



Co-funded by
the European Union



*Enhancing VET for social impact: putting
social public procurement into practice*

Deal4Good – PR1 Research Report



EUROPEAN CENTER
FOR SOCIAL FINANCE



ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ
ΔΥΤΙΚΗΣ ΑΤΤΙΚΗΣ
UNIVERSITY OF WEST ATTICA



MALTAVOCATIONAL



Co-funded by
the European Union

Deal4Good is funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them. Project number: 2024-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000244401



*Enhancing VET for social impact: putting
social public procurement into practice*

The Deal4Good Research Report

A small-scale transnational investigation on Social Public Procurement market

Activity leader	University of West Attica
Partner(s) involved	All partners
Status	Final
Distribution	Public
Date	July 2025



EUROPEAN CENTER
FOR SOCIAL FINANCE



ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ
ΔΥΤΙΚΗΣ ΑΤΤΙΚΗΣ
UNIVERSITY OF WEST ATTICA



Co-funded by
the European Union



Disclaimer

Deal4Good is funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them. Project number: 2024-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000244401

Copyright © 2025, Deal4Good Consortium, All rights reserved.

This document and its content are the property of the Deal4Good Consortium. It may contain information subject to intellectual property rights. No intellectual property rights are granted by the delivery of this document or the disclosure of its content. Reproduction or circulation of this document to any third party is prohibited without the prior written consent of the Author(s).



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution – NonCommercial – Share Alike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.



Co-funded by
the European Union



Abstract

This document, titled the **Deal4Good Research Report**, is the first official deliverable of the Deal4Good project. Deal4Good aims to enhance Vocational Education and Training (VET) for social impact by promoting the adoption of **Social Public Procurement** (SPP). The report is based on the activities carried out under Work Package 2 (WP2) – Knowledge Acquisition. This work package focused on identifying existing gaps in technical capacity and regulatory frameworks that limit the readiness of **Social Enterprises** (SEs) and **Contracting Authorities** (CAs) to participate effectively in SPP. As such, the report serves as a small-scale transnational investigation. To support this effort, project partners collected and analyzed data on the current state of the Social Economy and SPP in their respective countries. The report compares challenges and opportunities across partner countries and incorporates insights from interviews conducted with SEs and CAs. Their responses were analyzed and are interpreted in this document. In addition, the report includes a chapter highlighting selected case studies, identified by the project partners as **best practices**. The final sections present the key findings and overall **conclusions** of the research.

Keywords

Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP), Social value, Transnational, Desk Analysis, Best Practices



Co-funded by
the European Union



Contents

List of Tables	3
List of Figures	3
List of abbreviations.....	4
A short introduction to the Deal4Good project	5
1. Introduction	6
2. Background of partner countries	9
2.1 Germany.....	9
2.2 Italy.....	14
2.3 Greece	18
2.4 Spain	22
2.5 Malta	25
2.6 Romania.....	29
2.7 Bulgaria.....	32
2.8 Cyprus.....	35
3. Selection of User Cases & Desk Analysis	41
3.1 Data Collection	41
3.1.1 Methodology.....	41
3.1.2 Data processing.....	43
3.2 Data analysis.....	43
3.2.1 Methodology.....	43
3.2.2 Questionnaire Results per country	44
3.2.3 Comparative analysis and Statistical analysis model.....	72
3.2.4 Identification of blocking points & Action plan	86
4. Best practices.....	104
4.1 Objective	104
4.2 Case studies.....	105
5. Conclusions.....	119
6. Annex I – Questionnaire for SEs	120





