE capacities to assess and mitigate potential risks to its operations, reputation, and stakeholders, to monitoring and responding to political frameworks or regulations that could affect SE operations, such as immigration policies or trade agreements, capacities and strategies that SEs employ to mitigate the impact of global trends such as brain drain or talent migration on its workforce and competitiveness, as well as availability of skills that is needed for SEs to stay informed about broader socio-economic trends and potential implications for its business operations and market positioning.

5.1 Overview of the SE survey

On the project level, 231 SEs showed interest to participate in Danube4SEecosystem project. Most of them 31% (72) are located in Slovakia, Hungary 13% (29), Slovenia 13% (29), Czechia 12% (27), Serbia 9% (20), Austria 7% (16), Romania 6% (14), Republic of Srpska / B&H 6% (13), Croatia 5% (11).

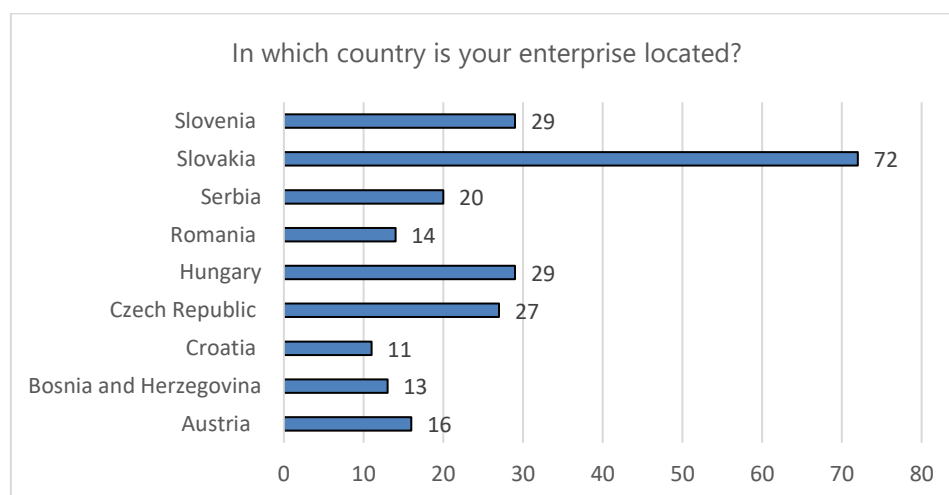


Figure 1. In which country SEs are located?

Maturity of the surveyed SEs

The majority of surveyed SEs **(42%) operate for more than 10 years**, while **39% operate between 6-10 years**, 13% operate between 1-5 years and 7% operate less than 1 year.

Analysing the graphic below, it is important to highlight the fact that the majority of SEs that are operating for **10 years or more** are located in **Austria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic and Slovenia**, while the most of the SEs in **Romania, Serbia and Slovakia** have been established recently in the past **1-5 years**.

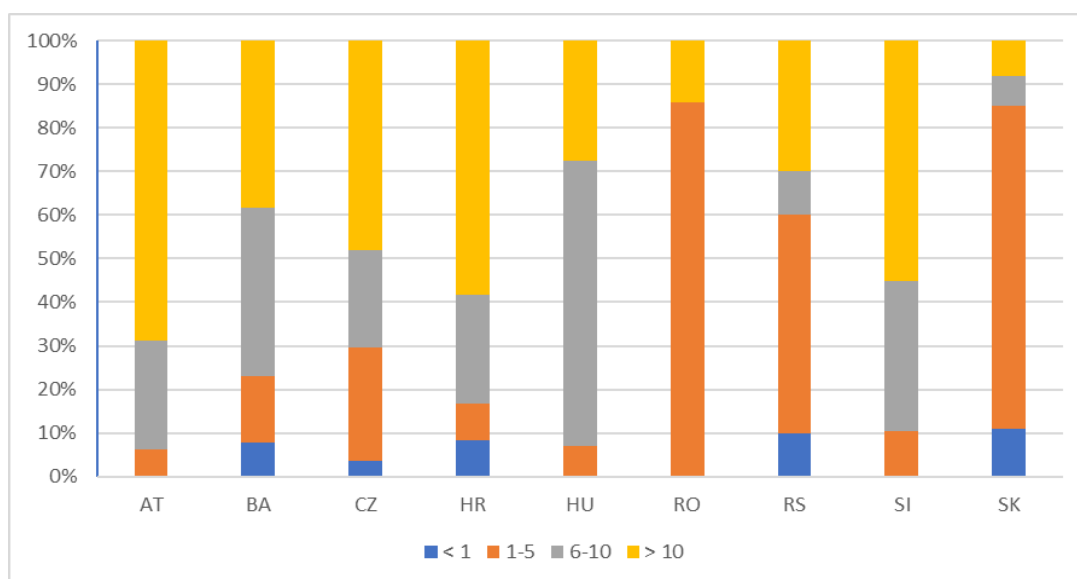


Figure 2. In what year was established your enterprise?

Type of enterprise

Majority of assessed SEs in partner countries are micro-SMEs 48% and small SMEs 29%, while 24% of surveyed SEs are medium sized companies. When looking at the country profile of SEs, it can be noticed that the majority of the SEs that participated in the survey in partner countries are included by company size in the category of **micro-sized companies**, having less than ten employees. Only Austria reported that SEs are small enterprises with up to 50 staff members. Additionally, they reported only two micro-enterprises (fewer than 10 staff) and four mid-sized enterprises (up to 250 staff) were represented in the sample.

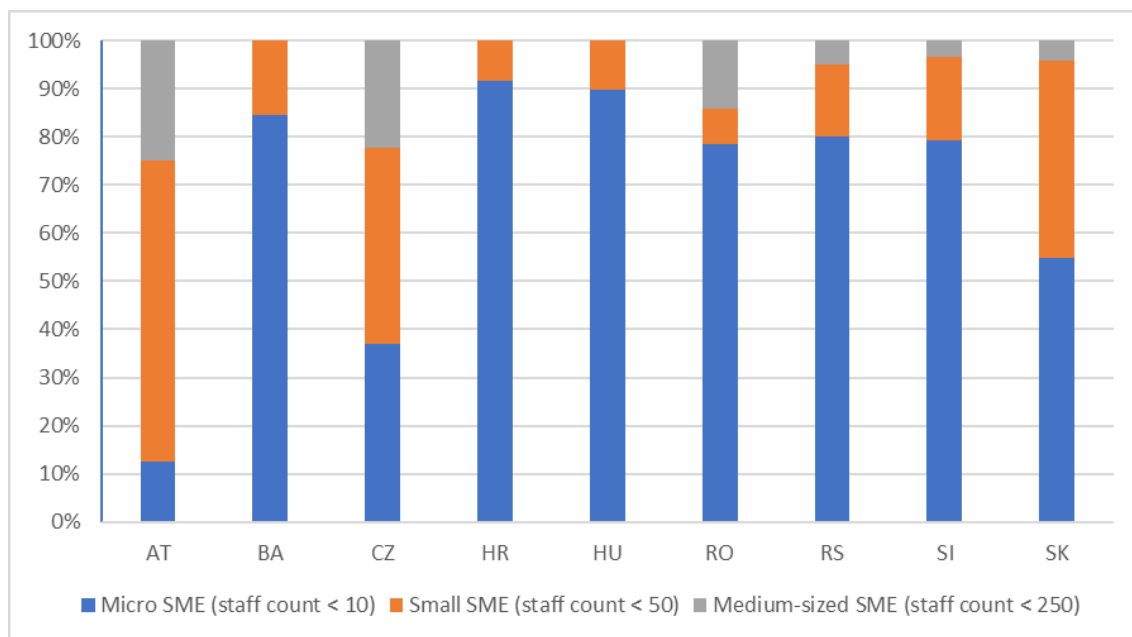


Figure 3. What business category applies best to your enterprise?

Form of organisation of SEs

Dominant form of organisation of SEs, **47%** (108 SEs), is **non-profit legal person** (association, non-profit private limited company, etc.), **37%** (86 SEs) are **Profit-making legal entities** (private limited company, corporations etc.), and 17% (39) SEs operate as a **natural person**.

The majority of SEs in **Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia** and **Slovenia** are **Non-profit legal entities**, while SEs in **Bosnia, Czechia**, and **Slovakia** are **for profit organisations**. The only country where the respondents are divided equally between non-profit and for-profit organisations is Romania. The diversity in form of organisation is related to different framework conditions in partner countries.

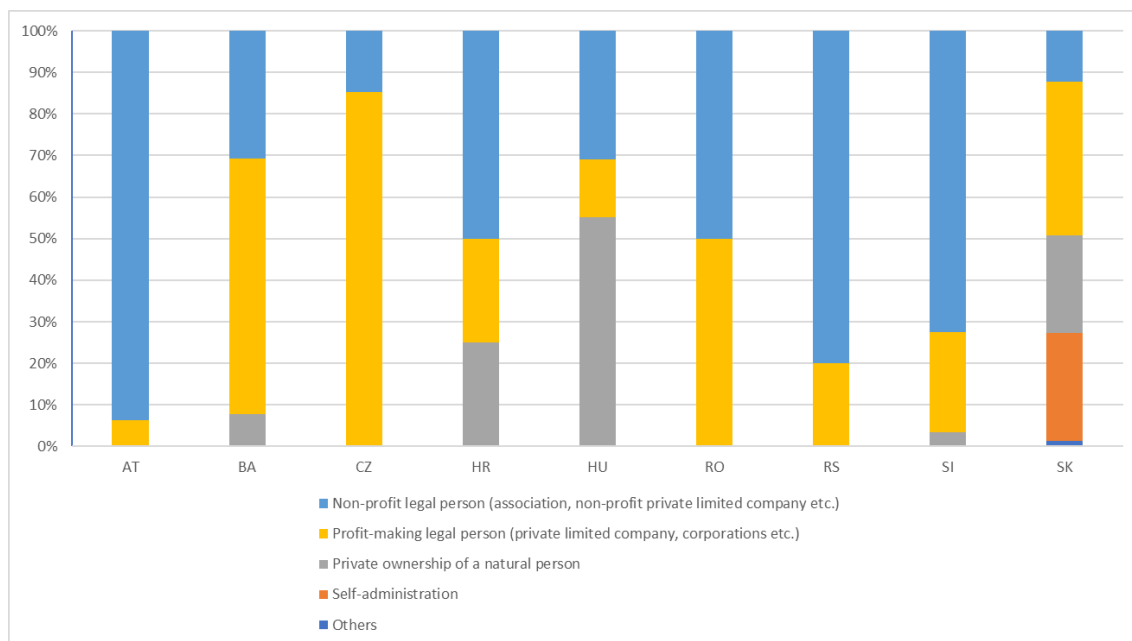


Figure 4. Please indicate the majority ownership of your enterprise

Social objectives

Looking at areas where SEs are fulfilling their social role, the majority of them **56%** fulfil their social role in the area of **Labour market improvements**. Other social areas are:

- Environmental and sustainability services - 29%;
- Support of social enterprises and economic development - 28,6%;
- Integration activities - 28,6%;
- Welfare services - 20%;
- Educational sector - 19%;
- Civil society and equality - 14%.

Analysing the responses in the national reports, it is interesting to see that the SEs in partner countries have different priorities in terms of social objectives. For instance, in **Austria**, 81% of the respondents stated that they are focused on **labour market improvements, activities targeting civil society and equality, and integration efforts**. SEs in **Bosnia** have as main social objectives **improving the labour market** (38.5%), **environmental protection** (30.8%), **civil society and equality** (30.8%), and **support for social enterprises and economic development** (30.8%). In **Czechia**, the most frequently declared social goals among social enterprises are the **improvement of the labour market** (66,7%), as well as **integration activities** (51,9%), **social services** (33,3%) and **support of social enterprises** (33.3%). In Hungary, the top three social objectives are **Support of social enterprises and economic development, Labour market improvements, and**

Environmental and sustainability services. In **Serbia**, based on the answers of SEs, 45% are operating and providing **welfare services**, 40% dealing with **environmental and sustainability services**, 35% provide **support for social enterprises and economic development**. SEs in **Slovenia** have as main social objectives **Environmental and sustainability services** (48.4 %), **labour market improvements** (38.7%), **educational sector** and **supporting of SE and economic development**.

Markets on which SEs sell their products/services

As it is shown in the table below, SEs sell their product or services predominantly on **local markets** and **regional markets**. This can be explained by the fact that the majority of them are micro-sized companies with low numbers of employees, thus, do not have the capacity to operate on larger markets. However, some of them also operated on national markets 40%. Only 7% SEs indicated that they reach one neighbouring country, and 7% operate on international markets.

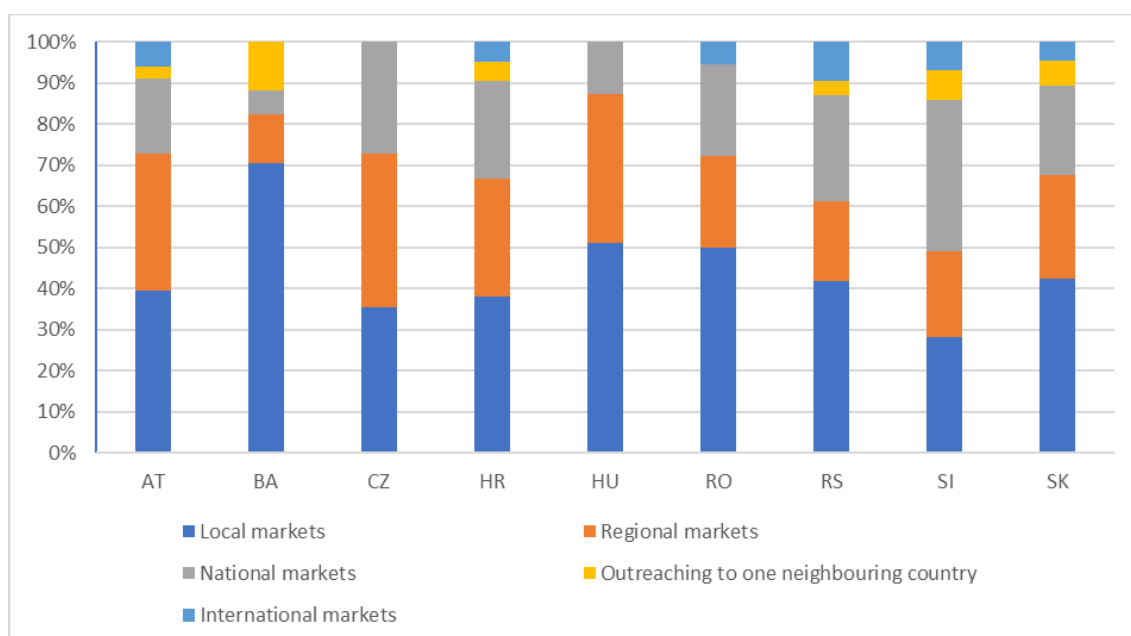


Figure 5. In which markets do you sell your products/services?

Expanding the operational market

Even though the majority of SEs are currently operating on **local** and **regional markets**, there is an interest in reaching out to other markets as well. In **Czechia, Hungary and Serbia** there is a high interest in reaching the **national markets**, compared to Austria, Bosnia where the interest is lower. Also, SEs are interested in reaching out to **international markets**. The highest interest is shown in **Slovenia and Serbia**.

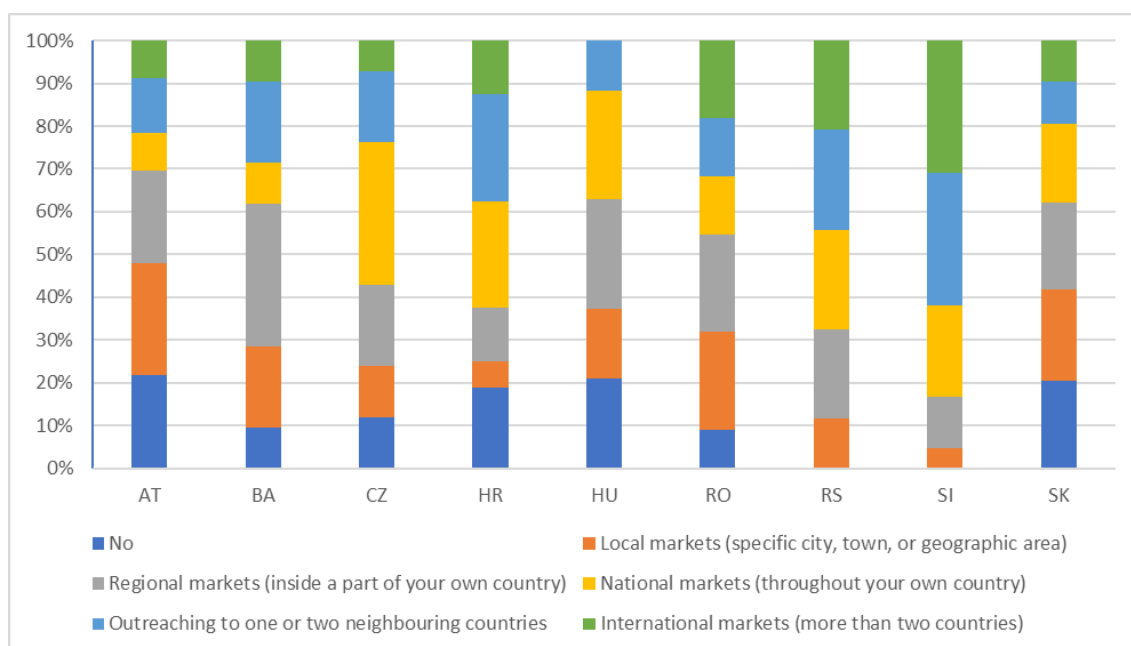


Figure 6. Would you like to enter new markets?

