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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**

O 3.3

**Jointly developed, tested D4SEE Social Economy
Support Methodology for applying solutions on SE
collaborative models, based on the pilot actions
implementation**

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Executive Summary

The Danube4SEcosystem project *"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"* aims to enhance the resilience and development of social enterprises (SEs) in the Danube Region by strengthening their capacities, improving cooperation with local public authorities (LPAs), and fostering a more inclusive labour market. The project addresses persistent territorial disparities within the social economy ecosystem, particularly the limited engagement of public authorities, insufficient networking opportunities, low levels of innovation, and the lack of visibility of social enterprises and their societal contributions.

Within the project, Specific Objective 3 (SO3) focuses on fostering transnational cooperation and coordination between social enterprises and their ecosystem. Through the establishment of the Danube Social Economy Network and the implementation of pilot actions in participating countries, the project promotes collaborative models involving social enterprises, local public authorities, and other relevant stakeholders. As part of SO3, five pilot actions were jointly developed and implemented under Activity 3.2 to test the practical applicability of the D4SEE Strategy. The pilot actions were designed as bottom-up interventions responding to real local needs and challenges, while strengthening cooperation between social enterprises (SEs), local public authorities (LPAs), and other relevant stakeholders across the Danube Region.

This document is a jointly developed transnational framework derived from five pilot actions implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia, and Slovakia under the project. Rather than presenting a single uniform approach, the methodology is structured as five interconnected solution modules, where each module corresponds directly to one pilot action (1 pilot = 1 solution). Each solution translates field experience into a practical, transferable implementation model that can be adapted across different governance contexts in the Danube Region.

A key added value of this output is its strong focus on applicability and transferability. The methodology is designed to support users operating under varying levels of institutional readiness, ranging from early-stage awareness environments to more advanced governance systems. Each solution includes guidance on adaptation, enabling flexible implementation in different national and local contexts.

Overall, the methodology confirms that the sustainable development of the social economy depends on structured and continuous cooperation between Local Public Authorities and Social Economy actors. It demonstrates that when strategic priorities are translated into practical, locally adapted tools, even small-scale interventions can generate systemic improvements in governance practices, institutional capacity, and cross-sector collaboration.

Introduction

The Danube4SEcosystem project aims to strengthen the social economy ecosystem across the Danube Region by improving the capacity of social enterprises, enhancing cooperation with local public authorities, and fostering more inclusive labour markets. Within this framework, Specific Objective 3 (SO3) focuses on the operational testing of the D4SEE Strategy through pilot actions implemented in diverse territorial contexts.

The present methodology is the result of five pilot actions implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia, and Slovakia. These pilots were designed as applied experiments to test different models of cooperation between Local Public Authorities (LPAs) and Social Economy actors. Although the pilots differed in their thematic focus and local context, they shared a common objective: to identify practical and transferable solutions that strengthen the social economy support ecosystem at the local and regional levels.

The experience gained through the implementation of these pilot actions forms the basis of this document. The methodology was developed directly from the lessons learned, implementation experiences, stakeholder feedback, and outcomes generated during the pilot phase. Rather than presenting a single uniform approach, the methodology consists of five distinct but complementary solutions, each corresponding directly to one pilot action (1 pilot = 1 solution).

The five solutions address different dimensions of social economy development:

- **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Strategic planning and institutional framework development for social entrepreneurship;
- **Croatia:** Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP) as a mechanism for strengthening cooperation between LPAs and social enterprises;
- **Hungary:** Development of local purchasing communities and cross-sector cooperation models;
- **Serbia:** Local Economic Development Programmes supporting social enterprises employing vulnerable groups;
- **Slovakia:** Municipal self-assessment and governance diagnostic tools for improving cooperation with social economy actors.

Each solution presented in this document follows a common structure that reflects the practical experience of the pilot implementation. The sections describe the challenge addressed, lessons learned during implementation, the proposed solution, replication and transfer possibilities, required human and financial resources, practical implementation guidance, and relevant support mechanisms. Together, these solutions provide a portfolio of tested approaches that can be adapted and applied by local and regional authorities, social economy support organisations, and other stakeholders across the Danube Region.

