

D3.2.1. Joint guidelines on outreach to and engagement of stakeholders

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ABW and NGO BRIT

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0.2	19.12.2025	Dragana Panajotović (Executive director of ABW)	Additional comments / suggestions
1.0	31.12.2026	Artur Voroych	BRIT suggestions
2.0	January 2026	Lija Stojković (Project manager at ABW)	Final version with accepted suggestions from BRIT

OVERVIEW

During the implementation of the IMPACTA project, one of the planned activities (Activity 3.2 - Awareness raising and replication) includes preparation of the **D3.2.1. Joint guidelines on outreach to and engagement of stakeholders**. This document has been developed by the Association of Business Women in Serbia (ABW, RS), as the lead partner for Activity 3.2, in close cooperation with NGO BRIT.

This document aims to provide guidance to project partners on stakeholder mapping, as well as the outreach and engagement process. The joint guidelines (D3.2.1) on stakeholder outreach and engagement are designed to strengthen support and collaboration at the pilot sites, enabling the effective replication of project knowledge.

Stakeholder engagement represents a continuous and structured process through which the project partners establish initial contacts and ensure effective communication with the key stakeholders. The purpose of this process is to inform all interested parties about stakeholders' expectations and interests, enabling these aspects to be taken into account within decision-making procedures.

In addition to contributing to strategic management processes and assessing the impacts of activities on affected groups, stakeholder engagement also supports organizational learning and change. Its added value lies in the joint identification of solutions that are appropriate to the specific social and environmental context, while fostering constructive dialogue and tracking the development of social relationships.

To ensure effective stakeholder engagement, continuous improvement of the process is essential. This can be achieved by aligning engagement objectives with overall project goals, taking into consideration stakeholders' preferences and expectations, strengthening problem-solving capacities, selecting appropriate engagement methods, and acting upon feedback received from stakeholders.

This deliverable is directly related to the D.1.3.2 The Workplan of Multistakeholder Action Groups, that has been developed by RAPIV. The MAG's role is to ensure that research, piloting, and policy activities are shaped by diverse stakeholder input and remain relevant to women's entrepreneurship and social innovation across the project regions.

TARGET GROUP INVOLVEMENT

The purpose of the document

D3.2.1. Joint guidelines on outreach to and engagement of stakeholders is envisioned as a document providing project partners with guidelines on stakeholders' involvement through the following actions:

- Establishment of a structured stakeholder database, segmented by target groups and systematized by categories, with regular updates ensured by the project partners (PPs);
- Fostering transnational cooperation among stakeholders and partners by establishing Local Support Groups (LSG), as a part of the SO1 - Strengthening Local Initiatives through Research and Capacity Building; as well as forming international Action Group Network. This way, the **dual-level structure** of stakeholder cooperation is ensured through: local engagement at national/regional/local level, and transnational learning and guidance at project level.
- Organisation of transnational networking events and round tables aimed to promote increased cooperation and knowledge exchange between stakeholders in the Danube Region - The aim of local support groups is to channel the opinions, knowledge, and needs of local stakeholders for pilot implementation and the strategies impacting the area. Each country will organize at least 1 co-creation workshop (in line with D.1.3.1 Reports on the Organisation of Local Support Groups based on URBACT methodology);
- Implementing capacity-building activities for project partners and stakeholders by organizing training sessions, supporting skill development, and facilitating mutual learning. These actions generate mutually useful insights, strengthen institutional capacities and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the project outcomes;
- Building a cooperative framework for stakeholder collaboration (as a part of SO1), focusing on capacity-building and strategic policy development for supporting women's entrepreneurship and inclusion. Collaboration will take place at two levels: local via forming the local Support Groups and international (Action Group Network);
- Effectively communicating the insights and findings from the Strategic Diagnostic Review and Contextual Analysis (D1.1.1) to a broad spectrum of stakeholders the

communication objective aims to engage stakeholders at multiple levels — including policymakers, business support organizations, entrepreneurs, and the general public — to foster an informed and inclusive dialogue.