Skills required to access new markets

Regarding the skills that are required to enable SEs to access new markets, the responding SEs stated they need to acquire or improve the followings:

- **Systemic (ecosystem) thinking among SEs:** get to know local/regional actors, be aware of trends and statistical data.) - 38%
- **Risk management plan/strategy** - 36%
- **Digital skills & online marketing** - 33%
- **Social public procurement** - 28%
- **Innovation management** - 26%
- **Circular economy** business models for SE - 25%
- **Identifying and measuring the social and environmental impact within the business model** - 17%

Cooperation with local public administrations

Analysing the responses received from partner countries, it can be noted a good Cooperation with local public administrations. **72% of the SEs are cooperating with local public administrations**, 26% SEs don't have any cooperation with local public administrations, and 5 representatives of SEs are not familiar if they have any cooperation with local public administrations.

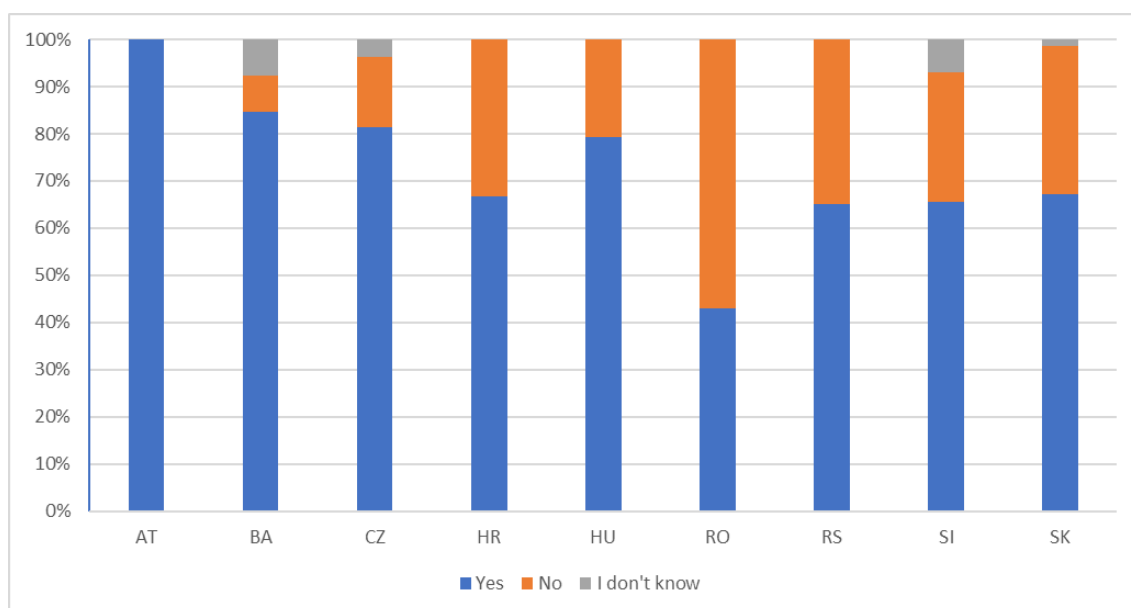


Figure 7. Does your organisation have any cooperation with local public administrations?

When analysing answers in each country, it is noticed a very good cooperation with LPAs in most of the partner countries. Lower cooperation is shown in Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Integration of vulnerable groups into labour market

According to the OECD, vulnerable groups that are considered difficult to integrate into the labour market are usually only marginally integrated into the labour and have various barriers to employment, such as a combination of low qualifications, care responsibilities, health restrictions, addiction problems or geographical mobility problems. Examples of groups that are difficult to integrate include people with care responsibilities, a lack of language skills among jobseekers with a migrant background, health restrictions and age (OECD 2021).

54% of SEs, have 1-5 employees considered as hard to integrate into the labour market, while only 1 SEs, representing 0,5%, employs over 101 people that are difficult to integrate into the labour market and 1 (0,5%) employs 56-60 people hard to integrate into the labour market.

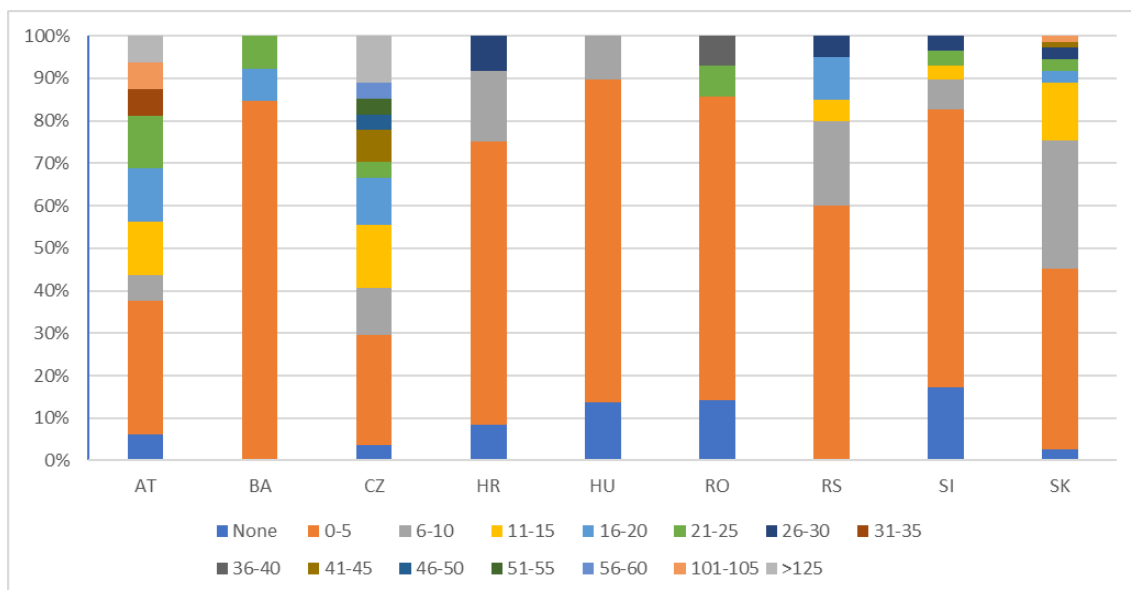


Figure 8. How many of your employees are considered hard to integrate in the labour market?

Related to the ambition of SEs to especially integrate vulnerable groups (people with disabilities, migrants, elderly, etc.) into either their organisation or into country's labour market, 46% stated that they especially consider hiring vulnerable groups; 35,5% stated that their business model aims to help vulnerable people find suitable jobs and 19% stated that this issue is not relevant to them. The interaction of vulnerable groups into the labour market is highly important especially for Austrian SEs and Bosnian SEs.

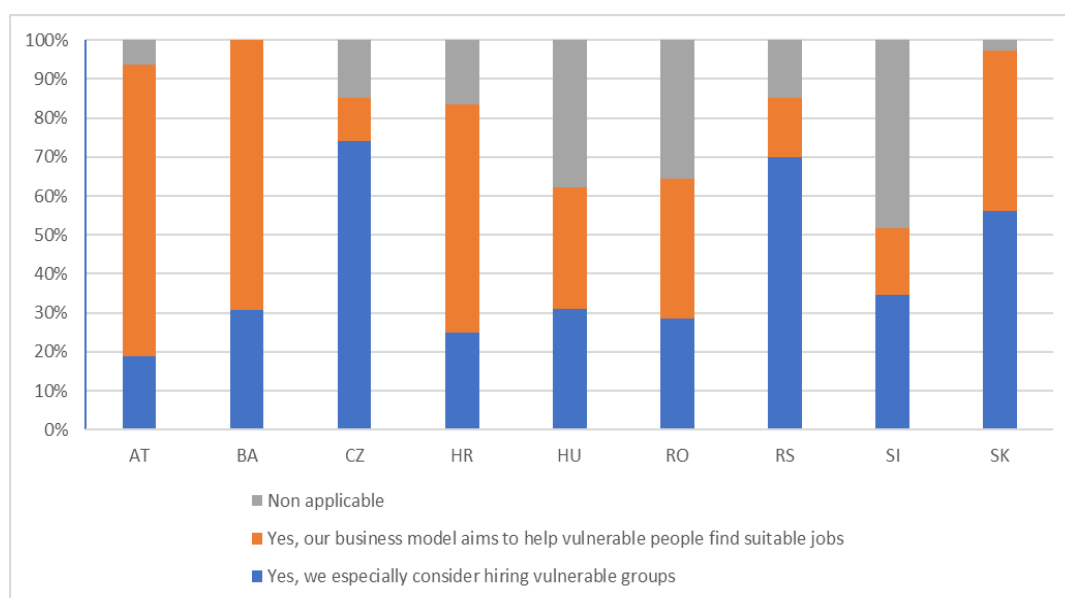


Figure 9. Has your organisation the ambition to especially integrate vulnerable groups (people with disabilities, migrants, elderly, etc.) into either your organisation or to your country's labour market?

Support provided for the integration of vulnerable groups

With the aim to support the integration of vulnerable populations into the labour market SEs offer different types of services, such as:

- Mentorship opportunities - 33%
- Job training programs - 31%
- Internship opportunities - 11%
- Networking events with employers - 9%

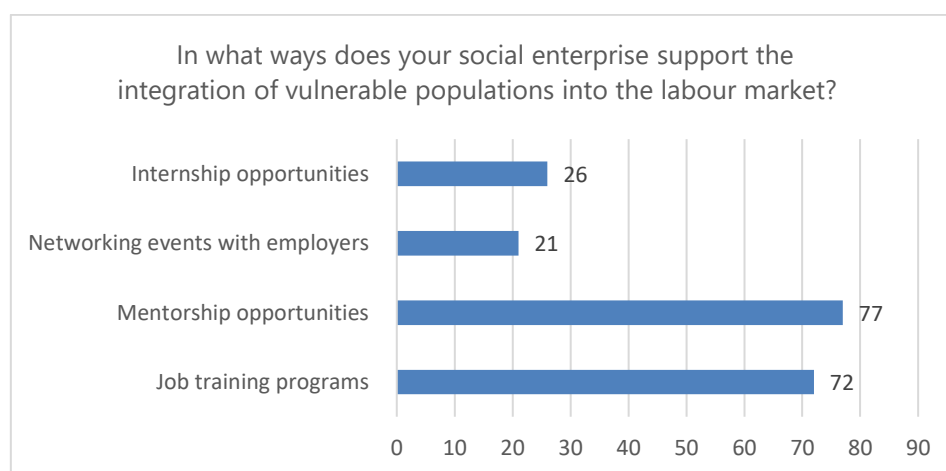


Figure 10. In what ways does your social enterprise support the integration of vulnerable populations into the labour market?

Job training programmes represent one opportunity offered in countries such as: **Czechia, Serbia, Slovenia** and **Croatia**. **Mentoring** is one very common approach provided by SEs in **Slovakia, Croatia, Hungary, Czechia** and **Slovenia**. SEs in **Romania** provide **internships**, while **networking** events with employers are provided mostly in **Austria, Bosnia, Croatia** and **Hungary**.

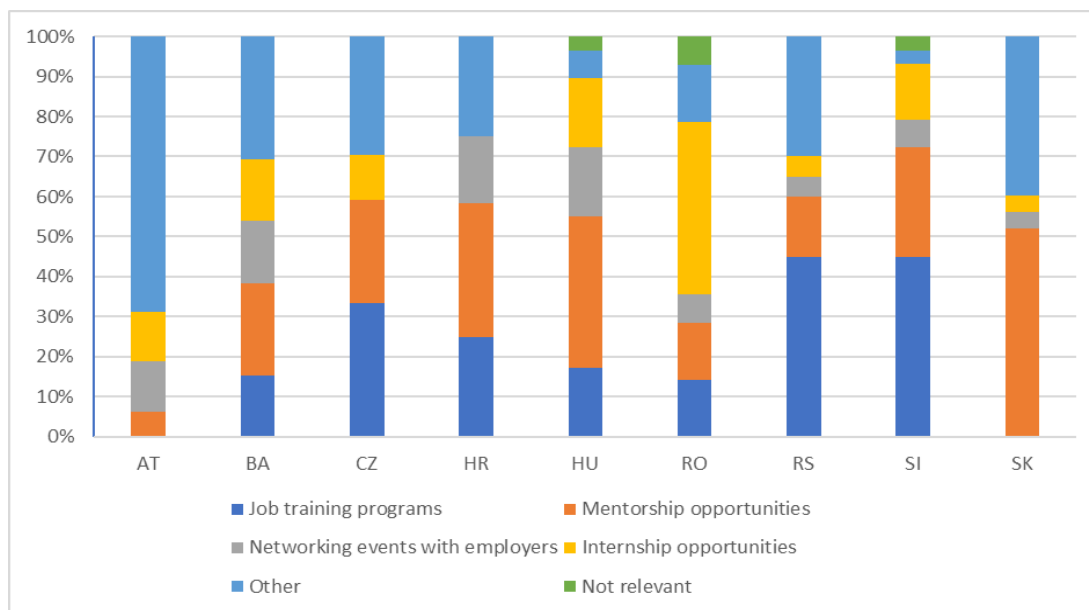


Figure 11. In what ways does your social enterprise support the integration of vulnerable populations into the labour market?

5.2 Analysis of existing skills in SE

This section presents the main findings on existing SE skills based on the transnational analysis carried out within the project countries. The results of the analysis are to be considered in relation to the types of business entities and the sizes of the SE that have participated in the study. By these rankings, most of the participant organisations (64,38%) in all project countries have declared that their organisations are Micro SME (< 10 employees), 28,33% were Small SME (<50 employees) and 7,30% were Medium-size SME (<250).

By country, the study has revealed the following results:

- In Romania, 78,57% of the participants declared that their SEs are Micro SMEs, 14,29% are Medium SMEs and only 7,14% are Small SMEs.
- In Hungary, 89,66% of the participants declared that their SEs are SMEs, 10,34% are Small SMEs and none of the SEs were Medium-size SMEs.
- In Slovakia 54,79% of the participants declared that their SEs are Micro SMEs, 41,10% are Small SMEs and only 4,11% are Medium-size SMEs.
- In Croatia 91,67% of the participants declared that their SEs are Micro SMEs, 8,33% are Small SMEs and none of the SEs are Medium-size SMEs.
- In Czech Republic 40,74% of the participants declared that their SEs are Small SMEs, 37,04% are Micro SMEs and 22,22% are Medium-size SMEs
- In Austria 62,50% of the participants declared that their SEs are Small SMEs, 25% are Medium-size SMEs and only 12,5% are Micro SMEs.
- In Serbia 80% of the participants declared that their SEs are Micro SMEs, 15% are Small SMEs and only 5% are Medium-size SMEs.

- In the Republic of Srpska (Bosnia & Herzegovina) 84,62% of the participants declared that their SEs are Micro SMEs, 15,38% are Small SMEs and none of the SEs are Medium-size SMEs.
- In Slovenia 79,31% of the participants declared that their SEs are Micro SMEs, 17,24% are Small SMEs and only 3,45% are Medium-size SMEs.

In this context, it is necessary to highlight the fact that the top existing skills that were identified are to be considered in relation to the types of organisations that participated in the study. This is in line with the low granularity that can be observed in the transnational findings and set direct lines of actions in terms of the project durability.

Top 5 existing skills ranked by number of countries

The figure below highlights the fact that the top skill that the employees of the SEs that were involved in the study have is related to **Accounting principles and practices** ($f=8$; $f\%=88.8\%$), which include financial knowledge. SE from 8 out of 9 countries have employees with competences in this area. Another top existing SE skill that was identified is related to the management of human resources - **Setting up a business plan** ($f=6$; $f\%=66.6\%$).

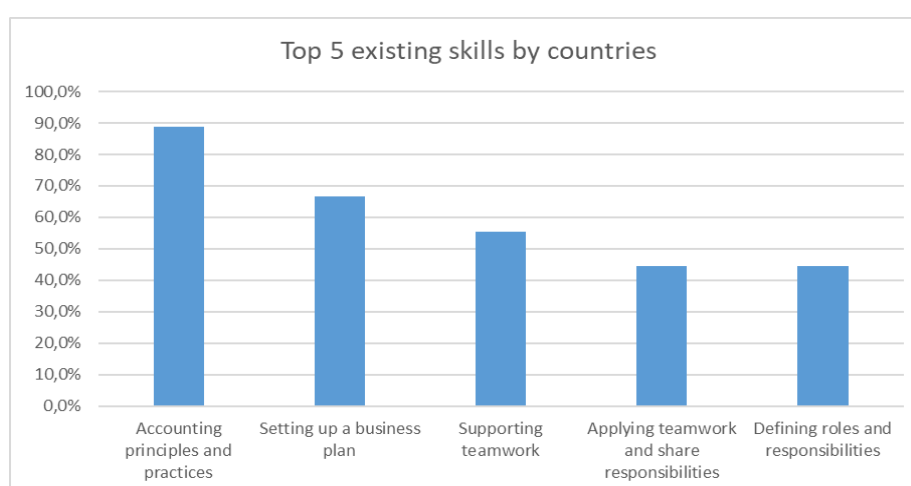


Figure 12. Top 5 existing skills by countries

Top 5 existing skills ranked by number of responses

Accounting principles and practices ($f=188$; $f\%=80.69\%$) and **Setting up a business plan** ($f=185$; $f\%=79.4\%$) were also the top skills of SE employees when the ranking was done by the number of responses during the transnational analysis. Financial and human resources management skills are the top existing skills within the SE participating in the survey.