The purpose of this document is to transform pilot experience into practical implementation knowledge. By documenting and systematising the five tested solutions, the methodology supports the transfer of knowledge, facilitates replication in different territorial contexts, and contributes to the long-term implementation of the D4SEE Strategy.

The document is organised around the five pilot-derived solutions and concludes with cross-cutting observations on transferability, sustainability, and future application within the Danube Region and beyond.

D4SEE Social Economy Support Methodology: Five Pilot-Based Solutions

Bosnia and Herzegovina - Development of a long-term strategy for the development of SEs in the Republic of Srpska for the period 2025-2031

Pilot summary

The pilot action was developed with the support of the South Muntenia Regional Development Agency (Romania) and implemented by RARS in cooperation with the Ministry of Economy and Entrepreneurship of the Republic of Srpska. The objective of the pilot action is the adoption of the Social Entrepreneurship Strategy of the Republic of Srpska 2025–2031. The Strategy is based on the results of comprehensive analyses and a local action plan developed within the D4SEE project and is aligned with the Draft Sets of Priorities for D4SEE Strategy Building. The process of developing and implementing the action plan involved a wide range of stakeholders, including SEs, enterprises operating in the spirit of SE, public authorities, LPAs, citizens' associations, local development agencies and educational institutions.

Although the Strategy has not yet been fully adopted, activities undertaken so far have already resulted in improved dialogue and cooperation among key stakeholders, as well as increased visibility of SE in the public sphere. Following formal adoption, the Strategy is expected to serve as a framework for coordinated support measures and the implementation of concrete activities starting from 2026.

Pilot solution

Main challenge addressed by the pilot

The pilot addressed the absence of a comprehensive strategic and institutional framework for the development of social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Srpska. Although a legal framework already existed, there was no coordinated long-term policy to support social enterprises, strengthen cooperation with local public authorities, improve financing opportunities and promote the labour market inclusion of vulnerable groups.

Pilot experience and key lessons learned

The pilot confirmed that developing an effective public policy requires continuous cooperation between government institutions, local public authorities, social enterprises and other stakeholders. Early involvement of stakeholders, evidence-based planning and regular consultations significantly improved the quality of the final Strategy and facilitated institutional ownership. Strong political commitment and cooperation with the competent Ministry proved essential for successful adoption and implementation.

Proposed solution

Develop and implement a comprehensive Social Entrepreneurship Strategy through an inclusive and evidence-based planning process that:

- establishes clear strategic objectives and measurable indicators;
- defines institutional responsibilities;
- strengthens cooperation between social enterprises and local public authorities;
- introduces sustainable support and financing mechanisms; and
- provides a framework for long-term policy implementation and monitoring.

How can the solution be replicated or transferred?

- I. Define clear priorities and objectives.
- II. Involve regional stakeholders throughout the process.
- III. Ensure continuous cooperation between SEs and LPAs.
- IV. Secure support from competent institutions.
- V. Analyse local needs, capacities and challenges before implementation.
- VI. Adapt activities to local conditions to ensure long-term sustainability.

Required human and financial resources

Human resources

- RARS project team;
- Representatives of the Ministry of Economy and Entrepreneurship of the Republic of Srpska;
- Members of the Government-appointed working group;
- Representatives of social enterprises, local public authorities, local development agencies and educational institutions involved through the regional stakeholder group.

Financial resources

- Financial resources for organising stakeholder meetings and public consultations;
- Resources for preparation and dissemination of strategic documents;
- Administrative and technical support for coordination of the strategy development and implementation process.

Practical implementation guidance

- Ensure close cooperation with the responsible ministry.
- Involve stakeholders throughout the planning process.
- Base strategic priorities on analyses and stakeholder consultations.

- Conduct public consultations before adoption.
- Clearly define responsibilities for implementation.
- Establish monitoring mechanisms through the responsible institutions.