- Establishing external communication guidelines ensuring that stakeholders are properly informed about project outputs and their feedback is taken into account for potential adjustments.
- Developing a Gender-sensitive Policy Agenda as an output, guiding the formulation and implementation of policies promoting gender equality in social innovation. Drawing from successful initiatives globally, IMPACTA will equip stakeholders with actionable strategies (Advocacy Agenda).

Identifying stakeholders

Project partners will identify and involve relevant stakeholders, including individuals, groups, and organizations that influence or may be influenced by project activities. Project partners review the relevance and effectiveness of engagement activities in addressing specific challenges and objectives. By examining outcomes and practical results, the project team adjusts engagement approaches as needed to improve future actions. This ongoing approach demonstrates the value of stakeholder engagement, supports efficient use of resources, and helps ensure that activities effectively respond to identified needs and priorities.

The diversity of target groups (disadvantaged women, rural populations, minorities, women 50+, refugees), should also be taken into account while selecting the potential stakeholders.

The role of all project partners is to engage the following categories of stakeholders, whose diverse perspectives, feedback, and insights will support effective project implementation and inform future actions and initiatives derived from the project results:

- policy makers (national public authorities, such as ministries and public administrations; local public authorities, etc.)
- higher education and research organisations
- interest groups including NGOs
- business support organisations
- SMEs
- International organisations and institutions

- General public

Project partners should profile stakeholder groups as well as individual stakeholder representatives according to the following features:

- Regional institutions and organisations
- National or sub-national
- address/location
- territorial scope
- quadruple helix type

-Quadruple helix stakeholder model brings together four key sectors involved in innovation and societal development: Public sector (policy-makers, public authorities, public institutions), Private sector (businesses, SMEs, industry representatives), Academic and research sector (universities, research institutes, experts), Civil society (NGOs, citizens, community groups, media).

- relation to underrepresented groups and gender equality
- relation to women entrepreneurship and business angels

Stakeholders engagement will take place in several ways:

- general involvement;
- Local Support Groups
- International Action Group Network

The role of the project partners (PPs) is to establish Local Support Groups (LSGs), which will actively contribute to the project throughout its entire duration. The LSGs will support the learning processes of organizations involved in policy-making and implementation, helping to ensure the effective execution of project tasks. These groups will meet regularly to share insights and provide feedback on project activities and outcomes.

Stakeholders relevant to the promotion of women's entrepreneurship in the respective partners' countries should be included in the LSGs. It is essential that all stakeholders adhere to the principles of the quadruple helix model and that the selection process remains transparent. Each PP is responsible for identifying and engaging stakeholders, as well as facilitating discussions within the groups.

LSG members will contribute their specific knowledge and expertise, while also gaining targeted knowledge generated through the project. They will provide feedback on all activities defined in the project application, as well as on activities refined throughout the implementation phase.

As described in detail within the D.1.3.2 Multi-stakeholder Action Group will be composed of representatives selected from the Local Support Groups (LSGs) established in each partner country. Each LSG will nominate between one and four representatives to join the MAG. This ensures that the MAG is firmly rooted in local realities while functioning as a transnational structure for exchange and guidance.

Partners' roles

As stated in project proposal, partner engagement in **SO3: Replicable Model Development and Stakeholder Engagement objective** contains collaborating on developing models based on pilot interventions and translating them into action plans (in the partner's country) and co-development of the International Strategy for adoption. Additionally raising awareness and facilitating replication through joint outreach efforts, local advocacy events in the partner's country and participation in the final conference. SO3 focuses on creating a scalable model (O3.1) with a Transnational Strategy (O3.2) for the Danube Region and Local Action Plan (O3.3) building on post-pilot evaluations, stakeholder engagement, and replication strategies to spread project knowledge. We aim to integrate disadvantaged groups through coordinated policies driven by the Advocacy Agenda (O1.1), planning, and joint strategies, enhancing inclusive employment and fostering cross-border collaboration.