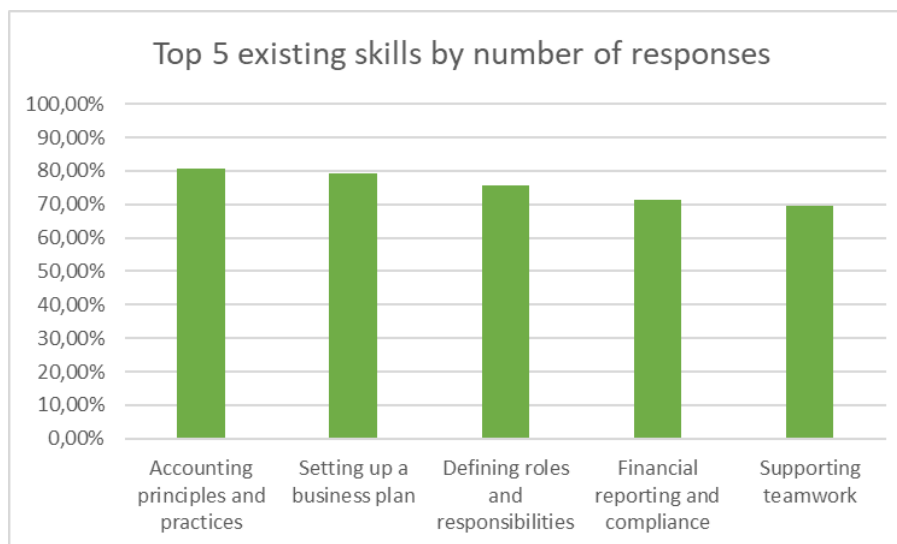


Figure 13. Top 5 existing skills by number of responses

5.3 Analysis of most requested skills

Top 5 most necessary skills requested by countries

From the figure below, it can be seen that **Search Engine Marketing (SEM)** ($f=5$; $f\%=55.5\%$) is the most requested skill, followed up by **Exploring new markets and/or customers**, **Report on sustainable business and fulfilment of ESG indicators** and **Risk management strategy**.

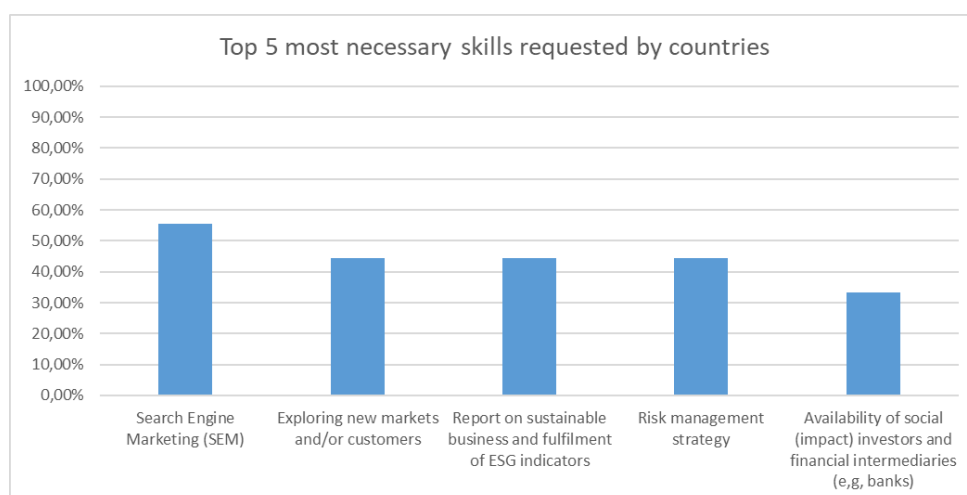


Figure 14. Top 5 most necessary skills requested by countries

Top 5 most necessary skills by number of responses

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) ($f=153$, $f\%=65.6\%$), Marketing competences - **Exploring new marketing/sales channels** and **Marketing competences** are the top 3 skills when the ranking is carried out by number of responses. This is a clear indication that most of the participants consider that these skills need to be developed or improved in their social enterprises.

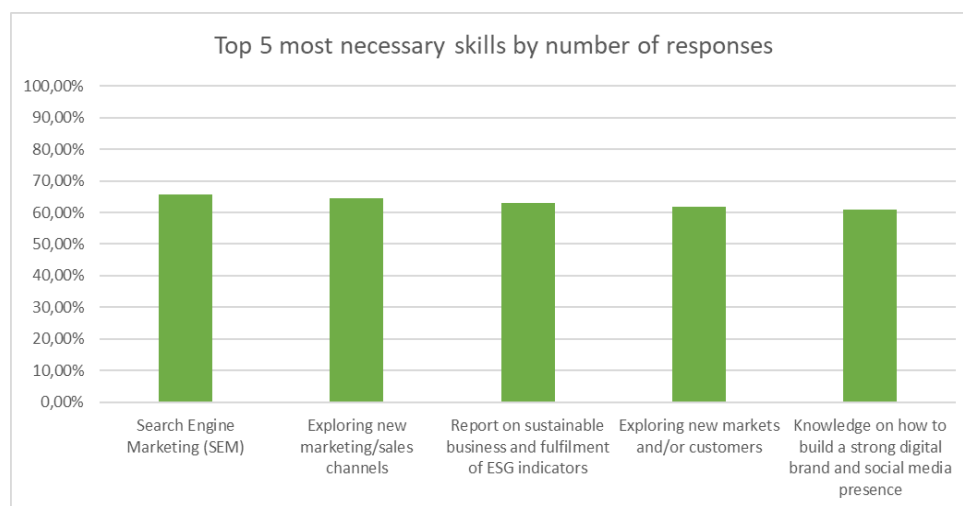


Figure 15. Top 5 most necessary skills by number of responses

5.4 Key findings

Analysing the responses received to the questionnaire, it is concluded that out of 231 SEs, **64 %** create a **profit**, while **37%** of them **do not create a profit** by performing the business activities.

Financial resources used

Regarding the **financial resources they utilise**, the majority (60%) indicated that they are using **public funds (European Union, national and regional programmes)**. Other SEs specified:

- Bank loans - 34 %
- funds by participating at competitions, grants and awards - 28%
- public procurement - 25,5%
- private investment Venture Capital (VC) or Social Investments (SI) - 24%
- support from private foundations - 14%

For those SEs that need additional financing to improve their business operations, most of them, **49%, stated that they didn't use but needed social banking and micro-credits (small loans)**. Other form of funding needed by the SEs are from:

- private foundations - 46%

- business angels - 40%
- needed public procurement - 39%
- participate at competitions, grants and award - 35,5%
- public funds (European Union, national and regional programmes), etc - 30%
- social enterprise catalysts (ASHOKA, NESsT fellowship programmes) - 29,5%

All these different financial instruments require different knowledge and skills.

Finance literacy

Most of the SEs (55%) stated that they need to improve skills related to the **risk management strategy**. Other **needed and not used more important skills** are:

- auditing - 40%
- knowledge on different financing options - 40%
- Budgeting and financial planning and forecasting - 38%
- public procurement - 32%

Table 2: Needed and not used more important skills for SEs

Financial literacy		
	No of SEs	%
Accounting principles and practices	29	13%
Procurement skills	74	32%
Risk management strategy	127	55%
Budgeting and financial planning and forecasting	88	38%
Financial reporting and compliance	50	22%
Taxation knowledge	58	25%
Knowledge on different financing options	92	40%
Auditing	93	40%
Others	32	14%

Risk management

Another set of questions refer to **Risk management** as entering and leaving the business world is an inevitable process. Almost every successful businessman has been unsuccessful at least once,

whether he was rejected by a large company, made a mistake with a prototype, or was fired or went bankrupt. Business environment is now facing difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic, wars and/or other unforeseen situations and extraordinary circumstances. Due to the current uncertainty, it is important to help SEs to prevent potential problems they may face. In this regard, it is important to motivate SEs to create a Risk management strategy, define the potential problems in business operations, and define concrete measures to prevent them.

Regarding the skills that are needed for SE to be able to **Assess and mitigate potential risks to its operations, reputation, and stakeholders**, 42% of the respondents stated that it is important to have **insurance coverage for key risks** (e.g., property insurance, liability insurance). Other SEs indicated:

- they need help in doing a **diversification of suppliers or business partners** to reduce dependency risks - 35%
- they have to have **better and regular communication with investors, shareholders**, and other stakeholders about key risks - 35%
- they need to learn how to **analyse industry trends and market conditions related to potential risks** - 16%
- want to learn how to use **tools and software for risk assessment**, etc - 11%

For **monitoring and responding to political frameworks or regulations that could affect SE operations, such as immigration policies or trade agreements**, the majority - 53%, declared they regularly monitor legislative and regulatory changes relevant to the industry. Other surveyed SEs indicated:

- they collaborate with legal experts or consultants to ensure compliance with regulations - 40%
- they conduct impact assessments to understand the potential effects of political changes on the business - 15%

Strategies that SEs employ to mitigate the impact of global trends such as brain drain or talent migration on its workforce and competitiveness is for majority (32%) implemented in their organisation along with diversity and inclusion initiatives to create an inclusive workplace culture that attracts and retains diverse talent. Strategies for other SEs are:

- Implementation of **employee retention programs and talent development initiatives** - 25%,
- Investment in **training and upskilling programs** to nurture internal talent pipelines - 31%,
- **Exploration of remote work options** or flexible work arrangements to retain skilled workers - 28%
- **Collaboration with educational institutions or industry partners** to attract and retain talent - 20%.

In terms of skill that is needed for SEs ***to stay informed about broader socio-economic trends and potential implications for its business operations and market positioning*** for the majority, 53%, is participation in industry conferences, seminars, and networking events. Other SEs stay informed by:

- subscribing to economic and industry publications or newsletters -25%,
- engaging economic analysts or consulting firms to understand market dynamics and trends - 21%
- establishing internal research and analysis teams to track and analyse relevant trends and their potential impact - 7%.

Skills needed for running business operations

Skills needed for running business operations are various, from **managing budgets and organising production, communication with buyers, suppliers, financial institutions, donors, to collaboration with teams**. Therefore, there is a need to develop both strong soft and hard skills for all employees to take the various responsibilities of the job. These business skills are also traits that need to be developed in order to effectively support business practices that maximise efficiency and for achieving success. Any SME relies on a strong combination of both hard skills and soft skills including skills like technical aptitude, coordination and planning.

Key skills in running enterprises

Some of the key skills in running enterprises that SEs indicated as a need are:

- exploring new marketing/sales channels - 65%
- Search Engine Marketing (SEM) - 65%
- report on sustainable business and fulfilment of ESG indicators is important - 64%
- exploration of new markets and/or customers - 62%
- knowledge on commercial law - 61%
- availability of social (impact) investors and financial intermediaries (e.g. banks), are crucial aspects for running SE - 61%
- green marketing - 60%
- data analytics - 60%
- drafting and implementing a marketing strategy - 58%
- establishment of market-based (business) relationships with other public authorities / governments - 54%
- Content Marketing (email, videos) - 51%

Detail topics within skills in running enterprise are listed in the table below:

Table 3: Key skills in running enterprises

SKILLS IN RUNNING AN ENTERPRISE		
Which general aspects are the most crucial for you running your social enterprise?	No of SEs	%
Setting up a business plan	49	21%
Implementing the strategic plans	72	31%
Managing increased costs of raw materials / services	86	37%
Availability of social (impact) investors and financial intermediaries (e.g. banks)	141	61%
Exploring new markets and/or customers	144	62%
Establishing market-based (business) relationships with other businesses	114	49%
Establishing market-based (business) relationships with other public authorities / governments	124	54%
Joining a lobby or network with other SE	104	45%
Adapting to existing market regulations	95	41%
Understanding legal frameworks (laws, tax regulations, code of labour, etc.)	75	32%
Finding skilled / committed / motivated employees	95	41%
Applying teamwork and share responsibilities	65	28%
Are you familiar with the following ESG tools and green skills?	No of SEs	%
Social Impact Evaluation	106	46%
Demonstrating the social impact created by our organisation	93	40%
Environmental Sustainability Evaluation	132	57%
Report on sustainable business and fulfilment of ESG indicators	147	64%
Green marketing	139	60%

Waste management	86	37%
Sustainable production and logistics	113	49%
Environmental management skills	133	58%
What is your company's knowledge on human resources management?	No of SEs	%
Defining roles and responsibilities	48	21%
Improving employees' development and well-being	67	29%
Developing feedback tools for employees	101	44%
Knowledge on labour and social law	84	36%
Conflict management	77	33%
Supporting teamwork	64	28%
Strengthening the sense of belonging to the enterprise	84	36%
Bringing the social motivation into day-to-day work	86	37%
Having an in-house HR team / staff	95	41%
What are your company's marketing competences?	No of SEs	%
Knowledge on the relevant market and industry	78	34%
Drafting and implementing a marketing strategy	135	58%
Content Marketing (email, videos)	118	51%
Exploring new marketing/sales channels	149	65%
Data Analytics	138	60%
Knowledge on commercial law	123	53%
Knowledge on how to build a strong digital brand and social media presence	142	61%
Search Engine Marketing (SEM)	153	66%

6. Skills gaps assessment of Local Public Authorities (LPAs)

6.1 Overview of the LPA survey

This section provides general information on LPAs that participated in piloting of the skill gap assessment tools, such as: age of LPA; size of LPA; number of employees in LPA, designated persons in LPA to cooperate with SE, etc.

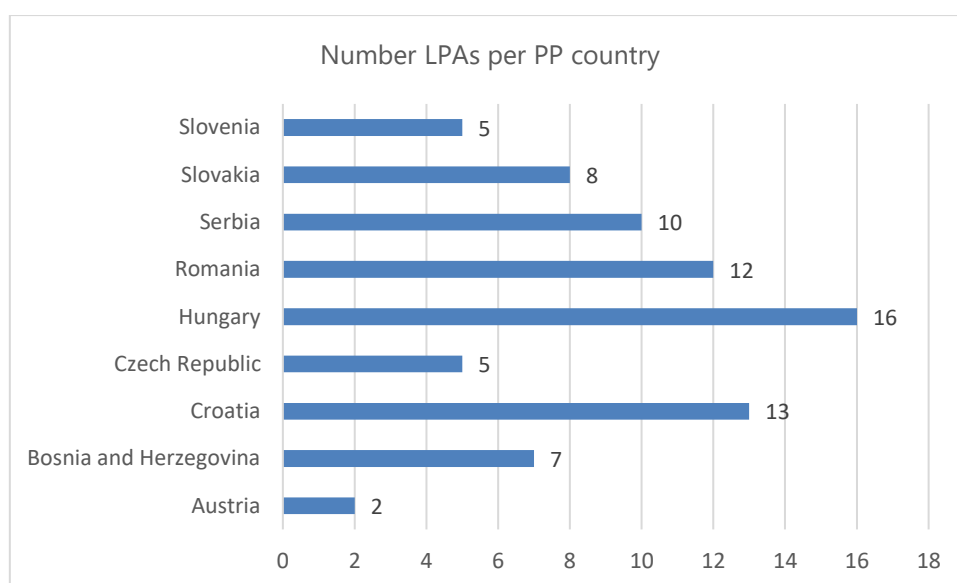


Figure 16. Number of LPAs on the project level

At project level, 78 LPAs showed interest to participate in the pilot activities within the Danube4SEecosystem project. Most of them, namely 20,5%, are located in Hungary, in Croatia 17%, in Romania 15%, in Serbia 13%, in Slovakia 10%, in Republic of Srpska / B&H 9%, in Slovenia 6%, in Czechia 6% and in Austria 2%. Almost half of LPAs, **49% are located in urban areas**, and **47% in rural areas**. Regarding the population size, **most of LPAs operate in small towns 55%**, and 23% LPAs in medium towns. Only 19% operate in large cities.

Regarding the human capacity of LPAs, the results show that **29,5% are small**, with **1-20 employees**. 28% are larger, with 21-50 employees, 15% LPAs employ more than 200 employees, 13% LPAs employ 51-100 employees while 10% employ 101-200 employees. Promising information is that **most of the involved LPAs are familiar with the definition of SE**, where only 11.5% (9) of them are not familiar with the definition of SEs.

When it comes to cooperation with SEs, results indicate that even though **82% LPAs are familiar with types of activities that can have social impact, only 49% LPAs cooperate with SEs.**

Among the LPAs who cooperate with SEs (38), **45% LPAs don't have designated persons to cooperate with SEs**, while 37% LPAs have persons for the cooperation with SEs.

Incentives LPAs provided for SEs

Available incentives that local public authorities provide to social enterprise are:

- *financial incentives* - 17%
- *networking opportunities* - 15%
- *business spaces* - 13%
- *specific trainings* - 8%
- *reduction of land costs* - only 3

Closer analyses of incentives that LPAs provide for SEs shows that none of LPAs provide tax benefits in any form.

As it is shown in the figure below, Austrian LPAs provide only **financial and networking opportunities for SEs**, Slovenia and Czechia provide **business spaces** while Romanian LPA **don't provide any incentives for SEs**. Other incentives provided are **reduction of land costs** (SK and HR) and **specific training** (SI).