Relevant contact points and support mechanisms

Development Agency of the Republic of Srpska (RARS)
 Ministry of Economy and Entrepreneurship of the Republic of Srpska
 Council for the Development of Social Entrepreneurship of the Republic of Srpska
 Local Public Authorities (LPAs)
 Local development agencies
 Social enterprises and their representative organisations
 Danube4SEcosystem project partnership

Croatia - Promotion of socially-responsible public procurement

Pilot summary

The pilot program in Međimurje County in Croatia was developed with the support of the Regional Development Agency of South Bohemia (Czechia) and focused on encouraging and putting into practice responsible public procurement (SRPP). It involved incorporating considerations into an actual procurement process to showcase how public purchasing can have a beneficial social effect. Especially through aiding the employment of marginalized communities. All, within the framework of national and EU procurement laws. The pilot action was implemented in Croatia's Međimurje County through the collaboration between the Municipality of Mala Subotica and the social cooperative Humana Nova Čakovec. Its aim was to promote socially responsible public procurement (SRPP) 10 by integrating social criteria into the procurement of goods (T-shirts, caps, flags). The action addressed gaps identified in the SWOT analysis, such as weak LPA-SE cooperation and outdated procurement practices. The pilot involved REDEA, ACT Group, the selected LPA, and Humana Nova, and was supported by dedicated training and expert guidance.

Pilot solution

Main challenge addressed by the pilot

Despite the existence of social enterprises capable of delivering high-quality goods and services, cooperation between Local Public Authorities (LPAs) and social economy actors remains limited. Public procurement procedures are often focused primarily on price, while opportunities to generate broader social value through procurement are underutilized.

The pilot addressed several challenges identified during the D4SEE analysis phase:

- Limited awareness among LPAs about the role and capacities of social enterprises;
- Low visibility of social enterprises and their products and services;
- Procurement practices that rarely include social criteria;
- Lack of practical examples demonstrating how Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP) can be implemented within existing legal frameworks;
- Insufficient dialogue and cooperation between LPAs and social economy actors.

Pilot experience and key lessons learned

Objective: a pilot project for social public procurement between a Local Public Authority and a Social Enterprise as Bidder. The goal is to integrate social value into procurement processes, ensuring that the procurement contributes to positive social outcomes.

The pilot was implemented through a procurement procedure conducted by the Municipality of Mala Subotica for promotional materials and working clothes, integrating social criteria into the evaluation process. Additional points were awarded to bidders employing persons with disabilities and other hard-to-employ groups.

The selected supplier was Humana Nova, a Croatian social enterprise employing vulnerable and marginalized groups while producing high-quality textile products.

Key lessons learned include:

- Social criteria can be integrated into procurement procedures without significant administrative burden.
- The main barrier is often not legislation, but lack of knowledge and confidence among procurement officers.
- Capacity building and practical guidance are essential for successful implementation.
- Market research should focus not only on price but also on social value creation.
- Even small procurement procedures can generate measurable social impact.
- Direct cooperation between LPAs and social enterprises increases trust and opens opportunities for future collaboration.
- Once implemented successfully, SRPP is likely to be repeated and expanded by local authorities.

One of the most important outcomes was a change in institutional mindset: procurement began to be viewed not only as a purchasing mechanism but also as a strategic tool for community development.

Key feedback collected included:

- LPAs often don't know what SEs offer;
- SEs should proactively present their services;
- Larger procurements should be split to allow SE access;
- Many LPAs still use outdated procurement rules lacking social clauses;
- A structured dialogue between LPAs and SEs is needed.

Proposed solution

The proposed solution is a practical model for integrating Socially Responsible Public Procurement into local procurement procedures.

The model consists of five key steps:

1. Mapping local social challenges and community needs;
2. Identifying social enterprises and socially responsible suppliers operating in the region;
3. Conducting market research that considers both price and social value;
4. Integrating social criteria into procurement documentation and evaluation procedures;
5. Monitoring and communicating social impact generated through procurement.

The model enables LPAs to use existing procurement legislation to support employment, social inclusion, and local social economy development while maintaining transparency and fair competition.