After the implementation of the pilot projects, a Replicable model development and Stakeholder engagement and replication will take place (SO3). This will be based on the comparative analysis of the pilots (D3.1.1).

Awareness-raising and stakeholder engagement will be carried out. Guidelines (D3.2.1) for effective stakeholder engagement and public participation in the Danube region will be elaborated and in order to promote wider community participation and support, launch dynamic initiatives and awareness-raising events will be held (D3.2.2).

All project partners will be involved in these actions, with the emphasis on the SO3 and Act. 3.2 (including stakeholders engagement), considering the contextual (national) perspectives and specific circumstances and insights, as well as the stakeholders' feedbacks and unique points of view related to each respective partner country.

The **SO3 Replicable model development, Stakeholder engagement and replications** is being lead by AFAM. In charge of the **Activity 3.1 - Developing a model based on the pilots and translating them into action plans and strategies** are two project partners - AFAM and HETFA, while the **Task 3.2 Awareness raising and replication** (including the development of this deliverable) is lead by ABW, supported by NGO BRIT.

STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

1. Objectives of Stakeholder Engagement

The stakeholder engagement process aims to:

- Ensure inclusion of all types of stakeholders, having in mind diverse project target groups, including women entrepreneurs, minorities, rural populations, and disadvantaged groups.
- Support co-creation of knowledge and policy initiatives through structured feedback and collaboration.
- Strengthen local and transnational networks for sustainable social innovation and women's entrepreneurship.
- Align project activities with stakeholders' expectations, needs, and capacities.

2. Stakeholder Identification and Prioritization

Steps to identify and prioritize stakeholders:

1. Map stakeholders using the quadruple helix model (Public, Private, Academic, Civil Society).
2. Segment stakeholders by:
 - Geographical scope (local, regional, national, transnational)
 - Sectoral focus (policy, business support, research, NGOs)
 - Interest/impact on project goals (e.g., women entrepreneurship, social innovation)
3. Evaluate engagement potential: prioritize stakeholders based on influence, willingness to engage, and ability to contribute actionable insights.
4. Profile individual representatives for participation in LSGs and MAG, considering diversity, expertise, and inclusivity.

2a. Stakeholder Value Exchange Matrix

To make stakeholder mapping operational, each identified stakeholder group should be described through a functional Value Exchange Matrix defining the following parameters for each group:

5. **Interests and benefits** – what motivates this stakeholder group to engage.
6. **What we expect** – specific contributions or actions expected from the stakeholder group.
7. **What we offer** – tangible and intangible benefits the project provides to this group.
8. **Formats of interaction** – e.g., quarterly coordination meetings, shared calendars, joint communications.
9. **Risks/Safeguards** – e.g., mitigating personnel changes by maintaining two contact persons per organisation.

Recommended sub-categories for the matrix include: Local/Regional Authorities, Business Support Organizations & Innovation Spaces, Educational Institutions, NGOs/Communities (critical for reaching vulnerable groups), and SMEs/Media Platforms.

3. Stakeholder Outreach Methods

The outreach strategy includes a combination of direct and indirect approaches, tailored to stakeholder type and local context:

3.1 Direct Outreach

- Personalized invitations to LSG participation via email, phone, or in-person meetings.
- Consultation interviews with key stakeholders to gather insights before workshops or policy discussions.
- One-on-one briefings for high-impact stakeholders, such as policymakers, business support organisations etc.

3.2 Indirect Outreach

- Information campaigns: newsletters, social media updates.