7. Annex II – Questionnaire for CAs..... 126

8. Annex III – Best practices questionnaire 133



List of Tables

TABLE 1 KEY SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS FOR GERMANY	10
TABLE 2 KEY INDICATORS OF THE SE SECTOR IN GERMANY	11
TABLE 3 KEY SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS FOR ITALY	15
TABLE 4 KEY INDICATORS OF THE SE SECTOR IN ITALY	16
TABLE 5 KEY SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS FOR GREECE	19
TABLE 6 KEY INDICATORS OF THE SE SECTOR IN GREECE	21
TABLE 7 KEY SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS FOR SPAIN	23
TABLE 8 KEY INDICATORS OF THE SE SECTOR IN SPAIN	24
TABLE 9 KEY SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS FOR MALTA	26
TABLE 10 KEY INDICATORS OF THE SE SECTOR IN MALTA	27
TABLE 11 KEY SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS FOR ROMANIA	30
TABLE 12 KEY INDICATORS OF THE SE SECTOR IN ROMANIA	31
TABLE 13 KEY SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS FOR BULGARIA	33
TABLE 14 KEY INDICATORS OF THE SE SECTOR IN BULGARIA	33
TABLE 15 KEY SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS FOR CYPRUS	35
TABLE 16 KEY INDICATORS OF THE SE SECTOR IN CYPRUS	37
TABLE 17 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS FOR GERMANY	45
TABLE 18 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS FOR ITALY	48
TABLE 19 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS FOR GREECE	52
TABLE 20 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS FOR SPAIN	55
TABLE 21 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS FOR MALTA	58
TABLE 22 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS FOR BULGARIA	61
TABLE 23 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS FOR ROMANIA	64
TABLE 24 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS FOR CYPRUS	68
TABLE 25 PEARSON CORRELATION RESULTS	82
TABLE 26 ANOVA TEST RESULTS	83
TABLE 27 ANOVA TEST RESULTS	84
TABLE 28 BLOCKING POINTS IDENTIFIED AND ACTION PLANS	88

List of Figures

FIGURE 1 METHODOLOGY DIAGRAM	7
FIGURE 2 CHART SHOWING IDENTIFIED BLOCKING POINTS IN GERMANY	47
FIGURE 3 CHART SHOWING IDENTIFIED BLOCKING POINTS IN ITALY	50
FIGURE 4 CHART SHOWING BLOCKING POINTS IDENTIFIED IN GREECE	54
FIGURE 5 CHART SHOWING IDENTIFIED BLOCKING POINTS IN SPAIN	57
FIGURE 6 CHART SHOWING BLOCKING POINTS IN MALTA	60
FIGURE 7 CHART SHOWING BLOCKING POINTS IN BULGARIA	63
FIGURE 8 CHART SHOWING BLOCKING POINTS IN ROMANIA	66
FIGURE 9 CHART SHOWING BLOCKING POINTS IN CYPRUS	70
FIGURE 10 FAMILIARITY OF PARTNER COUNTRIES WITH PP AND SPP	72
FIGURE 11 AWARENESS OF SEs FROM PARTNER COUNTRIES ON STRATEGIES	73
FIGURE 12 PARTICIPATION OF PARTNER COUNTRIES IN PP AND SPP	74
FIGURE 13 FREQUENCY OF PARTICIPATION IN PROCUREMENTS	74





FIGURE 14 COMPARATIVE RESULTS FOR SPP PARTICIPATION.....	75
FIGURE 15 ABILITY OF SEs FROM PARTNER COUNTRIES TO PARTICIPATE IN SPP.....	76
FIGURE 16 FAMILIARITY OF CAs FROM PARTNER COUNTRIES ON PP AND SPP.....	77
FIGURE 17 KNOWLEDGE OF CAs FROM PARTNER COUNTRIES ABOUT STRATEGIES ON SPP.....	78
FIGURE 18 INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS IN SPP PROCEDURES BY CAs.....	80
FIGURE 19 ABILITY OF CAs FROM PARTNER COUNTRIES TO DEVELOP AND PUBLISH SPP.....	81
FIGURE 20 BEST PRACTICE FROM SPAIN "FAIR TRADE AS A CORE PROCUREMENT PRINCIPLE".....	105
FIGURE 21 BEST PRACTICE FROM SPAIN "FAIR TRADE AS A CORE PROCUREMENT PRINCIPLE".....	106
FIGURE 22 BEST PRACTICE FROM SPAIN "TURNING OIL INTO SOCIAL VALUE".....	107
FIGURE 23 BEST PRACTICE FROM GREECE "SCALING SE PARTICIPATION THROUGH RESERVED LOTS".....	108
FIGURE 24 BEST PRACTICE FROM POLAND "SOCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH LOCALIZED PROCUREMENT".....	109
FIGURE 25 BEST PRACTICE FROM BELGIUM "MAINSTREAMING SOCIAL CLAUSES".....	110
FIGURE 26 BEST PRACTICE FROM GERMANY "INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT THROUGH IT CIRCULARITY".....	111
FIGURE 27 BEST PRACTICE FROM SINGAPORE "DIGITALIZING PUBLIC PROCUREMENTS".....	112
FIGURE 28 BEST PRACTICE FROM NORWAY, "ETHICAL PROCUREMENT WITH GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN OVERSIGHT".....	113
FIGURE 29 BEST PRACTICE FROM ITALY "COMBATING LABOR EXPLOITATION IN FASHION SUGGLY CHAINS".....	114
FIGURE 30 BEST PRACTICE FROM ITALY "EMBEDDING SOCIAL CRITERIA IN HEALTH PROCUREMENT".....	115
FIGURE 31 BEST PRACTICE FROM ITALY, "REGIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE PROCUREMENT".....	116
FIGURE 32 BEST PRACTICE FROM CYPRUS "DUAL FOCUS ON SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS IN CLEANING PROCUREMENT".....	117
FIGURE 33 BEST PRACTICE FROM CYPRUS "INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE FURNITURE PROCUREMENT FOR INNOVATION SPACES".....	118