How can the solution be replicated or transferred?

The pilot is highly replicable with minimal resources.

Success factors:

- I. Education and dialogue between LPAs and SEs;
- II. Use of contract-splitting to allow SE participation;
- III. Clear social criteria and fair evaluation methods;
- IV. Institutional support from intermediaries (organizations that act as a bridge between LPAs and SEs).

Recommendations for replication:

- I. Develop simplified SRPP templates;
- II. Regularly update local procurement rules;
- III. Facilitate SE directories and LPA-SE matchmaking platforms.

Required human and financial resources

Human resources

- Procurement officer or designated municipal staff member;
- Management support from the local authority;
- External SRPP or social economy expert (recommended during initial implementation);
- Participation of social enterprises and relevant stakeholders.

Financial resources

The pilot demonstrated that implementation does not require significant additional financial resources.

Main costs may include:

- Staff training and capacity building;
- Preparation of procurement documentation;
- Stakeholder engagement activities;
- Communication and dissemination activities.

The procurement itself can be financed through regular institutional budgets.

Practical implementation guidance

For successful implementation, local authorities should:

- Start with a smaller procurement procedure to gain practical experience;
- Conduct market research before launching the tender;
- Identify social objectives relevant to their community;
- Use clear, measurable, and legally compliant social criteria;
- Ensure transparency throughout the process;
- Document lessons learned and communicate results;
- Gradually expand SRPP practices to additional procurement areas.

Experience from the pilot suggests that success depends more on preparation and willingness to adopt a different perspective than on additional administrative effort.

The key question for local authorities should not be only “What is the lowest price?” but also “What additional value can this procurement create for our community?”

Relevant contact points and support mechanisms

Local and Regional Support

REDEA – Regional Development Agency of Međimurje County

ACT Group – social economy and social entrepreneurship support organization

Municipality of Mala Subotica – practical implementation example of SRPP

Humana Nova – social enterprise and example of a socially responsible supplier

Recommended Support Mechanisms

- Capacity-building programmes for procurement officers;
- Social enterprise directories and databases;
- Matchmaking events between LPAs and social economy actors;
- SRPP guidelines and template procurement documentation;
- Regional and national knowledge-sharing networks;
- Peer-learning activities among municipalities implementing SRPP.

The Croatian pilot demonstrates that socially responsible public procurement can be successfully implemented with existing resources and legislation, while simultaneously contributing to social inclusion, local development, and the long-term strengthening of the social economy ecosystem.

Hungary - Purchasing community at local level

Pilot summary

The Hungarian Pilot Action was developed with support of the University of Maribor (Slovenia), with the objective of supporting the establishment of the purchasing community of Simontornya by organizing networking and developmental workshops with the active participation of various local stakeholders. Simontornya is a vibrant small town that actively pursues business development opportunities, such as developing their farmer's market and other sales opportunities aimed at local residents and visiting tourists as well. CDDA created the local pilot action in close cooperation with the local municipality in order to help them to move forward in those ideas. The value proposal of CDDA offered an easy format and methodology to the local municipality that would have helped them clarify the business model of the purchasing community and facilitate a deeper and more strategic cooperation between the relevant local actors. During the implementation it became clear that finding and activating stakeholders from various backgrounds is more challenging than expected. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that in order to

implement the methodology more emphasis needs to be put on pre-screening partners or developing soft tools that help collaborations.

Pilot solution

Main challenge addressed by the pilot

The pilot addressed the limited cooperation between Local Public Authorities (LPAs) and local economic actors in developing structured purchasing communities. Although Simontornya had strong local economic assets (farmers' market, tourism potential, small producers), there was no structured governance or business model enabling coordinated collaboration between stakeholders. A key barrier was also the limited openness to cross-sector engagement, which restricted innovation and network expansion.

Pilot experience and key lessons learned

The pilot demonstrated that participatory economic development requires early and active involvement of diverse stakeholders beyond municipal actors. While initial phases were largely municipality-driven, limited stakeholder diversity reduced the generation of new ideas and slowed down the development process at the beginning.