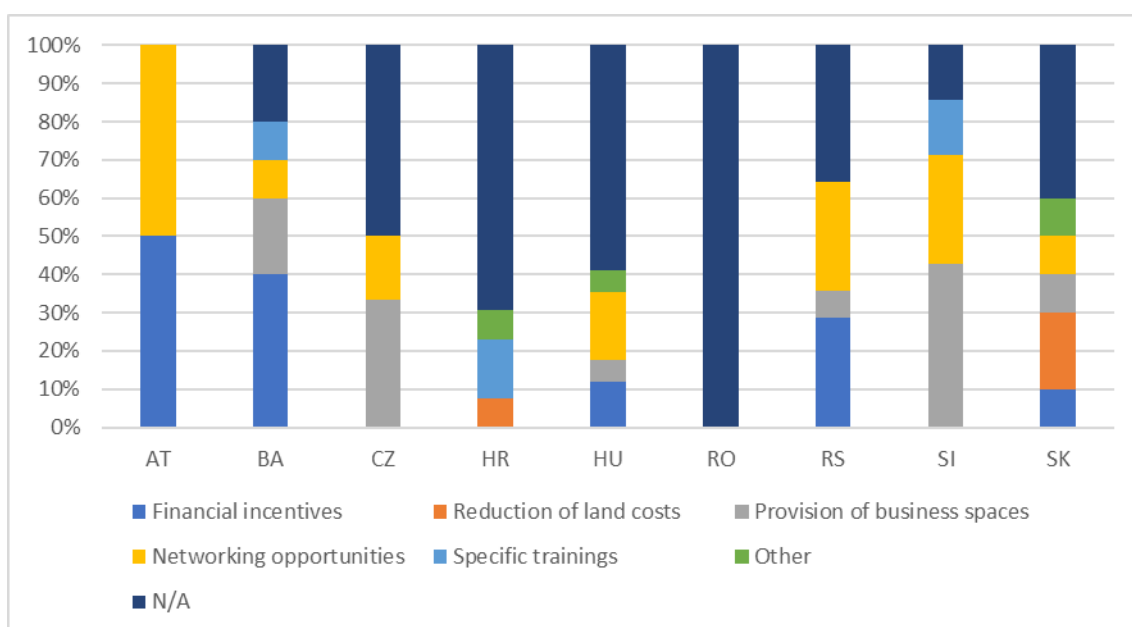


Figure 17. Incentives provided to SEs

Cooperation with SEs

58% LPAs are planning to cooperate with SEs but on the other hand, **31% representatives of LPAs are not familiar with future plans regarding the cooperation** of their LPAs and SEs.

Looking at the figure below, it can be noticed that the Austrian, Serbian, Slovakian and Bosnian LPAs are highly interested in cooperating with SEs, while LPAs in Romania and Croatia show less interest.

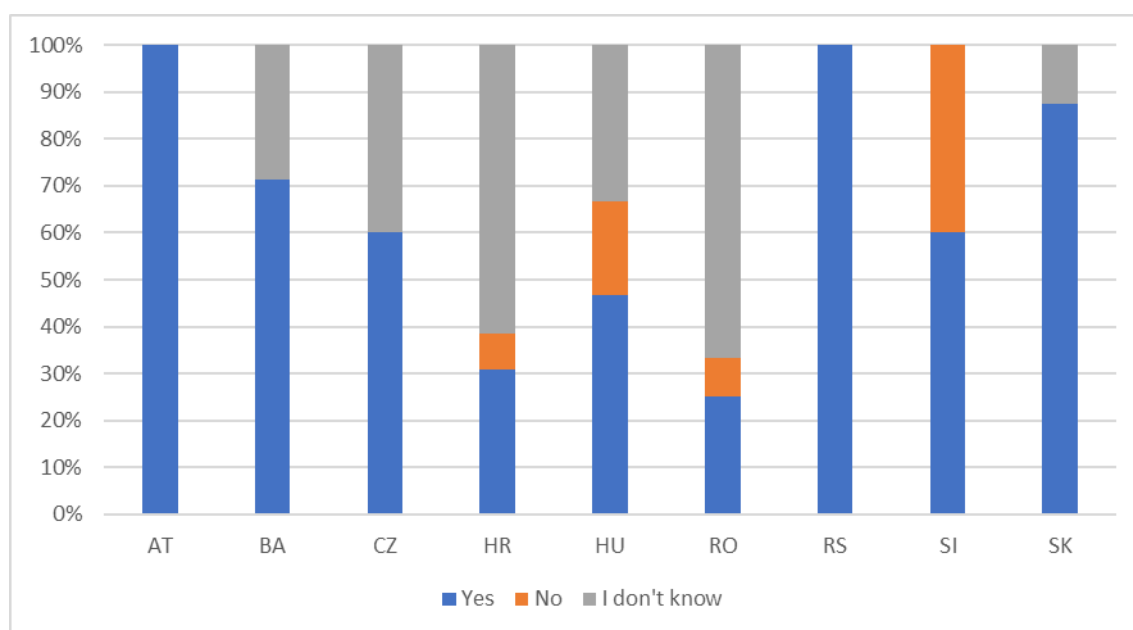


Figure 18. Does your LPA plan to have any cooperation with SE?

6.2 Analysis of existing top skills in LPA

The premises of the analysis considered the number of employees from the LPAs that have participated in the study, as the size of the organisation provides insights into the diversity of skills an organisation can accommodate and on the capacity of the organisation to cover a wider range of services that can support SE development. 42,86% of the LPAs that have participated in the study have declared that their organisation has between 1-20 employees, 12,99% of the LPAs have stated they have between 21-50 employees, 12,99% of the LPAs have between 51-100 employees, 10,39% LPAs have between 101-200, 16,88% LPAs have more than 200 employees and 3,9% of the participants stated that they don't know the number of the employees the organisation has. Since the great majority of participant organisations have below 20 employees, the consortium was able to leverage the findings on existing skills. Moreover, since the percentage of LPAs with more than 200 employees is also significant (16,88%), the study was able to provide insights on the skill structure of such larger organisations.

The findings of the transnational analysis conclude that the top existing skills of the LPAs that filled in the questionnaires were:

- *Innovation and modernisation* - Ethical considerations and GDPR, Innovation and Adaptability; Cybersecurity awareness; Data Analysis;
- *Service delivery* - Cooperation and Teamwork, Strategic thinking, Budgeting
- *Good governance* - Policy analysis, Cross-cultural awareness

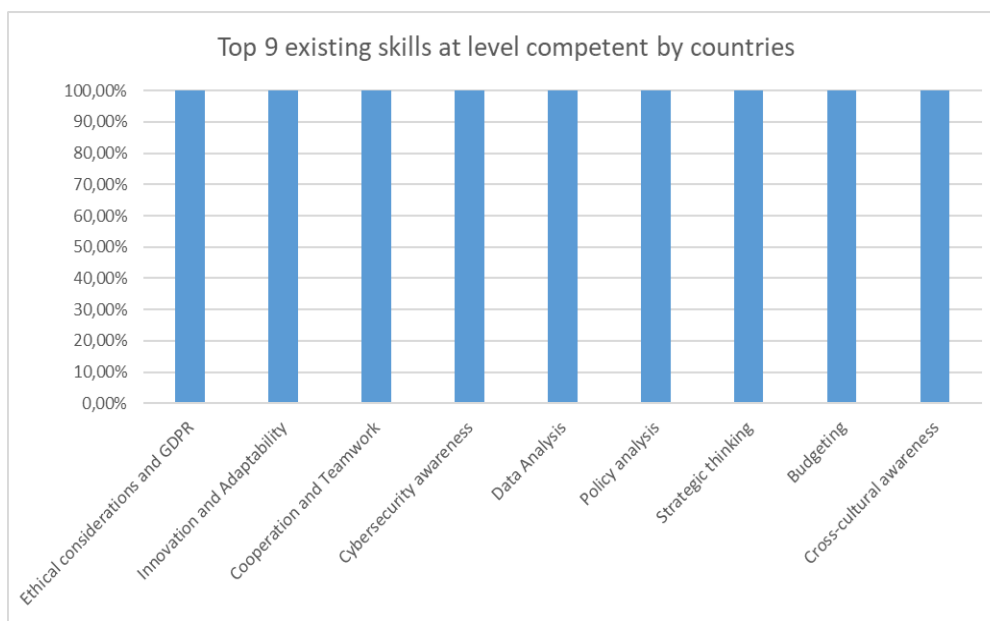


Figure 19. Top 9 existing skills at level competent by countries

Concerning **Strategic objectives, Adaptability in terms of adjusting strategies in response to changing social needs and policy environments** (f=; f%=44.1%) is the top existing skill within PAs, followed by **Critical thinking skills** (f=; f%=42.8%), which is related to Service delivery.

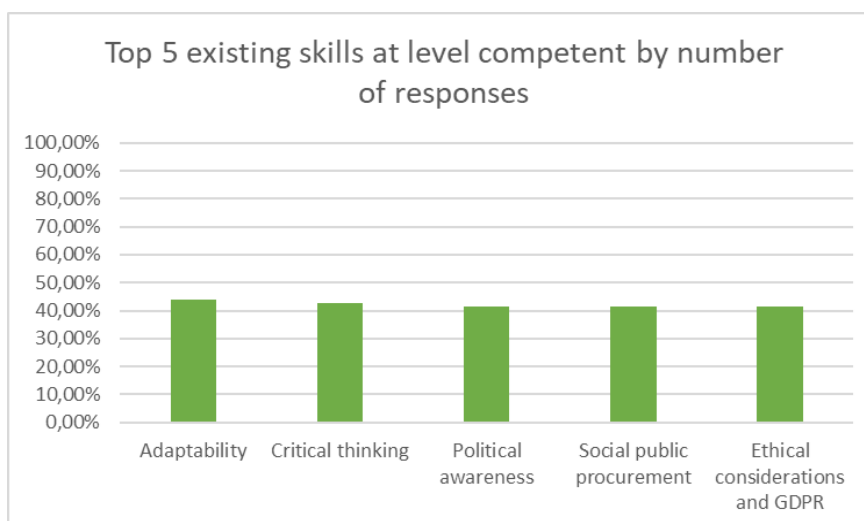


Figure 20, Top 5 current skills at level competent by number of responses

6.3 Analysis of most requested skills for Local Public Authorities

Top 5 skills needed to develop by countries for LPAs

Figure 21 shows the results of the Local Public Administration skills in terms of *Policy implementation, Financial support, Partnership and Networking, Capacity building, Public-Private partnership, Co-creation of solutions*.

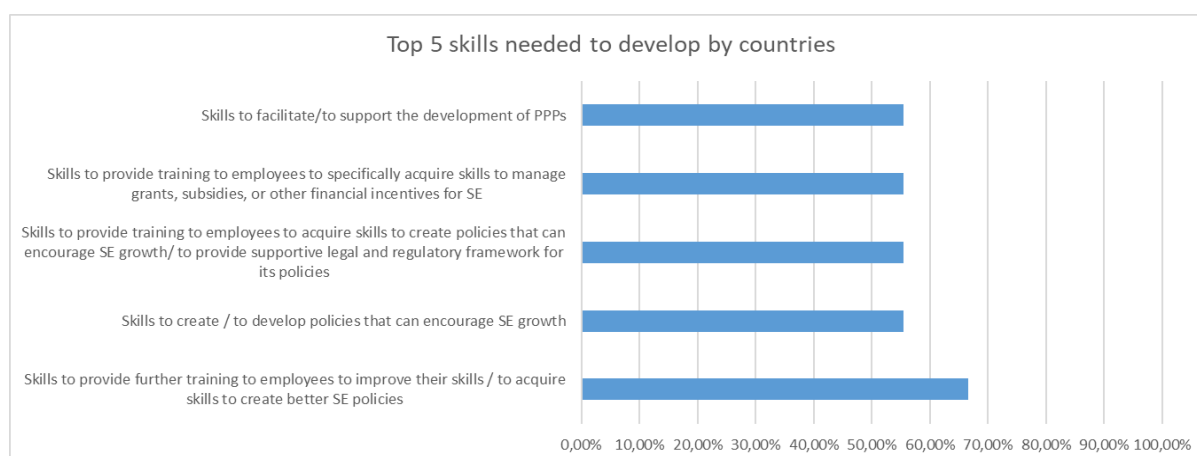


Figure 21. Top 5 skills needed to develop by countries

Analysing the data collected from all the project partners (9 countries), it can be seen that **Policy implementation** skills do not exist and are the most requested to be improved when we rank the results by number of countries where LPAs have selected this option, respectively **training for employees to improve their skills to create better SE policies (n=6)**, followed up by other skill related to policy implementation and training in terms of policy development, skills related to financial support and skills for public-private partnerships.

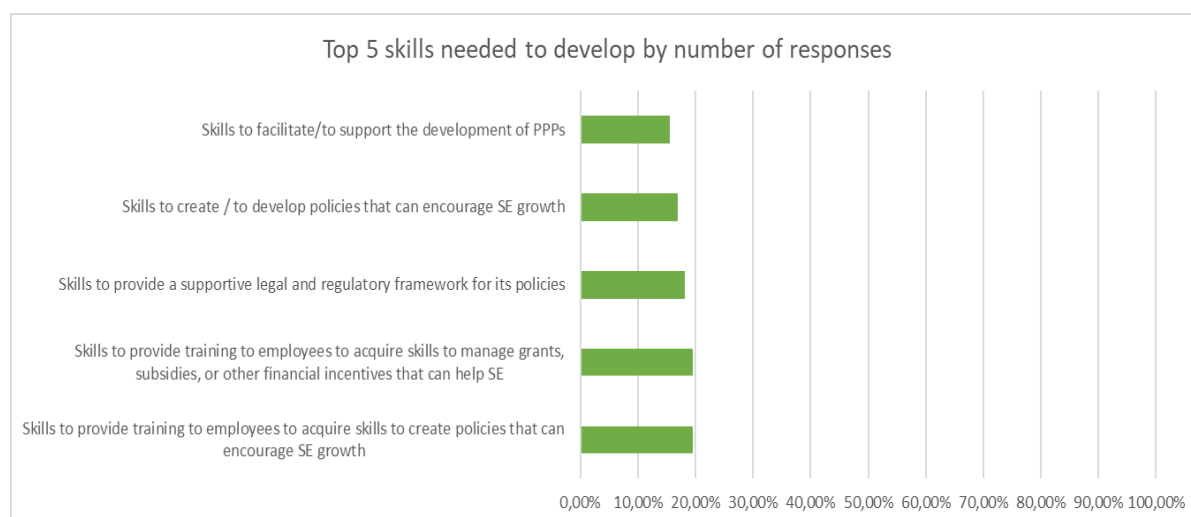


Figure 22. Top 5 skills needed to develop by number of responses

For the same categories of skills, as presented above, the results show that, according to the total number of survey participants, the most requested skills **are training to employees to acquire skills to create policies that can encourage SE growth and training to employees to acquire skills to manage grants, subsidies, or other financial incentives that can help SE** (f=15; f%=19.48%).

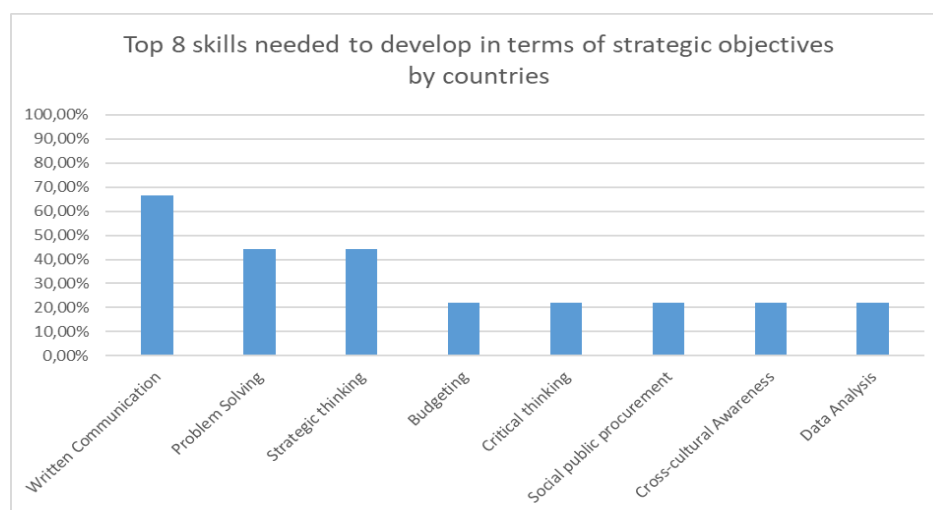


Figure 23. Top 8 skills needed to develop in terms of strategic objectives by countries

Analysing the data, in terms of strategic objectives, it can be seen that, the skills needed for **Service delivery** to provide efficient, reliable, and accessible services to meet the needs of the SEs, respectively **Written communication (n=6)** are the most requested skills to be improved when we rank the results by number of interested countries, followed up by another two skills from the same category – **Problem solving and Strategic thinking**.

On top 4 - 8 were identified again with other skills related to **Service delivery (Budgeting, Critical thinking, Social public procurement)**, skills related to **Good governance (Cross-cultural awareness)** and skills related to **Innovation and modernization (Data analysis)**.

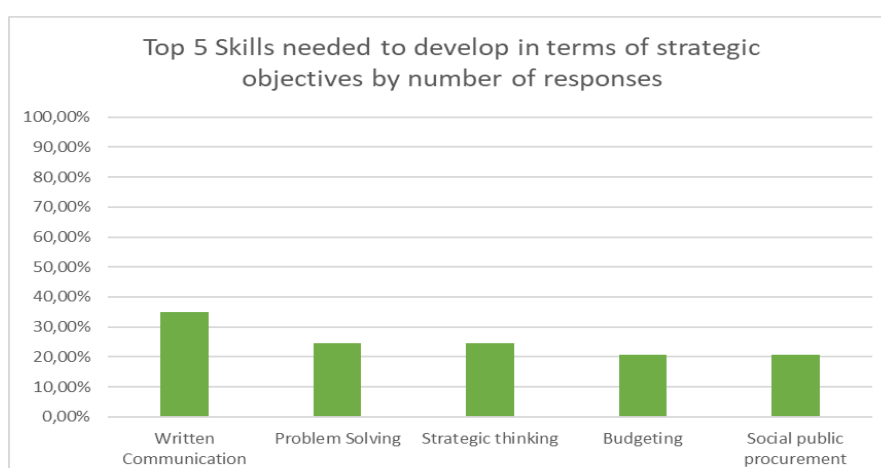


Figure 24. Top 5 Skills needed to develop in terms of strategic objectives by number of responses

For the same categories of skills related to **Strategic objectives**, all the top 5 skills in terms of number of responses were from the category **Service delivery** which shows that the LPAs need to develop their capacity to provide efficient, reliable, and accessible services to meet the needs of the SEs.