List of abbreviations

WP	Work Package
SE	Social Enterprise
CA	Contracting Authority
SPP	Social Public Procurement
KPI	Key Performance Indicator





A short introduction to the Deal4Good project

Deal4Good project is an innovative European project that tackles the complex growth challenges faced by Social Enterprises (SEs) that must simultaneously achieve commercial success and generate positive social impact. While the EU has taken significant steps to support SE development, persistent national disparities, limited scalability, and a shortage of skilled professionals continue to hinder progress.

A major challenge lies in the **limited availability of professionals specialized in Social Public Procurement (SPP)**, as well as the **lack of comprehensive vocational education and training (VET)** programs that equip professionals with the necessary skills to support SEs in accessing and benefiting from public procurement opportunities.

To address these gaps, Deal4Good aims to design, pilot, and deliver an innovative **“Social Procurement Expert (SPE)” curriculum**. This cutting-edge training program will empower professionals with socio-economic backgrounds to help SEs unlock their potential through effective engagement in SPP.

The project supports two core **EU priorities**:

- **Adapting VET to labour market needs** by developing targeted competencies and bridging the gap between training and the social economy;
- **Increasing the attractiveness of VET** through blended learning, work-based experiences, and innovative digital tools.

By building a robust, future-ready training model and fostering cross-sector collaboration, Deal4Good equips professionals to become **key enablers** of inclusive, sustainable growth of Social Public Procurements across Europe.





1. Introduction

The Work Package 2 of the Deal4Good project aims to **investigate vendors' and buyers' development gaps in the field of Social Public Procurements (SPPs)**. This investigation explores in depth both SEs' and contracting authorities' readiness for SPPs. The partnership has identified existing gaps (technical capacity, regulation, etc) and analysed specific regional and sectoral barriers and opportunities to take advantage of the transnational project dimension. The small-scale investigation aims to provide partners, target groups, and relevant international audiences with a clear understanding of the support needs within the social procurement domain. The research result have taken the form of an innovative Research Report (PR1), which is this document.

This document is the 1st Deliverable of the Deal4Good project, named **“PR1 – Deal4Good Research Report”**.

PR1 is designed to target researchers, specialized companies, public institutions, and social enterprises and:

- Support the development of the training curriculum.
- Serve as a key resource for future Social Procurement Experts (SPE) and form an integral part of the training materials (PR2).
- Inform the development of policy recommendations (PR6), ensuring they are based on a comprehensive understanding of the context, challenges, and opportunities.
- Guide the creation of the Social Enterprises' Digital Assessment Tool, a crucial product enabling SPEs to become immediately operational and competitive in the labor market.

The Deal4Good Research Report is a major output, and the partnership is committed to ensuring its **broad dissemination** to maximize the understanding and reuse of the collected information and research findings. It is distributed free of charge through various channels, including the project's website, social media, newsletters, and the Erasmus+ Program platforms (EPALE, Project Results Platform, etc.).

The report will be made available in all partner countries' languages. This **translated** content will be shared with social enterprises and contracting authorities in each country, facilitating a clearer understanding of the report's insights and recommendations.

In figure, the methodology diagram including all different sections of the report is presented.