Key lessons include:

- Cross-sector participation is essential for viable purchasing communities.
- Stakeholder “pre-selection” strongly influences innovation potential.
- LPAs often require mindset-oriented support, not only methodological guidance.
- Small municipalities may default to closed governance structures unless actively facilitated otherwise.

Proposed solution

A structured methodology for establishing local purchasing communities through multi-stakeholder facilitation.

The model includes:

1. Mapping of local economic actors (producers, service providers, consumers)
2. Early-stage stakeholder screening and engagement strategy
3. Facilitation of participatory workshops to define business models

4. Co-creation of governance and operational frameworks
5. Identification of development pathways for local markets (e.g. farmers' markets, tourism-linked sales channels, public works production schemes)

The solution ensures that purchasing communities are not only conceptualized but operationalized through inclusive governance structures.

How can the solution be replicated or transferred?

The methodology is transferable to small and medium-sized municipalities with active local economies.

Successful replication requires:

- I. Early stakeholder mapping and openness assessment
- II. Flexible facilitation tools adapted to local political contexts
- III. Strong municipal leadership commitment to participation
- IV. Adaptation of business models to local economic structures (agriculture, tourism, local production)

The model is particularly suitable for rural or semi-rural regions with fragmented local supply chains.

Required human and financial resources

Human resources

- Municipal coordinator or local development officer;
- External or internal facilitator for stakeholder workshops;
- Representatives of local producers, SMEs, and community actors;
- Regional development agency support.

Financial resources

- Costs for workshop organization and facilitation;
- Communication and stakeholder engagement activities;
- Minor administrative and coordination costs

The model does not require large-scale investment but depends on time allocation and facilitation capacity.

Practical implementation guidance

Success depends primarily on participation quality rather than procedural complexity.

- Conduct preliminary mapping of local stakeholders and economic assets;
- Assess willingness of actors to participate in cross-sector cooperation;
- Organize structured multi-stakeholder workshops;
- Identify and validate local economic cooperation models;
- Define governance and operational structure of the purchasing community;
- Establish implementation roadmap for market development activities;
- Ensure continuous engagement and follow-up mechanisms.

Relevant contact points and support mechanisms

Municipality of Simontornya (local governance and implementation)

Central Danube Development Agency (methodological support and facilitation)

University of Maribor (expert support in participatory development methods)

Local producers, farmers, SMEs, and tourism stakeholders

Regional development and cooperation networks under the Danube4SEecosystem partnership

Serbia - LAP for Integration into labour market of vulnerable groups

Pilot summary

The pilot action was developed with the support of the Centre for Social Innovation (Austria), and was implemented by CCIS with the support of ZSI. ZSI provided mentoring support in creating LAP by transferring the knowledge related to the Integration into the labour market of vulnerable groups. The main focus of this LAP was creating a specialized Local Program for the Development of SEs that employ people from vulnerable groups which is connected to Priority Area 7: Support work integration and transition for vulnerable groups. After contacting several LPAs in Serbia (while conducting skill gap assessment tools for LPAs and organizing RSM) CCIS was able to start a cooperation with LPA Kragujevac that expressed an interest in implementing the pilot action 2026.

LPA Kragujevac proposed to allocate funds in the budget of 2026 for developing social entrepreneurship. To use these funds, CCIS will help them create a specialized local program for SE development by including LPA Kragujevac in D4SEE project activities. The main goal of this Pilot action is to seize untapped opportunities and possibilities in order to improve the business environment for the social economy sector which employs people from vulnerable groups in the city of Kragujevac. The main resources for developing the LAP (developing the Local Economic Development Program for SEs that employ people from vulnerable groups) are planned within the D4SEE project, while the resources for implementing the Local Economic Development Program for SEs that employ people from vulnerable groups will come from the City of Kragujevac's budget.