6.4. Key findings

It is encouraging information that 83% LPAs are familiar with the definition of SEs, and only 9 of them are not familiar with the definition of SEs. Also, 82% LPAs are familiar with types of activities SEs can perform to have social impact, but only 49% (38) LPAs cooperate with SEs. Among 38 LPAs that cooperate with SEs, 22% (17) LPAs don't have designated persons to cooperate with SEs, and only 18% (14) LPAs have persons for the cooperation with SEs, while 7 LPAs are not sure if they have persons for this kind of the cooperation.

Table 4: Types of incentives LPAs provide

Incentives for SEs	No of responses	
	f	f%
LPAs provide financial incentives	13	17%
LPAs provide networking opportunities	12	15%
LPAs ensure business space	10	13%
LPAs organise specific trainings	6	8%
LPAs provide reduction of land costs	only 3	4%

Noticeable is that none of LPAs provide tax benefits in any form.

To be able to increase the number of LPAs that are actively involved in creating stimulating ecosystem for SEs and to boost cooperation as well to expand support LPAs are providing, PPs asked LPAs **What skills do you think your LPA would need to start cooperation/ to improve its cooperation with SE?**

Detailed evaluation of the LPA skills within the **Service delivery** group of questions, showed that surveyed LPAs in majority marked **written communication 29%** as missing skill. **Strategic thinking** is for 24% of LPAs topic for capacity building and for 24% LPAs **problem solving** is a key missing skill.

In the **Good governance section**, the **most needed skill** is **Cross-cultural Awareness** for 22% of surveyed LPAs, and for 17% **policy analysis**.

Within Innovation and modernization, three key skills stand out. Cybersecurity awareness and ethical considerations and GDPR are the most needed skills for 19%, while E-government service is missing for 17% of surveyed LPAs.

7. Challenges faced by SEs during the pandemic

COVID-19 has been a major challenge for companies and for business continuity - especially for smaller companies, including social enterprises. The skill gap assessment tool assessed the experience of SEs with COVID-19 and public support as well as what it will take for SEs to become more resilient in the future and be resilient to further crises.

The most challenging factors that caused the problems to SEs in accessing public support during the pandemic were:

Table 5: The most challenging factors that caused the problems to SEs in accessing public support during the pandemic

Challenges	Quite challenging	Great challenge
Bureaucratic processes in accessing support for (social) businesses	25% (57) SEs	30% (70) SEs
Lack of support measures by public authorities for social businesses	22% (52) SEs	25% (58) SEs
Lack of information regarding support for (social) businesses	21% (48) SEs	23% (53) SEs
Lack of skilled workforce	16.5% (38) SEs	19% (43) SEs
Geographical barriers (e.g. it was necessary to physically go to a certain place like a city)	9% (21) SEs	12% 28 SEs
Language barriers in accessing support (e.g. certain information only available in one language)	5% (11) SEs	10% (23) SEs
Limited networking options (including online)	12% (27) SEs	9.5% (22) SEs
Barriers in infrastructure (e.g. internet connectivity, lack of online support, transportation networks)	6% (13) SEs	9% (21) SEs
<i>*SEs who chose the option "other" most of them stated that they established their SE after the Covid crisis</i>		

To overcome the challenges caused by the pandemic 71 % SEs stated that they needed **better support by public authorities** specified to smaller and social businesses; 67% SEs consider that the **lower bureaucratic burdens for social enterprises when tendering for public programs** or other support measures could help; 107 SEs want more information provided especially to social enterprises; 38,5 % SEs needs more **dedicated networking opportunities with other businesses**

and social enterprises to exchange knowledge; 33% SEs need support in **training the workforce** (e.g. training on digital and green skills); 33,5% SEs need **Increased online support** (e.g. informative online meetings or training); 28% SEs need **improved public programs' feedback and evaluation processes**; 12 % SEs need **support in attracting talent**; while 8% SEs need information accessible in different languages.

Due to the growing number, types and extent of global risks, such as environmental disasters, the complication of individual exclusion and resource depletion, it is increasingly important that any business reduces the negative effects on the environment in which it operates. It makes sense to start with social enterprises in assessing the effects of certain interventions, bearing in mind that the primary motive for their emergence is to solve recognized social problems and create resilient communities. Based on that, public authorities on the national/regional and local levels should provide better support to SEs in creating the support programs adjusted to SEs, to lower bureaucratic burdens for social enterprises when tendering for public programs or other support measures, to provide support to SEs by organizing training to SEs (training the workforce (e.g. training on digital and green skills). Also, SEs need support in attracting talent and networking opportunities with other businesses and social enterprises to exchange knowledge.

8. Transnational comparative analysis of social enterprises skills gaps

8.1 Comparative analysis of current and needed SE skills

From the table below, it can be seen that, although the **Search Engine Marketing (SEM)** is the most requested skill, the number of participants who find this skill not relevant is larger than the number of the participants who have this skill in their social enterprise. The same situation can be observed for the **Report on sustainable business and fulfilment of ESG indicators** skill. This skill is requested by 63% of the SE participating in the study, but, at the same time, the number of participants who chose this skill as not relevant is larger than those who chose the skill as relevant and existent in their SE.

The top skill in the SE participating in the study is **Exploring new markets and/or customers**. This showcases the high flexibility and dynamic these organisations have and their ability to adapt to changing market conditions.

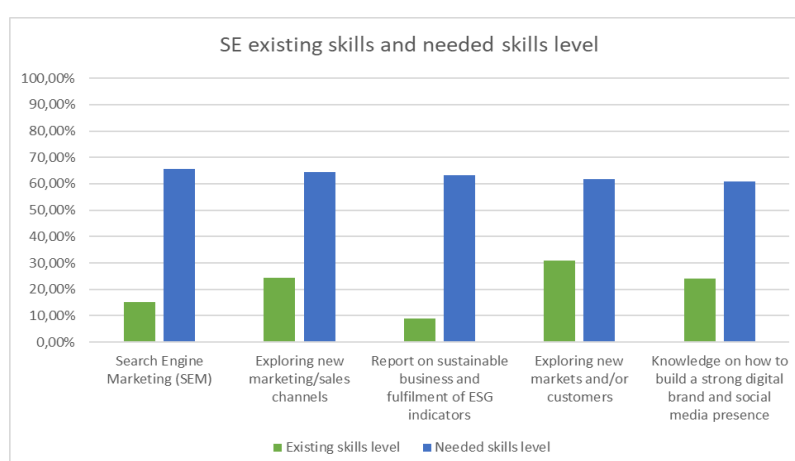


Figure 25. SE existing skills and needed skills level

Financial literacy skills

Table 6: Financial literacy – needed skills per PP country

Financial literacy	Not used but needed skills								
	Romania	Hungary	Slovakia	Croatia	Czech Republic	Austria	Serbia	Republic of Srpska	Slovenia
Accounting principles and practices	21,43%	3,45%	16,44%	25,00%	7,41%	6,25%	5,00%	38,46%	6,90%

Procurement skills	21,43%	13,79%	43,84%	33,33%	40,74%	6,25%	55,00%	46,15%	10,34%
Risk management strategy	50,00%	34,48%	60,27%	75,00%	66,67%	25,00%	80,00%	76,92%	34,48%
Budgeting and financial planning and forecasting	42,86%	13,79%	35,62%	33,33%	48,15%	6,25%	55,00%	46,15%	31,03%
Financial reporting and compliance	14,29%	10,34%	24,66%	50,00%	7,41%	6,25%	45,00%	30,77%	17,24%
Taxation knowledge	28,57%	6,90%	20,55%	41,67%	11,11%	31,25%	40,00%	53,85%	31,03%
Knowledge on different financing options	57,14%	37,93%	39,73%	66,67%	37,04%	18,75%	50,00%	84,62%	41,38%
Auditing	35,71%	20,69%	36,99%	58,33%	55,56%	6,25%	55,00%	30,77%	44,83%

With the aim to compare SEs skills and define the skills gap in the field of financial literacy, we compare needed skills per PP country and select 3 of the most needed skills per country.

Table 6 shows that SEs in all PP countries need to improve their skills related to **risk management strategy**. Looking at the SEs per countries, SEs in Slovakia, Czechia and Serbia need to improve **procurement skills**, SEs in Romania, Hungary and Serbia need to improve their skills related to **budgeting and financial planning and forecasting**, SEs in Austria and Republic of Srpska/B&H need to improve their skills related to **taxation knowledge**, SEs in Romania, Slovakia, Croatia, Austria, Republic of Srpska/B&H and Slovenia need to improve their skills related to **knowledge on different financing options**, SEs in Hungary, Croatia, Czechia and Slovenia need to improve their skills related to **auditing**.

Risk management skills

Table 7: Needed skills/activities to have to assess and mitigate potential risks to SEs operations, reputation, and stakeholders

Risk management	Not used but needed skills								
	Romania	Hungary	Slovakia	Croatia	Czech Republic	Austria	Serbia	Republic of Srpska	Slovenia
Use of risk assessment tools and software	71,43%	41,38%	58,90%	50,00%	48,15%	31,25%	60,00%	92,31%	58,62%

Analysis of industry trends and market conditions for potential risks	64,29%	37,93%	65,75%	58,33%	40,74%	37,50%	65,00%	84,62%	48,28%
Regular communication with investors, shareholders, and other stakeholders about key risks	42,86%	17,24%	41,10%	33,33%	40,74%	6,25%	50,00%	61,54%	20,69%
Engagement with regulatory authorities and compliance with disclosure requirements	57,14%	24,14%	49,32%	25,00%	29,63%	6,25%	45,00%	84,62%	27,59%
Establishment of internal controls to reduce the likelihood or impact of risks	35,71%	24,14%	53,42%	41,67%	40,74%	6,25%	35,00%	53,85%	37,93%
Insurance coverage for key risks (e.g., property insurance, liability insurance)	50,00%	27,59%	41,10%	33,33%	18,52%	6,25%	50,00%	69,23%	37,93%
Diversification of suppliers or business partners to reduce dependency risks	57,14%	37,93%	42,47%	41,67%	33,33%	12,50%	60,00%	61,54%	31,03%

From the table above it is noticed that, when it comes to ***Risk management to have to assess and mitigate potential risks to SEs operations, reputation, and stakeholders***, SEs are interested in acquiring skills in using **risk assessment tools and software**, skills to be able to **analyse industry trends and market conditions** for potential risks, skills that allow to allow a better diversification a of suppliers or business partners to reduce dependency risks, skills which allow a better establishment of internal controls to reduce the likelihood or impact of risks.

Table 8: Needed skills/activity to monitor and respond to political frameworks or regulations that could affect SEs operations, such as immigration policies or trade agreements

Risk management	Not used but needed skills								
	Romania	Hungary	Slovakia	Croatia	Czech Republic	Austria	Serbia	Republic of Srpska	Slovenia
Regular monitoring of legislative and regulatory changes relevant to the industry	28,57%	31,03%	53,42%	33,33%	33,33%	6,25%	25,00%	46,15%	24,14%
Collaboration with legal experts or consultants to ensure compliance with regulations	35,71%	27,59%	53,42%	50,00%	66,67%	25,00%	60,00%	61,54%	34,48%
Conducting impact assessments to understand the potential effects of political changes on the business	50,00%	37,93%	67,12%	58,33%	70,37%	31,25%	60,00%	84,62%	48,28%

In terms of **Risk management to monitor and respond to political frameworks or regulations that could affect its operations, such as immigration policies or trade agreements**, SEs are most interested in acquiring skills for conducting impact assessments to understand the potential effects of political changes on the business.

Table 9: Needed skills/activity to employ to mitigate the impact of global trends such as brain drain or talent migration on SEs workforce and competitiveness

Risk management	Not used but needed skills								
	Romania	Hungary	Slovakia	Croatia	Czech Republic	Austria	Serbia	Republic of Srpska	Slovenia
Implementation of employee retention programs and talent development initiatives	57,14%	31,03%	43,84%	50,00%	37,04%	18,75%	45,00%	53,85%	27,59%
Investment in training and upskilling programs to nurture internal talent pipelines	57,14%	37,93%	53,42%	50,00%	44,44%	0,00%	40,00%	69,23%	13,79%

Exploration of remote work options or flexible work arrangements to retain skilled workers	42,86%	31,03%	36,99%	25,00%	25,93%	0,00%	50,00%	69,23%	6,90%
Collaboration with educational institutions or industry partners to attract and retain talent	50,00%	37,93%	49,32%	66,67%	44,44%	6,25%	50,00%	61,54%	20,69%
Diversity and inclusion initiatives to create an inclusive workplace culture that attracts and retains diverse talent	42,86%	31,03%	58,90%	33,33%	44,44%	12,50%	45,00%	53,85%	17,24%

In terms of **Risk management to employ to mitigate the impact of global trends such as brain drain or talent migration on its workforce and competitiveness**, SEs are most interested in acquiring skills for collaboration with educational institutions or industry partners to attract and retain talent, Investment in training and upskilling programs to nurture internal talent pipelines and Diversity and inclusion initiatives to create an inclusive workplace culture that attracts and retains diverse talent.

Table 10: Needed skills/activity to stay informed about broader socio-economic trends and potential implications for business operations and market positioning

Risk management	Not used but needed skills								
	Romania	Hungary	Slovakia	Croatia	Czech Republic	Austria	Serbia	Republic of Srpska	Slovenia
Subscription to economic and industry publications or newsletters	42,86%	27,59%	38,36%	25,00%	22,22%	0,00%	15,00%	61,54%	20,69%
Participation in industry conferences, seminars, and networking events	28,57%	31,03%	42,47%	25,00%	18,52%	6,25%	25,00%	38,46%	27,59%
Engagement with economic analysts or consulting firms to understand market dynamics and trends	50,00%	34,48%	52,05%	25,00%	62,96%	12,50%	50,00%	53,85%	51,72%
Establishment of internal research and	50,00%	27,59%	46,58%	58,33%	40,74%	25,00%	55,00%	84,62%	41,38%

analysis teams to track and analyse relevant trends and their potential impact									
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From the table above, when it comes to ***Risk management related to ability to stay informed about broader socio-economic trends and potential implications for its business operations and market positioning***, SEs are interested in acquiring skills to be able to establish internal research and analysis teams to track and analyse relevant trends and their potential impact and to engage with economic analysts or consulting firms to understand market dynamics and trends.

8.2 Analysis of open questions in the SE questionnaire

When PP asked SEs ***“Do you believe there are ways to streamline or simplify the administrative processes to make them more accessible to social economy enterprises?”*** SEs indicated potential resolutions to this problem:

- ***Participatory approach in the development of SEs regulations*** – This could be done directly for preparation of local laws and regulations, and indirectly by having adequate representation of SEs attitudes and needs on national level. SEs need to have opportunity to influence and intervene in order to make the existing laws more in line with their capacities and thus to influence the criteria for programs and subsidies;
- ***Good governance*** - Improved administrative procedures that would diminish repeated requests for the same documents due to the poor level of interconnectivity between different authorities. Creating a procedure that will enable “document to circulate not people” meaning when submitting to one administrative body to be used by another one if needed;
- ***Simplifying the registration and tax treatment for SEs*** – although any tax treatment is or can be challenging for all public authorities, it is necessary to approach this problem eventually;
- ***Legal definition of social entrepreneurship*** – The Law on SEs is one way to define social economy but there are other means as well such as Strategies, bylaws, or any consensus made by stakeholders on national level. When defining SE there has to be some advantages connected to it;
- ***Predictability of doing business*** - Municipal taxes should be regulated uniformly across all regions/federal states or any other form of administrative organisation of the PP countries. This would eliminate regional discrepancies and simplify compliance for social enterprises operating in multiple locations; Reporting on SE social impact should be simplified and standardised as well;

- **Capacity building of LPAs to support SEs in access to finance** – to be able to provide more information and support SEs in navigating and applying for available funding. As the majority of SEs that participated in the assessment process are micro and small (77%) it was expected to have requests regarding support service (and programs) tailored for this category. Incorporating this service among LPAs will enable better visibility of programs for social enterprises as micro and small SEs (as any other SME) are in lack of human capacities to devote just to follow information on available funding (programs, grant, European Social Fund (ESF) grants, favourable loans, etc). In this way, SEs will have information on time about the adequate and adjusted to their needs support programs and funding schemes,
- **Developing digital services and enabling digital communication between SEs and LPAs** - reporting, submitting documents, etc can be performed online.
- **Networking** – Organising more meetings to promote SEs, information sharing, creating more formal and informal partnerships including joint project applications, joint training and education, etc.

8.3 Analysis of the SE interviews

Social enterprises face the same **challenges and obstacles** across PP countries, namely:

- **Inadequate legal framework** that does not sufficiently support the development of SE or there is an insufficient implementation of the existing regulations. The proof that legislative context is not favourable to SEs, is indicated in low number of social economy companies “with a certificate” in countries where applicable, although there are many organisations that are part of the social economy ecosystem;
- **The prejudices imposed by society regarding the work capacities of people with disabilities**, people from disadvantaged backgrounds, people who are generally excluded from the labour market for various reasons that are often unjustified; the reluctance with which the organisations respond to the requests from SEs for the placement of these people on the labour market;
- **Recognition and competitiveness** in the market because of the insufficient awareness and knowledge of customers and government on SE. Finding a market for SEs services or products as traditional companies and the public sector are the most important clients to SEs, cooperation with them is at the same time the most important and the most challenging for SEs. The goods and services of SE must argue for their quality and price, since, despite the instruments such as reserved contracts for SEs, price always wins in the end. The social objectives of SE are secondary in the competition.
- **The reluctance of public authorities in establishing cooperation with SE** such as Public procurement processes. Public procurement programs are designed in a short period of time and usually with no public insight. Furthermore, public procurement usually aims to

attract projects according to certain criteria, which are often of innovative and new character, but with no criteria regarding social impact;

- **Access to finance (A2F)**, especially when accessing traditional financial instruments such as loans. Looking at the reasons why SEs have issues with A2F, the main problem is not so much in turnover and profit, but mainly in cash flow. Also, the problem is a tendency of financial programs/subsidies to mainly support the development of the new activities of SE. They lack support in business development to draw funds to stabilise existing activities (pricing, rebranding, employee training, strategic planning).
- **Human resources** meaning recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce for specialised work such as finance management. On the other hand, finding employees from the target groups is not that of a challenge, but to train and retain them. Also, incapacity for work for people with mental illness, can last for several months. Finding a temporary replacement is very complicated.