- Public webinars and online forums to engage wider audiences, especially SMEs and civil society.
- Dissemination of research outputs (Strategic Diagnostic Review, Contextual Analysis) with clear calls for feedback.
- **Hyper-local outreach channels:** to effectively reach disadvantaged groups (IDPs, rural women, minorities), partners should leverage field-tested local infrastructure including Administrative Service Centers (ASCs/CNAPs), employment centers, local libraries, rural administrations (starostats), and dedicated IDP Telegram and Viber community channels.
- **Ad and landing page templates:** outreach ads must clearly answer four questions – for whom, what it gives, what it requires, and how to apply. Landing pages should explicitly state accessibility features (e.g., children’s rooms, travel/care vouchers) to lower barriers for mothers and rural women.
- **Recruitment funnel monitoring:** track engagement effectiveness using metrics such as Click-Through Rates (CTR), conversion from interest to application, and the share of priority vulnerable groups in the application flow, enabling weekly A/B testing and real-time correction of outreach messaging.

3.3 Event-Based Engagement

- Co-creation workshops: structured sessions in each partner country for brainstorming and feedback collection.
- networking events: to foster knowledge exchange across regions and sectors.
- Transnational conferences/partners’ meetings: provide a platform for LSG and MAG members to share lessons learned and replicate best practices.
- **HUB and Point structure:** establish physical support environments at two levels. A HUB acts as a central safe space offering co-working facilities, digital laboratories, and legal consultations (e.g., BRIT’s “New Energy” Science City model with shelter and generator). A Point serves as an accessible outreach location in remote communities (e.g., local libraries) for field days and basic consultations.
- **Action-oriented event formats:** complement standard workshops with formats that lead directly to economic action, including: Financial Clinics (helping women prepare grant/loan applications), Orientation Days held jointly with local employment centers, and Pitch Days connecting participants directly with investors.

4. Feedback and Adaptive Engagement

Ensuring stakeholder input shapes the project requires systematic feedback loops:

- Collect feedback during co-creation workshops/meetings;
- Integrate feedback into project planning, pilot implementation, and policy recommendations;
- Adjust engagement strategies based on stakeholder satisfaction and the level of their participation;
- Document lessons learned for replication in other regions.
- **Apply a data ethics policy:** enforce the “do no harm” principle by mandating informed consent, minimizing personal data collection, and ensuring all published data is in aggregated, depersonalized form.
- **Implement quarterly learning reviews:** each quarter, conduct a structured learning cycle including pre-/post-tests of competencies, pulse surveys after training modules, and documentary verification of real-world results (e.g., tracked sales growth, business registrations) to continuously improve the engagement program based on measured impact.

5. Inclusive and Gender-Sensitive Engagement Practices

To guarantee diversity and inclusivity:

- Apply transparent selection criteria for LSG and MAG members (already defined in D.1.3.2).
- Incorporate gender-sensitive discussion frameworks in workshops
- Track participation by stakeholder type to monitor inclusivity and involvement with project target groups.
- **Implement blind screening:** introduce a structured blind screening stage where names, social media links, and specific locations are hidden from assessors to prevent unconscious bias and ensure true inclusivity in participant selection.
- **Apply tailored approaches for specific vulnerable groups:**
 - *Rural women:* field training, mobile consultations, and micro-scholarships for logistics costs.
 - *Refugees/IDPs:* trauma-informed facilitation, flexible remote formats, and access to legal and language consultations.

- *Roma/Minority communities*: involve specialized community mediators and use culturally sensitive communication with minimal documentation barriers.
- *Mother-entrepreneurs*: provide childcare vouchers or establish children's corners at engagement venues to remove participation barriers.

6. Communication Guidelines for Engagement

Effective communication supports engagement by making stakeholders aware, informed, and motivated:

- Prepare **stakeholder-specific communication materials** (presentations, brief descriptions of the project outputs and activities).
- Use **multi-channel dissemination** (emails, social media, project website, newsletters).
- Possibly establish **feedback mechanisms**: surveys, questionnaires, and online consultation forms.
- Provide **regular updates** on how stakeholder input has influenced project decisions.