Pilot solution

Main challenge addressed by the pilot

The pilot in Kragujevac tackled the lack of institutional support and structured cooperation between Local Public Authorities (LPAs) and social enterprises (SEs) employing vulnerable groups. Key challenges included:

- Absence of a clear register of SEs at the local level.
- Limited knowledge and capacity of LPAs to design specialized programs for SE development.
- Weak coordination across ministries and institutions.
- Risk of insufficient funding and delays in adopting national and local programs.

Pilot experience and key lessons learned

Participatory approach works best: Early involvement of SEs, LPAs, civil society, and vulnerable groups ensured ownership and relevance.

Capacity gaps on both sides: LPAs lacked knowledge of SEs, while SEs struggled to articulate their needs clearly.

CCIS as mediator: The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia played a crucial role in bridging communication and guiding both LPAs and SEs.

Bottom-up methodology: Engaging stakeholders directly led to practical, tailored measures rather than generic policies.

Proposed solution

- Establish a Local Economic Development Program (LEDP) for SEs employing vulnerable groups.

- Create a formal register of SEs in Kragujevac.
- Conduct analysis of SE needs and priorities to inform program design.
- Institutionalize regular dialogue mechanisms (committees, focus groups, monitoring boards).
- Provide financial and non-financial support measures (capacity building, promotion, legal/regulatory support).

How can the solution be replicated or transferred?

The solution can be replicated in other municipalities by:

- I. Adopting the participatory model of stakeholder engagement.
- II. Using the step-by-step LAP methodology (mapping, analysis, consultation, drafting, adoption).
- III. Leveraging national laws and councils as a framework while tailoring measures locally.
- IV. Encouraging cross-sector partnerships (LPAs, SEs, NGOs, donors).

Required human and financial resources

Human resources

- CCIS experts (coordination, facilitation).
- LPA staff (policy design, monitoring).
- SE representatives (needs articulation, program participation).
- Civil society and vulnerable groups (feedback, co-creation).

Financial resources

- Development phase funded by the D4SEE project.
- Implementation phase financed through the City of Kragujevac's budget and potential donor contributions. The City allocated around EUR 85,000 for the implementation of activities defined in the LEDP. The LEDP was adopted at the end of 2025.

Practical implementation guidance

1. **Mapping:** Identify SEs and vulnerable groups in the municipality.
2. **Consultation:** Organize focus groups and introductory meetings.
3. **Analysis:** Conduct needs assessment of SEs and target groups.
4. **Drafting:** Prepare LEDP with concrete measures (capacity building, financial incentives, promotion).
5. **Validation:** Present findings to stakeholders for feedback.

6. **Adoption:** Secure approval from the local assembly and establish monitoring committees.
7. **Monitoring:** Track KPIs (employment of vulnerable groups, number of SEs established, funding allocated).

Relevant contact points and support mechanisms

Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia (CCIS) – lead coordinator and mediator.

Local Public Authority (City of Kragujevac) – responsible for adoption and implementation.

National Council for Social Entrepreneurship – policy alignment and national-level support.

Civil society organizations and associations of vulnerable groups – grassroots input and monitoring.

Slovakia - Audit of municipality processes for better cooperation between municipality and social economy actors

Pilot summary

The pilot action was developed with the support of the Advanced Technology Systems (Romania), and was implemented in Slovakia's Prešov Self-Governing Region. Its main objective was to identify internal barriers that limit municipalities' ability to support social enterprises. Instead of auditing processes, the focus shifted to reviewing strategic and internal documents after a preliminary assessment revealed that Slovak municipalities are not yet at a stage of formalised cooperation that would allow for process benchmarking.

The pilot confirmed gaps identified in the national SWOT analysis, particularly the lack of institutional awareness and fragmented cooperation. The main output is a set of practical recommendations for municipalities, presented at a stakeholder meeting and applicable nationally.

Pilot solution

Main challenge addressed by the pilot

Despite the growing importance of social enterprises in addressing social and labour market challenges, municipalities often lack the institutional capacity, strategic frameworks, and practical tools needed to cooperate with them effectively. Administrative fragmentation, limited awareness of the social economy, and the absence of clear internal procedures frequently create barriers to collaboration.