9. Transnational comparative analysis of local public administration skills gaps

To be able to streamline support and areas for LPAs where the most capacity building is needed, we asked LPAs to evaluate internal skills they believe are needed to be improved in order to cooperate with SEs. Therefore, PPs assessed skills related to cooperation with SEs as although LPAs can have certain skills listed in the survey, it does not mean they are skilful or experienced in cooperation with SEs. So, the Project is not evaluating entire LPA/public servants, just people designated to cooperate with SE if there are such people. On the other hand, to be able to develop or to improve services on LPA level, specialised training and capacities are required.

9.1 Comparative analysis of current and needed LPA skills

9.1.1 Skills LPA need to acquire

Analysing the data collected from all the project partners (9 countries), it can be seen that **Policy implementation** skills are those that LPAs are interested in improving the most, when results are ranked by number of countries, respectively **training for employees to improve their skills to create better SE policies (n=6)**. Other skills related to policy implementation and training in terms of policy development, are those related to financial support and skills for public-private partnerships.

The figure below, it is represented an overview related Top 5 skills needed to be developed for each country involved:

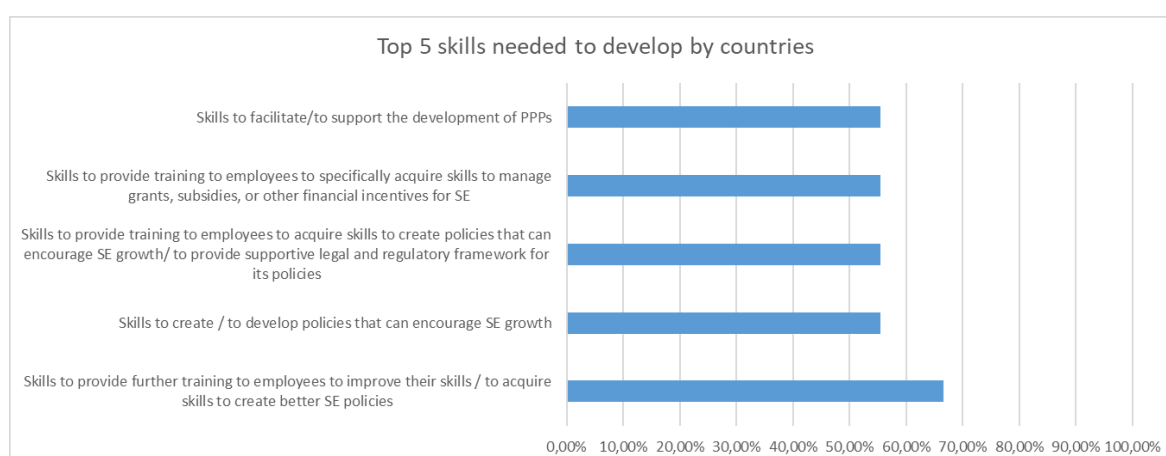


Figure 26. Top 5 skills needed to develop by countries

For the same categories of skills, as presented above, the results show that, according to the total number of survey participants, the most requested skills **are training to employees to acquire**

skills to create policies that can encourage SE growth and **training to employees to acquire skills to manage grants, subsidies, or other financial incentives that can help SE** (f=15; f%=19.48%).

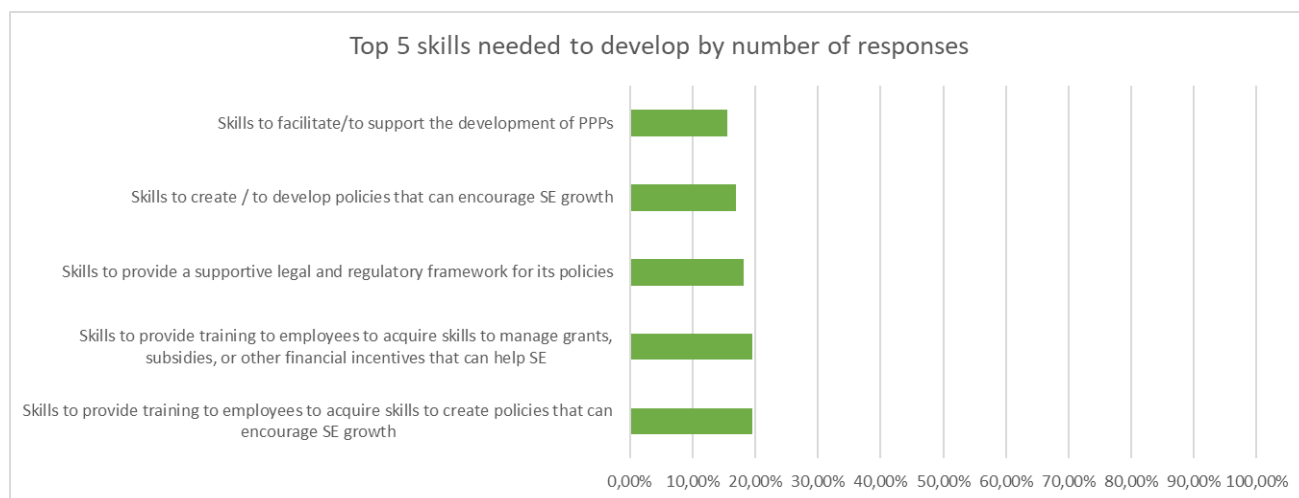


Figure 27. Top 5 skills needed to develop by number of responses

Analysing the data, in terms of different strategic objectives, it can be seen that the skills needed for **Service delivery** to provide efficient, reliable, and accessible services to meet the needs of the SEs, respectively **Written communication (n=6)** are the most requested skills to be improved by number of countries, followed up by another two skills from the same category – **Problem solving and Strategic thinking**.

The top 4 - 8 showcases the other skills related to **Service delivery (Budgeting, Critical thinking, Social public procurement)**, skills related to **Good governance (Cross-cultural awareness)** and skills related to **Innovation and modernization (Data analysis)**.

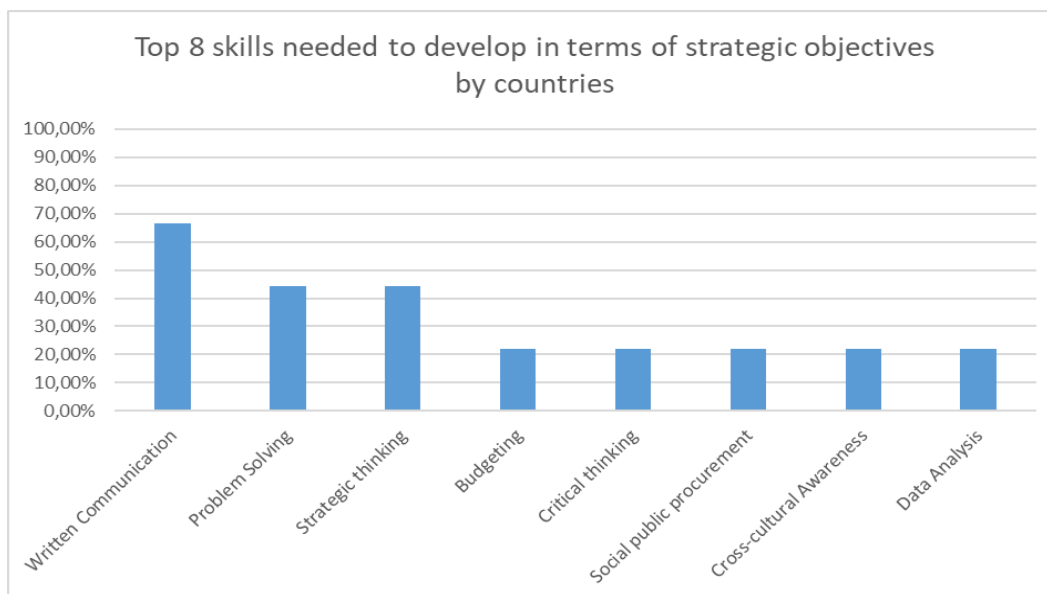


Figure 28. Top 8 skills needed to develop in terms of strategic objectives by countries

For the same categories of skills related to **Strategic objectives**, all the top 5 skills in terms of number of responses were from the category **Service delivery**, which shows that the LPAs need to develop their capacity to provide efficient, reliable, and accessible services to meet the needs of the SEs.

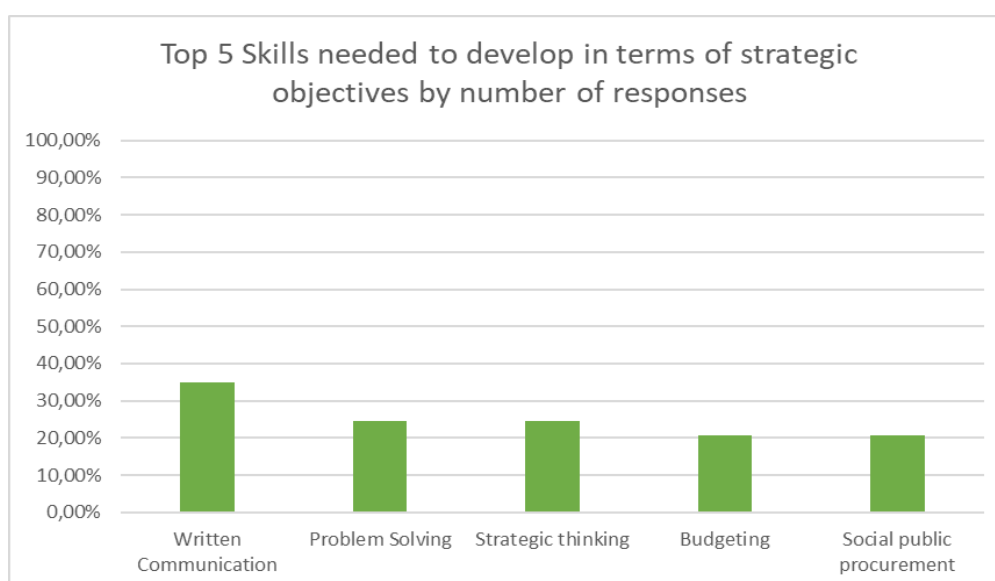


Figure 29. Top 5 Skills needed to develop in terms of strategic objectives by number of responses

9.1.2 Existing skills LPA are interested to improve

Analysing the data collected from all the project partners (9 countries), it can be seen that Policy implementation skills are the skills LPAs are most interested to improve, respectively **training for**

employees to improve their skills to create better SE policies (n=8) by number of countries, followed by trainings for financial support, trainings for partnership and networking, trainings for establishing better public-private partnerships and training for a better management of co-creation solutions.

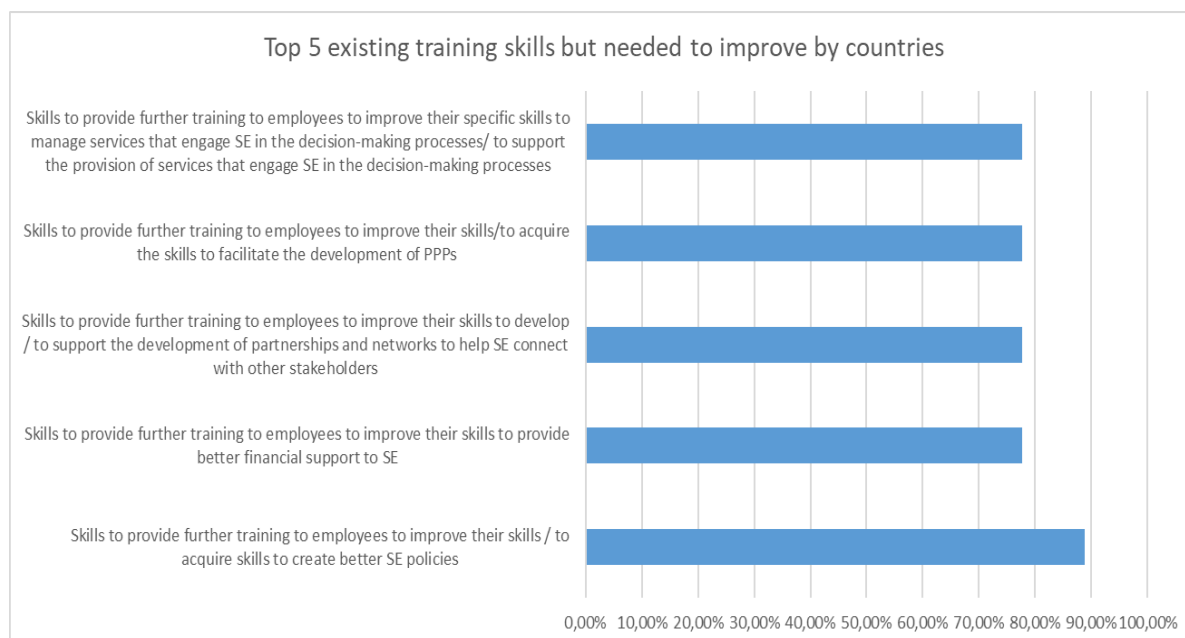


Figure 30. Top 5 existing training skills but needed to improve by countries

For the same categories of skills, as presented above, the results show that, according to the total number of survey participants, the skills LPAs are interested to develop the most are the skills for establishing a better **partnership and networking to help SE connect with other stakeholders** ($f=21$; $f\%=27.2\%$), followed up another type of partnership, which is **public-private partnership** ($f=15$; $f\%=19.4\%$).



Figure 31. Top 5 existing training skills but needed to improve by number of responses

Analysing the data related to **Strategic Objectives**, it can be seen that the skills needed for **Innovation and modernization** to implement new technologies and practices to improve public service delivery, respectively **E-Government services (n=6)** is the skill that LPAs are most interested in improving, when we rank the results by number of countries. The next two skills are **Good governance - Adaptability** and **Cross-cultural awareness**. [AG1]

Skills such as **Service delivery** (Cooperation and Teamwork, Social public procurement, Written Communication), **Good governance** (Policy analysis, Political Awareness) and **Innovation and modernization** (Cybersecurity Awareness, Data Analysis) were also identified as relevant.

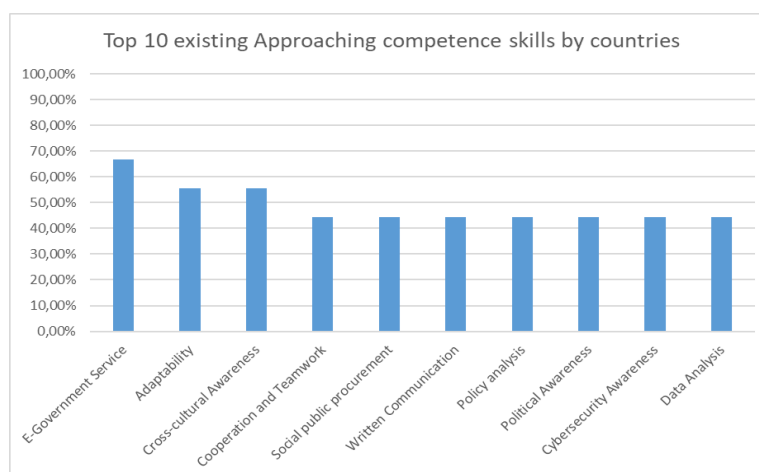


Figure 32. Top 10 existing Approaching competences skills ranked by number of countries

For the same categories of skills related to **Strategic objectives**, the most requested skill by number of responses was **Cybersecurity awareness (f=19; f%=24.6%)** related to Innovation and modernisation, which showcases that LPA do have basic digital skills, but they are interested in improving their competences to protect sensitive information from digital threats. The other two existing skills, but, at a minimum level, were related to Good governance - **Political awareness** (f=18; f%=23.3%) and Sustainable development - **Sustainability Knowledge** (f=18; f%=23.3%).

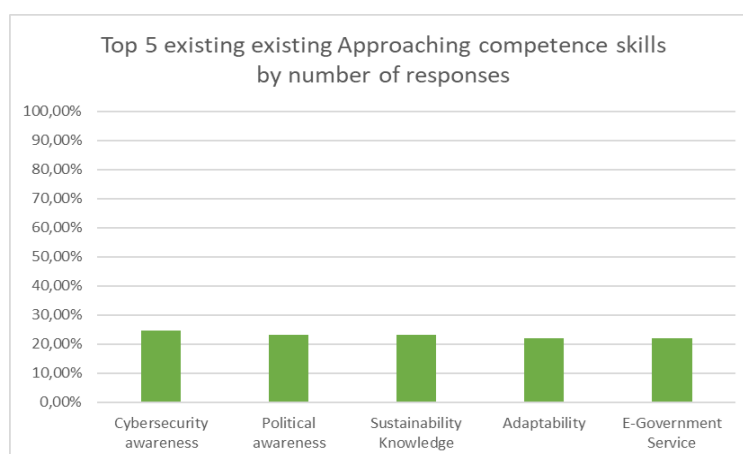


Figure 33. Top 5 existing Approaching competences skills by number of responses

9.1.3 Existing and needed skills in LPA

From the figure below, it can be seen that although the **Written communication (f%=49.3%)** is the most skill that LPAs are most interested to improve, the skill is existent in most of the Local Public Authorities, who participate in the survey, respectively: 33.7% of the respondents found themselves as competent, 10.3% as highly competent and 6.4% as exceptional.