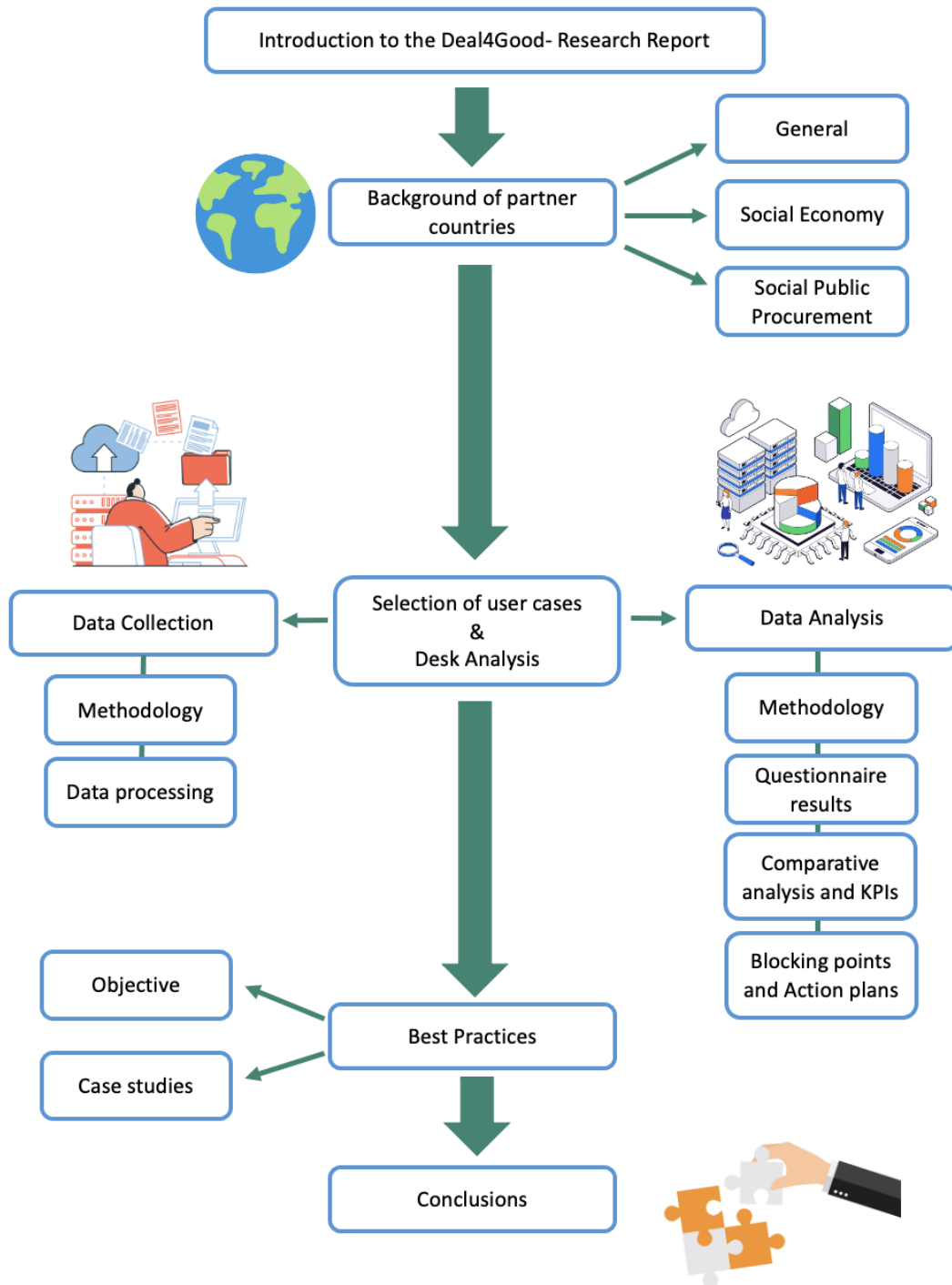


Figure 1 Methodology diagram





As presented in the above diagram, the report is **structured** into several key sections, each building upon the previous to provide a comprehensive overview and actionable insights regarding the state of Social Public Procurement (SPP) and Social Economy (SE) in the participating countries.

The report begins with an overview of the **background of each partner country**. This introductory section includes general demographic and economic indicators (e.g., population size, GDP, etc.) and outlines the current status of the social economy, including the number of Social Enterprises (SEs), their growth trends, and the maturity of the ecosystem. In addition, it presents a snapshot of the state of Social Public Procurement, highlighting existing policies, strategies, and key stakeholders at the national or regional level.