Pilot experience and key lessons learned

The original plan was to carry out an audit of municipal processes. However, after gaining a deeper understanding of the situation within the municipality, the plan was revised, and the activity was redirected toward an audit of strategic and internal documents. In addition, other forms of engagement with social enterprises implemented by the municipality were taken into account. This shift was prompted by the realization that municipalities in Slovakia - as well as in other Central and Eastern European countries - have not yet reached a level of cooperation with social enterprises where the quality of collaboration could be assessed through the quality of internal processes.

A key lesson learned was that improving cooperation often does not require major financial investments but rather better institutional coordination, explicit recognition of social enterprises in municipal policies, and the establishment of clear communication channels and responsibilities.

Proposed solution

The pilot developed a practical audit methodology and checklist enabling municipalities to assess their support ecosystem for social enterprises across four dimensions:

- Strategic and political support;
- Financial support mechanisms and public procurement;
- Partnerships, networking and stakeholder engagement;
- Visibility, communication and public recognition.

The tool helps municipalities identify institutional gaps and provides concrete recommendations for strengthening cooperation with social economy actors.

How can the solution be replicated or transferred?

The methodology is low-cost, scalable, and adaptable to different governance contexts. It can be replicated by municipalities, regions, and public authorities across Slovakia and the Danube region by adapting the recommendations to national legislation and local governance structures.

The checklist format makes the tool particularly suitable for self-assessment exercises, strategic planning processes, and policy development activities. The tool is available in Slovak, as well as for better transferability in English language.

Required human and financial resources

The implementation and usage of the tool require limited financial resources and can be carried out by a small multidisciplinary team within the municipality that can evaluate which recommendations they can implement according to their human and financial capacities.

Practical implementation guidance

1. Review the tool and included guidelines.
2. Based on the check list, conduct a review of strategic and internal municipal documents.
3. Map existing cooperation mechanisms and institutional responsibilities.
4. Engage social enterprises and other stakeholders through interviews or workshops.
5. Assess municipal readiness using the checklist.
6. Develop an action plan for improving cooperation.
7. Integrate recommendations into strategic documents and procurement practices.
8. Monitor implementation and update the assessment periodically.

Relevant contact points and support mechanisms

Slovak Business Agency (SBA)

Cross-Cutting Findings and Lessons Learned from the Pilot Actions

The five pilot actions implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia, and Slovakia provide a comparative evidence base on how cooperation between Local Public Authorities and social economy actors functions in different governance and socio-economic contexts. Despite differences in thematic focus, institutional maturity, and implementation models, several cross-cutting findings emerge that define the conditions for effective social economy ecosystem development.

1. Institutional readiness

One of the key findings across all pilots is that the effectiveness of interventions is strongly influenced by the level of institutional readiness of Local Public Authorities.

In contexts where LPAs demonstrated higher openness and administrative flexibility, cooperation with social enterprises developed faster and produced more concrete outcomes (e.g. Croatia's procurement pilot or Serbia's structured programme development).

This confirms that institutional readiness is a precondition for successful LPA–SE cooperation and should be assessed before intervention design.

2. Facilitation and intermediary actors

Across all pilots, facilitation emerged as a critical success factor. Cooperation between LPAs and SEs rarely develops spontaneously and requires structured mediation.

Intermediary organisations (such as development agencies, chambers of commerce, universities, or project partners) played a decisive role in:

- translating between administrative and social economy “languages”;
- building trust between actors;
- structuring dialogue and workshops;
- maintaining continuity in stakeholder engagement processes.

Without facilitation, cooperation risks remaining informal, fragmented, or dependent on individual relationships rather than institutional frameworks.

3. Stakeholder engagement

The pilots consistently demonstrated that the quality of stakeholder engagement is more important than the number of actors involved.

Meaningful participation requires:

- early involvement of relevant stakeholders in the design phase;
- inclusion of actors with real decision-making or operational capacity;
- continuity of participation across all phases of implementation;
- structured formats for dialogue (workshops, working groups, consultations).