The same situation can be seen in all the skills presented in the figure below, the majority of the participants identified themselves as competent in relation to the specific objectives identified by the consortium.

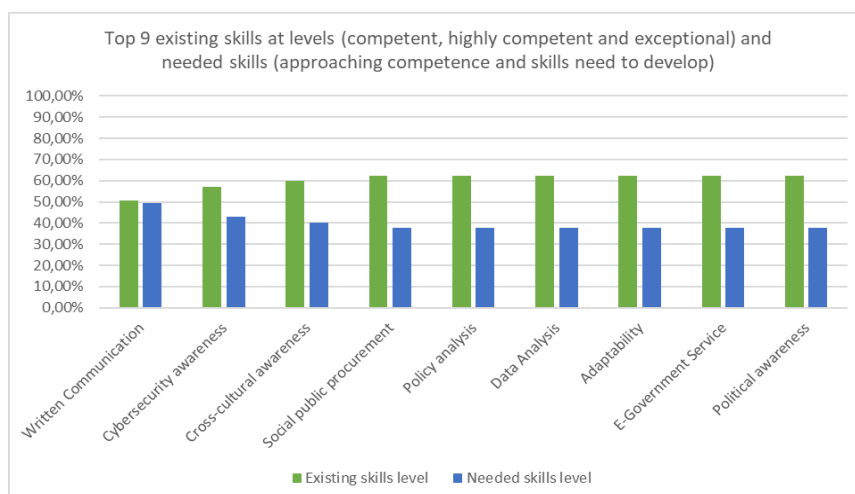


Figure 34. Top 9 existing skills (at levels: competent, highly competent and exceptional) and needed skills (at levels: approaching competence and skills need to develop)

9.2 Analysis of open questions in the LPA questionnaire

Increasing LPAs capacities in selected topics would enable them to resolve some of the SEs' needs, at least the ones that are under LPAs authorities. List of the topics and services correlate with the SEs request under "open questions" and they are:

- **Training on social entrepreneurship** - One of the preconditions for all LPAs if expressed interest in cooperation with SEs.
- **Analytical skill** – Second most important skill is to be able to perform a business survey and an analysis of SEs' need and demand to have a better working environment on a local level. Part of the surveying business community is to initiate cooperation with SEs and therefore to map operating SEs at the local level, to create list/ register of SEs at local level; and analyse SEs needs at the local level;
- **Financial planning and budgeting – creating local programs for SEs** – Although budgeting in public administration and in LPAs are designated to financial department's, other units are contributing by providing suggestions and requests for their business operation. Person or department designated to support SEs should have training on how to prepare

programs for the economic development (ED) and SEs support to be able to have allocated financial support within the budget. This area is regulated by the law so a designated person should be familiar with supporting regulations and steps that need to be taken in order to prepare programs for ED (assessing financial needs, developing criteria for distribution, forming independent bodies for monitoring expenditures, etc).

- **Strategic planning** – The strategic plan of local economic development or comprehensive municipal / city strategic document is a practical plan that will help the municipality to define strategic goals and to organise and develop its activities accordingly. It is important for LPAs to have this skill as it gives guidelines to activities for the development of the strategic area in a given period of time (normally 3 to 5 years) and determines direction, priorities, actions and responsibilities for implementation. It is focused on action, i.e. it is focused on implementation.” Participative strategic planning process enables LPAs to establish cooperation with other institutions, organisations for business support which will ease provision of other services that SEs need and LPAs are in lack of capacities to do so.
- **Good governance** - SEs indicated reduction of repeated requests for same documents due to the poor level of interconnectivity between different authorities. Creating internal LPA skills that will be tasked to occasionally evaluate local and transferred procedures and enable “document to circulate not people”. This would also influence digitalization of services provided to SEs.
- **Enhancement of networking ability** – as 49% of surveyed LPAs are located in rural areas, there is a big chance they will never be able to grow all capacities internally (due to the small number of employees). Therefore, building its capacities to establish cooperation with different organisations on a local level/regional and national level is crucial.
- **Specialisation of the LPAs officers** – Lack of resources to support SEs are not identified only in smaller LPAs, thus there is a need to have specialisation for designated persons on how to work with SEs. Potential resolution to this problem can be additional employment of a person who coordinates and helps the businesses.

9.3 Analysis of the LPA interviews

To be able to make conclusions in line with the Project scope that is creation of better communication and cooperation between SE and LPAs in order to improve ecosystem for SEs growth, we needed to consider what are the roles and jurisdictions of LPAs as well as what is needed of SEs. The domain where the competences of the LPAs and the needs of SE intersect is the field of our future interventions and activities. This of course does not exclude the improvement of knowledge and skills of both SEs and LPAs on an individual level.

To improve cooperation with SEs, LPAs have to work on:

- **Lack of understanding of the SE ‘business model’.** It’s important to better educate relevant stakeholders and thus improve cooperation between SEs and LPAs. LPAs should add

and/or improve specific skills necessary to support the unique needs of social enterprises. Also, proactive outreach to more SEs to better understand their needs and contributions they are making. Joint events and even training sessions would be a step forward.

- ***LPAs offer a diverse range of services***, which has to be promoted among SEs but also, LPAs should dedicate additional effort in training SEs employees on how to access digital services;
- ***Improved LPA capacities to support SEs to A2F*** and other opportunities the LPAs can facilitate (training programs, providing relevant information, local tax incentives, offering available premises). It is noticeable that larger LPAs are trying to create grant schemes to support the activities of NGOs. However, the budget for these schemes is very limited.
- ***Improved public procurement process*** as it is considered to be a very complex and professionally demanding topic, where even a small violation of the rules can result in large financial penalties. Therefore, public procurement experts prefer procedures that are traditional and the level of risk is minimal.

10. Challenges and means to support a better collaboration between SEs and LPAs

Danube4SEecosystem is all about creation of better cooperation and collaboration among SEs and LPAs, therefore it developed 2 assessment tools for SE sector to collect knowledge on how to enhance SEs skills and capacities by developing and providing training sessions for social entrepreneurs and local public authorities; how to improve visibility, how to establish collaboration with their ecosystem by the creating Danube Social Economy Network; and to increase the transnational cooperation between entities supporting the development of social economy and sharing the good practices learned in their territory. On the other hand, assessment tools and collected data helped in indicating areas for LPAs for improvement regarding supporting SEs. But most important data are points of interconnection among SEs and LPAs.

To be able to make conclusions in line with the project scope that is creation of better communication and cooperation between SE and LPAs in order to improve the ecosystem for SEs growth, we needed to consider what are the roles and jurisdictions of LPAs as well as what are the needs of SEs. The domain where the competences of the LPAs and the needs of SE intersect is the field of our future interventions and activities. This of course does not exclude the improvement of knowledge and skills of both SEs and LPAs on an individual level.

Total number of SEs that participated in the initial assessment process that PPs performed is 231. It was satisfying to learn that **72% SEs** already **established** some **cooperation with local public administrations**, while **26% SEs don't have any cooperation**.

In an ever-evolving landscape, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and so SEs, face continuous challenges that can threaten their sustainability. Covid 19 crisis was one of them that highlighted the need to thrive in such an environment, and that SMEs and SEs must embrace resilience strategies that enable them to withstand adversity and adapt to new circumstances. Survival rate for the small SMEs and SEs globally relied on public support. Even though the will to support SEs was visible, challenges to obtain it differ.

The areas for **improvement of SEs and LPAs cooperation**:

- **better support** to smaller companies and social businesses - 71%
- **lower bureaucratic burdens for SEs** when tendering for public programs - 67%
- **more information provided** especially to social enterprises - 46%
- more dedicated **networking opportunities** with other businesses and social enterprises to exchange knowledge - 39%
- support in **training the workforce** (e.g. training on digital and green skills) - 33%
- online support (e.g. informative online meetings or training) - 32%
- improved public programs' feedback and evaluation processes - 28%
- support in attracting talent - 12%

Tackling number one SE issue **Bureaucratic processes** in accessing support for (social) businesses would help in resolving other issues stated by the SEs.

Solutions to simplify the administrative processes

When PPs asked SEs *“Do you believe there are ways to streamline or simplify the administrative processes to make them more accessible to social economy enterprises?”* SEs indicated potential resolutions to this problem:

- **Participatory approach in the development of SEs regulations** – This could be done directly for preparation of local bylaws and regulations, and indirectly by having adequate representation of SEs attitudes and needs on national level. SEs need to have opportunity to influence and intervene in order to make the existing laws more in line with their capacities and thus to influence the criteria for programs and subsidies;
- **Good governance** - Improved administrative procedures that would diminish repeated requests for the same documents due to the poor level of interconnectivity between different authorities. Creating a procedure that will enable “document to circulate not people” meaning when submitting to one administrative body to be used by another one if needed;
- **Simplifying the registration and tax treatment for SEs** – although any tax treatment is or can be challenging for all public authorities, it is necessary to approach this problem eventually;
- **Legal definition of social entrepreneurship** – The Law on SEs is one way to define social economy but there are other means as well such as Strategies, bylaws, or any consensus made by stakeholders on national level. When defining SE there has to be some advantages connected to it;
- **Predictability of doing business** - Municipal taxes should be regulated uniformly across all regions/federal states or any other form of administrative organisation of the PP countries. This would eliminate regional discrepancies and simplify compliance for social enterprises operating in multiple locations; Reporting on SE social impact should be simplified and standardised as well;
- **Capacity building of LPAs to support SEs in access to finance** – to be able to provide more information and support SEs in navigating and applying for available funding. Given the fact that the majority of SEs that participated in the assessment process are micro and small (77%) it was expected to have requests regarding support service (and programs) tailored for this category. Incorporating this service among LPAs will enable better visibility of programs for social enterprises as micro and small SEs (as any other SME) are in lack of human capacities to devote just to follow information on available funding (programs, grant, European Social Fund (ESF) grants, favourable loans, etc). In this way, SEs will have

information on time about the adequate and adjusted to their needs support programs and funding schemes;

- **Developing digital services and enabling digital communication between SEs and LPAs** - reporting, submitting documents, etc can be performed online;
- **Networking** – Organising more meetings to promote SEs, information sharing, creating more formal and informal partnerships including joint project applications, joint training and education, etc.

As said, project partners needed to consider what are the roles and jurisdictions of LPAs regarding the need of SEs. The domain where the competences of the LPAs and the needs of SE intersect is the field of our future interventions and activities.

It is encouraging information that 83% LPAs are familiar with the definition of SEs, and only around 11% of them are not familiar with the definition of SEs. Also, 82% LPAs are familiar with types of activities SEs can perform to have social impact, but only 49% LPAs cooperate with SEs.

Among 38 LPAs that cooperate with SEs, 22% LPAs don't have designated persons to cooperate with SEs, and only 18% LPAs have persons for the cooperation with SEs.

Types of incentives LPAs provide to SEs

Table 11: Incentives LPAs provide to SEs

Incentives for SEs	No of LPAs
Financial incentives	17%
Networking opportunities	15%
Business space	13%
Specific trainings	8%
Reduction of land costs	only 3

Noticeable is that none of LPAs provide tax benefits in any form.

Increasing LPAs capacities in selected topics would enable them to resolve some of the SEs' needs, at least the ones that are under LPAs authorities. List of the **topics and services** correlate with the SEs request under "open questions" and they are:

- **Training on social entrepreneurship** - One of the preconditions for all LPAs if expressed interest in cooperation with SEs.
- **Analytical skill** – Second most important skill is to be able to perform a business survey and an analysis of SEs' need and demand to have a better working environment on a local

level. Part of the surveying business community is to initiate cooperation with SEs and therefore to map operating SEs at the local level, to create list/ register of SEs at local level; and analyse SEs needs at the local level;

- **Financial planning and budgeting – creating local programs for SEs** – Although budgeting in public administration and in LPAs is assigned to financial department's, other units are contributing by providing suggestions and requests for their business operation. The person or department assigned to support SEs should have training on how to prepare programs for the economic development (ED) and SEs support to be able to have allocated financial support within the budget. This area is regulated by the law so the appointee should be familiar with the supporting regulations and the steps that need to be taken in order to prepare programs for ED (assessing financial needs, developing criteria for distribution, forming independent bodies for monitoring expenditures, etc).
- **Strategic planning** – The strategic plan of local economic development or comprehensive municipal / city strategic document is a practical plan that will help the municipality to define strategic goals and to organise and develop its activities accordingly. It is important for LPAs to have this skill as it gives guidelines for strategic area development activities over a period of time (normally 3 to 5 years) and determines direction, priorities, actions and responsibilities for implementation. It is focused on action, i.e. it is focused on implementation." The participative strategic planning process allows LPAs to establish cooperation with other institutions, organisations for business support which will facilitate provision of other services that SEs are in need and LPAs do not have the capacities to do so.
- **Good governance** - SEs indicated reduction of repeated requests for same documents due to the poor level of interconnectivity between different authorities. Creating internal LPA skills that will be tasked with occasionally evaluating local and devolved procedures and allowing "the document to flow not the people". This would also influence digitalization of services provided to SEs.
- **Enhancement of networking ability** – as 49% of surveyed LPAs are located in rural areas, there is a big chance they will never be able to grow all the capacities internally (due to the small number of employees). Therefore, building its capacities to establish cooperation with different organisations at a local level/regional and national level is crucial.
- **Specialisation of the LPAs officers** – Lack of resources to support SEs are not identified only in smaller LPAs, so there is a need to have specialisation for designated persons on how to work with SEs. Potential resolution to this problem can be additional employment of a person who coordinates and assists the businesses.

11. Skill gap associated with digitalization and the implementation of the European Green Deal

The current chapter analyses the skills gap associated with digitalization and the implementation of the European Green Deal, in an effort to provide future-proof jobs and skills training for the green transition; comparative analyses of existing local public administration skills.

The European Green Deal (EGD) is a package of policy initiatives, which aims to set the EU on the path to a green transition, with the ultimate goal of reaching climate neutrality by 2050. It supports the transformation of the EU into a fair and prosperous society with a modern and competitive economy. The EGD aims at climate neutrality implying a significant acceleration of emission reductions making Europe the first climate-neutral continent in the world is a binding commitment under the EU Climate Law.

From July 2021 all sectors of the EU economy need to adapt to meet this challenge, starting by reducing emissions by at least 55% by the end of this decade. There is a 'Fit for 55' legislation, now fully adopted, which sets the EU on a path to reach its climate targets by 2030 in a fair, cost effective and competitive way.

The EU now has legally binding climate targets covering all key sectors of the economy. The overall package includes:

- emissions reduction targets across a broad range of sectors
- a target to boost natural carbon sinks
- an updated emissions trading system to cap emissions, put a price on pollution and generate investments in the green transition and
- social support for citizens and small businesses

Member States will now spend 100% of their emissions trading revenues on climate and energy-related projects and the social dimension of the transition.

Looking at the structure and areas of business operation of SEs that participated in the project survey, only 29% SEs are connected to the area of environmental and sustainability services. This data implies that the majority of SEs are not aware, or not totally aware of these regulations they need to comply with.

Majority of SEs (64%) have the need in building capacities on **Report on sustainable business and fulfilment of ESG indicators**, then for **green marketing 60%**, **environmental management skills** are important for 58% SEs and 57% indicated **environmental Sustainability Evaluation**.

Table 12: Familiarity with the following ESG tools and green skills

Are you familiar with the following ESG tools and green skills?	No of SEs skill / (activity) needed	%
Social Impact Evaluation	106	46%
Demonstrating the social impact created by our organisation	93	40%
Environmental Sustainability Evaluation	132	57%
Report on sustainable business and fulfilment of ESG indicators	147	64%
Green marketing	139	60%
Waste management	86	37%
Sustainable production and logistics	113	49%
Environmental management skills	133	58%

Assessing LPAs on **green deal topics** are covered within the “Sustainable development” group of enquiries. It has two questions and only 35% indicated the need to increase capacities, where environment policies have greater interest among LPAs meaning, 19% expressed interest in expanding knowledge and skill in this regard, and 15% in sustainability.

Table 13: Need to increase capacity on Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development	No of LPAs
Sustainability Knowledge	14% (10)
Environment Policy	19% (15)

For non-EU countries it is important to be aware of these regulations even though they are not mandatory at this point, any export activity of loan application will require compliance to green deal and ESG activities. Therefore, there is a need to build capacities of both, LPAs and SEs. LPAs should be promoters of this regulation, even to adjust and to introduce them in their regulation. On the other hand, SEs need to get the information on models on how to report on implemented

green methodologies, but most importantly, to get the information on how to finance green transition within their business operation.

Digitization refers to the integration of digital technologies into various aspects of business, including work operations, communications and services. By applying digital technologies, SMEs can streamline processes, improve accuracy and efficiency, and ultimately deliver better results to clients. Various aspects of business operation can be subject to digitalization. For example, out of 80% of SEs that expressed interest in expanding its operation on the foreign markets, 33% SEs indicated *Digital skills & online marketing* among other skills that are needed to initiate export.

Table 14: Marketing competences

What are your company's marketing competences?	No of SEs	%
Knowledge on how to build a strong digital brand and social media presence	142	61%
Search Engine Marketing (SEM)	153	66%

On the other hand, LPAs expressed the need in improving digital knowledge to be able to produce E-Government Service - 17%, Data Analysis - 14%, Cybersecurity Awareness for 19%, Innovation and Adaptability - 15% and Ethical considerations and GDPR - 19%.