4. Mindset and cultural barriers

Beyond technical and institutional issues, a recurring barrier across all pilots is the importance of governance culture and mindset.

In several cases, reluctance to adopt participatory or cross-sector approaches limited the scope of implementation, even when technical capacity existed. This was particularly visible in contexts where municipal structures were traditionally hierarchical or internally focused.

This suggests that social economy development requires not only technical capacity building, but also cultural and behavioural change within public administrations.

5. Need for adaptive implementation

The pilots show that successful LPA–SE cooperation develops incrementally rather than through immediate full-scale implementation.

Effective approaches typically followed a sequence of:

1. Context analysis and mapping;
2. Stakeholder engagement and trust-building;
3. Small-scale pilot implementation;
4. Adjustment and institutionalisation;
5. Scaling and replication.

This staged approach reduces risk and allows adaptation to local governance capacities

Taken together, the pilots confirm that the development of social economy ecosystems in the Danube Region depends on a combination of:

- institutional readiness and political support;
- facilitation and intermediary structures;
- practical, implementation-oriented tools;
- meaningful stakeholder engagement; and
- gradual, adaptive implementation processes.

How to Use This Methodology

This methodology is designed as a modular and flexible implementation framework rather than a linear process. Each of the five solutions can be applied independently or in combination, depending on the institutional context and development stage of the local or regional authority.

Modular application

Users may select and apply solutions based on specific needs:

- Diagnostic stage: Slovakia – guidance framework for institutional readiness self-assessment
- Stakeholder mobilisation stage: Hungary – development of local purchasing communities
- Policy development stage: Bosnia and Herzegovina – strategic framework development
- Implementation stage: Croatia – social procurement integration model
- Programme design stage: Serbia – local economic development programme for SEs

Flexible sequencing

The solutions are not intended to be applied in a fixed order. Instead, they can be combined in a cyclical process of development, implementation, and evaluation.

Target users

The methodology is intended for:

- Local Public Authorities (LPAs)
- Regional development agencies
- Social economy support organisations
- Social enterprises and their representative bodies
- Policy makers involved in local economic development
- Implementation principle

The key principle of application is progressive capacity building through practice-based cooperation, ensuring that institutional learning develops alongside practical implementation.

Dissemination

Dissemination is supported through the Danube Social Economy Network, EUSDR platforms, and partner institutional networks. The methodology is intended to be used both as a standalone implementation guide and as part of broader capacity-building programmes, including training sessions, advisory support, and pilot replication initiatives.

Importantly, the methodology is not a static document but a living framework that can be continuously updated based on new implementation experiences and evolving policy contexts.

Conclusion

The D4SEE Social Economy Support Methodology provides a comprehensive and operational framework that bridges strategic policy objectives with practical implementation in social economy development. It is grounded in real-life pilot experiences and reflects the diverse institutional, administrative, and territorial contexts of the Danube Region.

The methodology demonstrates that the most critical factor for effective social economy development is the quality of cooperation between Local Public Authorities and Social Economy Enterprises. When supported by structured processes, practical tools, and appropriate facilitation, such cooperation can generate sustainable outcomes with clear potential for long-term institutional anchoring.

In terms of sustainability, the methodology is designed to support the integration of successful practices into formal governance structures, ensuring that pilot results can be maintained beyond the project lifecycle. Its modular and flexible design also allows for adaptation to different resource levels and institutional capacities. Regarding transferability, the framework is explicitly designed for application across diverse territorial contexts, enabling replication in municipalities and regions with varying levels of social economy maturity. The inclusion of different implementation models and resource scenarios further strengthens its adaptability.

Looking ahead, the methodology provides a basis for future application and scaling of LPA–SE cooperation models across the Danube Region and beyond. It supports continued development through knowledge transfer, capacity building, and the gradual expansion of tested approaches into wider policy and practice environments.

Annexes

Pilot Implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Pilot Implementation in Croatia

Pilot Implementation in Hungary

Pilot Implementation in Serbia

Pilot Implementation in Slovakia