Innovation and modernization are a comprehensive group of questions and skills needed, and challenging for public servants. Majority of LPAs indicated **GDPR and cyber security awareness 19% as most critical** and in need for capacity building, followed by the **e-governance service with 17%.**

12. Durability, dissemination and exploitation measures

Durability of the Projects Output

Because of the challenges and the complex and changing context in which the project will operate in, the durability strategy of the D4SEE project was constructed at the very beginning of the project preparation while considering the opportunities. Planning for the long-term sustainability and impact of the project is built through early and key project activities:

- Identification of the key stakeholders and beneficiaries of the project and engage them in the analysis, and implementation processes (Activity 1.1).
- Definition of objectives, indicators, and targets for project outputs, and provision of alignment with a broader approach that considers national, and transnational strategies and priorities that impact the Danube Region (Activity 1.2).
- Carrying out a thorough analysis of the risks, opportunities, challenges and uncertainties that may affect the implementation, outcomes, and long-term exploitation.
- Develop a flexible and adaptive implementation plan that facilitates analysis-feedback adjustment loops along the way.
- Establishment of clear roles, responsibilities, accountabilities for the project implementation and monitoring.
- Communication of the project rationale, benefits, progress and results to the relevant audiences and stakeholders.

One of the key tools to ensure the durability of the project outputs is the Danube Social Economy Network (the Network) that was set up by 115 stakeholders in the Danube region. The Network will ensure transferability of project outputs and will support building linkages with the Danube regional social economy ecosystem after the project is finalised. The Network is composed of policymakers in partner countries, representatives of other EU funded projects with a similar purpose of supporting Social Economy (Social Seeds, RaiSE, Social(i)Makers, SEED-HUB, CERUSI, BRESE and SENSES). The Network will further transfer the knowledge gained in the Project with social economy support networks such as: TESSEA, national network for support of SE and South Bohemian Social Incubator in The Czech Republic; Social Entrepreneurship Network Austria, ACT Group Croatia, Social Economy Institute Romania, etc.

Some of the Projects activities will also ensure the wider take-up of project outcomes such as: D4SEE Strategy for inclusive Social Economy ecosystem, Action Plan, the D4SEE Capacity Building Platform, the D4SEE training and mentoring resources and processes, D4SEE peer learning network as well as Policy Recommendations developed within the project.

The EUSDR is an essential partner in the capitalization and further take-up of project results. In this regard, EUSDR PA Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy coordinator, has ensured support for introducing and discussing the projects in the meetings of the EUSDR PA steering committee. This

will ensure coordination with the EUSDR Priority Areas and will increase real implementation and impact of results of the Danube4SEecosystem project.

The main resources that the project consortium committed to maintain functional after the end of the project are:

- **The D4SEE Capacity Building Platform** - The aim of the durability strategy concerns the consolidation of the platform's ability to remain functional, effective, and engaging over time, without requiring excessive maintenance or updates. To ensure the achievement of this goal:

- The platform will be designed to be user-friendly, intuitive, and accessible for diverse stakeholder; to be flexible, adaptable, and scalable to accommodate different needs, preferences, and contexts; to follow best practices and standards for digital-enabled learning, such as instructional strategies, assessment methods, and feedback mechanisms.
- The technology used will be reliable, secure, and compatible with different devices and platforms; it will be easy to use, maintain, and update without compromising the functionality or quality of the platform features.

- **The D4SEE training and mentoring resources and processes** - To consolidate the durability efforts, the content published on the platform will be subject to assessment. Criteria used for assessment include: relevance, accuracy, how up-to-date it is for the intended objectives and outcomes, web accessibility. Gamification mechanisms will be applied to support engagement, interactivity, and diversity, in order to cater to different learning styles and preferences. The content will be curated, organised, and presented in a clear form that facilitates learning and retention.

- **The D4SEE peer learning network** - ASPs such as ACOR will support the uptake, impact and long-term durability of the project outcomes.

The following methods have been identified as ways to measure the durability of platform:

- Assess effectiveness of learning, mentoring, and networking activities through pre - and post-tests, quizzes, surveys, interviews, or observations.
- Assess engagement and retention by using analytics, such as time spent, completion rates, participation rates, or retention rates.
- Assess learning transfer to real-life situations or contexts through performance evaluations, case studies, portfolios, etc.

The current output sets the base for the development of the **Output 2.4 Co-designed D4SEE Capacity Building Programme for sustainable & resilient SEs and LPAs, based on microlearning approach**. The resources will be made available on the D4SEE platform, which can be a valuable resource for people who wish to improve knowledge and skills that in turn leads to sustainable social enterprises and a more developed and inclusive society.

Solutions consider opportunities for upskilling or reskilling the existing employees through training, mentoring, and networking, as well as recruiting and retention methods. The findings will be discussed with project partners and stakeholders during the 2nd Transnational Knowledge Transfer Workshop organised in Bosnia and Herzegovina back-to-back with the 2nd Policy Learning Dialogue in October 2024.

In addition, D4SEE project partners aim to create synergies with other EU funded projects with similar topics and to build on the outputs developed and strengthen the cooperation. In this regard, South Muntenia Regional Development Agency, as Lead Partner, introduced the project during the Kick Off Meeting of the Back on Track project that took place during 12-14 February in Vienna. Back on Track consortium has learned about Danube4SEcosystem project and expressed their interest to be engaged in future activities. Given the sector under which they operate, namely social economy, youth development and education, future collaboration will be in place.

Dissemination of the Project results

During the Launch Conference in Romania, the Network that will ensure the durability and dissemination of the Project activities was created. The Network is working on dissemination of the main outputs of the project by creating, increasing and maintaining collaboration between SEs and their ecosystem. Members of the Network are supporting the development of the social economy and share the best practices learned in their territory.

The Network is promoting the collaborative model of SEs and local public authorities and it will also be active in promoting the “Strategy for inclusive Social Economy ecosystem” that will support cities/regions in the Danube region to systematically support the functioning and development of social enterprises in their territory. The Network will disseminate the Policy recommendations and is working on their implementation where applicable. The Network will continue to work after the Project implementation.

Other tools that will enhance the visibility of the Project activities are organisation of Regional stakeholder meetings (RSM) and Policy Learning Dialogs (PLD). Each semester each PP will organise RSM while there are 3 PLDs organised. PLDs are a platform to invite and to engage with relevant policymakers and to share knowledge on policies that are supporting the development of the social economy and by exchanging ideas on what policy recommendation PPs are working.

The Communication and Dissemination Plan and a Communication package also aim to disseminate knowledge gained through the Project activity. There are Social Media accounts, project website, press releases for launching the project, but it will also have video introducing the project and main outputs and results, flyer, roll-up, poster, etc. PPs are working on promotion of the project activities and outputs via social media, PPs website and joint newsletter (5) that will support the dissemination of all major activities and events.

The last major dissemination event will be the Closing Event and Social Award Ceremony, which will be held in connection with SO3. Once the Closing Event ends, it will be finalised the active period of implementation of the project, and begins the long-term sustainable operation of the Danube Social Economy Network.

Exploitation measures

As said, the project envisioned activities in the stage of the project preparation. One of the activities aiming to secure further exploitation of the outputs is D.2.4.1 Co-creation workshops and D4SEE models. The report summarises the main points and outcomes; participants and facilitators; outcomes; feedback and evaluation. It presents the resulting D4SEE models for SEs, LPAs, and SE-LPA collaborations that communicate the D4SEE vision and fundament the exploitation strategy.

Outreach and exploitation targets are SEs, LPAs from PP countries, PPs and stakeholders.

Local public authority - Local public authorities are included from the very beginning of the project as one of the key partners. They will increase their capacities in the area of development of the social economy ecosystem, learn best practices on how to support SEs and will learn SE in their respective areas.

SME - Social enterprises will increase capacities through training on missing and needed skills. They will improve cooperation on local level directly but also on national level indirectly. They will network with SEs in local areas, but also on regional and PP level. They will be engaged in the project through different activities such as: assessment of the needs and challenges of SEs, mentoring and coaching activities, they will form part of the regional stakeholder groups and will be engaged in the pilot activities and in the development of policy recommendations. In addition, traditional SMEs are the economic actors who can support the sustainable development of SEs through cross-sector collaborations, as mentors and/or customers (integrated into their own supply chain) operation and will be integrated in the project activities within regional stakeholder meetings.

Business support organisation - BSOs will support the collaboration between the SEs with the traditional business environment and will be engaged in Co-creation workshops in knowledge transfer workshops in the Danube Social Economy Network.

Regional public authority - Regional Public Authorities are part of the stakeholder's groups and will support the implementation and dissemination of the main outputs of the project in their territory. They are also supporting the policy recommendation.

National public authority - The National public authorities are providing information on the existing policy framework in their countries. Also, the results of the project and policy recommendations will be supported and endorsed and will form part of new policies developed at national level.

Interest groups including NGOs - In some partner countries SEs have a legal status of NGO, however they are conducting social economy activities therefore they are the part of the regional stakeholders' groups in each partner country. Some of them are specialised in working with SEs so the knowledge gained and the Project success stories will provide relevant input for their future work and collaboration with the social entrepreneurship environment.

Higher education and research organisations – Some PPs are engaging universities as a part of the regional stakeholder group to disseminate the level of the educational programs in their area. They will learn from partner regions on the existing training programs for students on social economy and will support the dissemination of the learning modules developed within the project for further durability of the project.

13. Conclusions and recommendations

The national reports in partner countries [Annex 1-9] have shown that the SEs across the Danube region are facing similar challenges that are preventing them from growing. The current legal frameworks in these countries often do not sufficiently support the sustainable development of SEs. This development does not necessarily depend on the existence of a social entrepreneurship law. Even in countries where such a SE law has been adopted, the SE development might remain limited, as specific and additional support has not been provided. There are, however, countries that set good practices in this recharge and these will be recorded and disseminated at project level.

Overall, the lack of awareness and understanding among the general public and representatives of local public authorities results in lower efforts in cooperation between SEs and LPAs. LPAs in general understand what social impact means, but they rarely connect it to SEs. In some parts of the Danube region societal prejudices especially towards people with mental illness or disability can be still strong. Public procurements are still very often driven by lowest price criteria, while the benefits of contractors with social impact are not considered. Since many social enterprises are small or micro businesses, their capability to participate in public procurements can be limited. A socially responsible subcontractor for the main contractor of the public procurement could be a good way to include SEs into larger procurements. A significant potential is also hidden in ordinary smaller purchases the LPAs are doing often without even realising they could contract a SE for such items. While such purchases are rewarded with smaller amounts per purchase, such repeated purchases over time might give SEs a certain stability to maintain the demand for their services or products. When considering SE financials, profit and turnover are not usually the problem, but the cash flow is.

The analysis conducted by all project partners in the participating countries has identified various existing and needed skills of SEs, as well as of LPAs.

While SEs master some key traditional business skills such as accounting skills, creation of a business plan or creating a good teamwork environment, there are still other skills that SEs are lacking, which are not considered as progressive in today's fast changing world, e.g. **online presence of the company, creation of a strong digital brand or related online marketing.**

Digitalization of SEs was boosted several years ago during the COVID pandemic, but still has not reached the level of traditional businesses. The online environment is changing so rapidly that every entrepreneur, a traditional or social one, needs to undergo training to have the skills required work in a digital world. Another very much desired skill, connected to business expansion, is the ability to explore and enter new markets. Even though SEs thrive best in their local environment, where they can relate more on personal connections and hands-on experience with the customers, when SE has a successful product or service, it is a logical step to scale it up. Most of the SEs have an ambition to expand their business to other neighbouring regions or even on the national level.

Significant opportunities are brought by cross-border cooperation in the bordering regions. Entering a new regional market in a foreign country is of course much more difficult than expanding to a different region within the state. Further support for SEs in the form of training might be desired as well as connections to traditional business support organisations that focus on cross-border cooperation.

As already mentioned, most of the participating LPAs stated that they are familiar with the concepts of social impact and social entrepreneurship. However, the cooperation between SEs and LPAs is still underdeveloped across all the Danube region. This could be interpreted in several ways. LPAs, especially in smaller towns where the LPA does not have that many employees, might be overwhelmed with their current workload and simply do not have the capacity to focus on cooperation with SE. Sometimes innovations in general, including social innovations, are not viewed as a tool to make the administration more effective, but more likely are perceived as additional workload. When contracting public procurements, the main criteria for selection is the price of the acquisition.

While representatives of LPAs claim they understand social impact and social entrepreneurship, very often their awareness about SEs in their areas and about the services and products they offer is very limited. Even though LPAs would like to harvest the social impact the collaboration with social economy actors in general can bring, they often do not connect this impact to SE. Thus, in order to improve LPAs cooperation with SEs, they have to work on achieving a better understanding, in practical terms, of what SEs in their area offer and how LPAs can use it. Public procurement processes have to be improved and suppliers of smaller purchases made by LPAs should be revised.

There are LPAs that provide assistance for access to finance. Such programmes or just a provision of available options should be expanded from NGOs also to SEs. More than 70% of the SEs that participated in the study claimed that they do have a certain cooperation with LPAs, thus the cooperation does exist, it just needs to be improved. The improvements should focus on a better support of SMEs including SEs, lower bureaucratic burden when tendering for public programmes, better access to information or perhaps better networking opportunities.

As a follow-up activity on the skills gap analysis, training activities should take place to address the lack of skills in the identified areas. Such trainings can have various setups, duration and intensity to accommodate specific needs and contexts. This falls in line with the project's training strategy that implements the microlearning approach. A different level of training will be needed for middle-sized LPAs that already have a certain level of cooperation with SEs than for a small municipality with only several employees who have zero experience in cooperation with SEs. However, the interviews carried out in Romania showed the situation is the other way around: small LPAs in rural areas provide support for SEs, while a middle-size LPA did not. Thus, the trainings should reflect the overall results of the transnational skills gap analysis in the whole Danube region and they should also be tailored for the specific skill needs of SEs or LPAs in order to maximise the potential

of skills improvement in the specific area where it is conducted and on the specific group of participants that are involved in it.

The following topics were defined as the skills that should be part of the training programmes:

- **Top skills SE are interested in acquiring**

Table 15: Top skills SE are interested in acquiring

Social Enterprises (SEs)
Marketing (especially the digital marketing, search engine marketing, new trends in marketing or for example building a good digital brand)
Exploration of new markets (focusing mainly on expansion to other regions including cross-border regions and to the national level)
ESG reporting (basic orientation in this new topic, know-how on how to present SE as advantage to the private sector, potential for growth)
Risk management strategy (focusing on analysing the main aspects of business operation to identify, evaluate, and plan potential issues that could come up while doing business, and thus effectively help SEs in creating a Risk Management Strategy and new business model/plan)

Marketing competences were ranked as tops skills SE would like to acquire. These include Exploring new markets and/or customers, Report on sustainable business and fulfilment of ESG indicators and Risk management strategy. In the context of a highly digitalized market, SEs were interested acquiring skills to build strong digital brands and a good social media presence.

- **Top skills LPAs are interested in acquiring**

Table 16: Top skills LPAs are interested in acquiring

Local Public Authorities (LPAs)
Skills for Service delivery
Create / develop policies that can encourage SE growth
Manage grants, subsidies, or other financial incentives that can help SE
Provide a supportive legal and regulatory framework for policies
Manage services that engage SE in the decision-making processes/ support the provision of services that engage SE in the decision-making processes
Support the development of partnership and networking to help SE connect with other stakeholders and of PPPs

Digital accessibility standards and regulations (Written communication)
Ethical considerations and GDPR
Analytical skills: Problem solving, Strategic thinking & Critical thinking
Budget management
Skills for Good governance Policy analysis, Political Awareness, Cross-cultural awareness
Skills for Innovation and modernization Data analysis: Technical skills (spreadsheets, data and information visualization); Statistics skills; Project Management Cybersecurity

In relation to the strategic objectives defined by the project (*Service delivery, Good governance, Innovation and modernization and Sustainable development*), the analysis has shown that skills for **Service delivery** need to be developed further to enable LPAs to provide efficient, reliable, and especially *digitally accessible services* to meet the needs of the SEs, with **Written communication, Problem solving, Strategic thinking Budgeting, Critical thinking** and **Social public procurement** being ranked first. Concerning the other strategic objectives, skills related to **Good governance (Cross-cultural awareness)** and skills related to **Innovation and modernization (Data analysis)** were identified as most important to be acquired.

Part of the innovative approach for the assessment tool, a layer of pivot table approaches was applied to enable a multidimensional analysis of data that was collected. This enabled: (i) an increased insight due to the examination of many dimensions; (ii) easing the handling and maintenance of the multidimensional data model; (ii) improving the performance of the analysis in comparison to traditional databases.

The replicability of the skills gap analysis into other regions of Europe is fairly easy. The skill assessment tools were created in Google Forms as they are user-friendly and provide fast and simple data interpretation. The set of questions defined can be easily adapted, if needed. A good promotion of the data collection, a well-designed set of stakeholders that can boost it and sufficient time to collect the data with adequately scheduled reminders through well proven streams and peers will provide good and relevant data.

14. Annexes

- Annex 1 – National report on skills gap analysis and assessment tools – CZECHIA
- Annex 2 – National report on skills gap analysis and assessment tools - ROMANIA
- Annex 3 – National report on skills gap analysis and assessment tools - SERBIA
- Annex 4 – National report on skills gap analysis and assessment tools - AUSTRIA
- Annex 5 – National report on skills gap analysis and assessment tools - HUNGARY
- Annex 6 – National report on skills gap analysis and assessment tools - SLOVENIA
- Annex 7 – National report on skills gap analysis and assessment tools - CROATIA
- Annex 8 – National report on skills gap analysis and assessment tools - SLOVAKIA
- Annex 9 – National report on skills gap analysis and assessment tools – REPUBLIK OF SRPSKA/B&H
- Annex 10 - SE transnational analysis charts
- Annex 11 - LPA transnational analysis charts