The core of the document focuses on the **selection of user cases and desk analysis**. This section is divided into several chapters:

- Data collection explains the methodology used for gathering input from Social Enterprises and Contracting Authorities, including the design and administration of questionnaires.
- Data analysis presents the findings from the survey, broken down by country. This includes both qualitative and quantitative analysis, visualized through charts and supported by narrative interpretation. A comparative analysis across countries highlights common patterns and country-specific insights.
- Identification of blocking points draws from the survey findings to highlight the main obstacles faced by SEs in accessing or participating in public procurement processes, and action plan to outline targeted recommendations and measures to address each identified blocking point. These actions aim to improve SE readiness, enhance institutional capacity, and promote inclusive procurement practices.

Following is the “**Best practices**” section which introduces selected international case studies showcasing successful examples of policies, tools, or initiatives that have effectively increased the participation of SEs in public procurement. These practices serve as inspiration and models for potential adaptation in the participating countries.

The final section summarizes the **key insights** from the entire study. It distills the main findings from the data collection and analysis, highlights relevant best practices, and presents a set of overarching recommendations to foster more inclusive and socially responsible public procurement ecosystems.





2. Background of partner countries

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the **current landscape** in each of the participating partner countries (Germany, Italy, Greece, Spain, Malta, Romania, Bulgaria, and Cyprus) with a particular focus on the social economy and Social Public Procurement (SPP). Understanding this “state of play” is a crucial step in contextualizing the project’s research findings and shaping meaningful recommendations. The goal of this section is twofold. First, it offers baseline knowledge about the social economy frameworks, legal environments, and policy initiatives present in each country. Second, it helps establish each country's readiness to engage with and implement SPP practices. This foundational understanding enables the project consortium to more accurately interpret the results from the WP2 questionnaires and interviews conducted with Social Enterprises (SEs) and Contracting Authorities (CAs). By identifying key differences and similarities in the maturity and implementation of social economy initiatives and public procurement policies, this chapter serves as a valuable reference point. It provides the necessary context to explain national-level challenges and disparities in technical or regulatory capacity, while also highlighting areas of convergence and shared opportunities among the countries. Moreover, mapping the state of play allows for a better understanding of structural and systemic factors that influence the success or limitations of SPP. It helps uncover **country-specific dynamics**, such as government support, legislative developments, or cultural attitudes toward social value in procurement.

In the following sections, a **detailed profile** of each partner country is presented, offering insights that will support the comparative analysis and guide future policy and training interventions throughout Deal4Good project.

2.1 Germany

Facts about Germany

- Its economy is the largest in Europe
- Faces challenges of aging population and disparities
- Lacks legal definition of Social Enterprises
- Has no official registration system for SEs
- Hosts 70k SEs





General Background

Germany, located in the **heart of Europe**, is the continent's largest economy and a global industrial leader. It has a federal parliamentary system and is divided into 16 Länder (states). The economy is highly diversified, with strong sectors in manufacturing, particularly automotive, machinery, and chemicals. Services contribute around 70% to GDP, industry about 27%, and agriculture less than 1%. Socially, Germany faces several challenges, including a **growing aging population**, **regional disparities in economic development** (especially between eastern and western regions), rising housing costs in urban areas, and integration of migrants and refugees. Long-term unemployment and youth unemployment have decreased but remain areas of policy attention.

Table 1 Key socioeconomic indicators for Germany

Total population	84.075.075 (2025)
Employment rate	77,2% (2024)
Unemployment rate	3,6% (April 2025)
GDP per capita (USD)	54.343,23

Social Economy

Germany has a **rich social economy ecosystem**. The main types of organizations include cooperatives, foundations, associations (eingetragene Vereine), and gGmbHs (non-profit limited liability companies). These entities operate across social services, education, health, integration, circular economy, and sustainable development.

There is **no single legal definition** of a social enterprise in Germany, but recognition is growing. Social enterprises typically combine a social mission with entrepreneurial approaches, reinvest profits into their mission, and often follow inclusive governance practices.

National and regional networks supporting the sector include SEND (Social Entrepreneurship Netzwerk Deutschland) and DSEE (Deutsche Stiftung für Engagement und Ehrenamt). While there is **no official registration** or certification system specific to social enterprises, legal frameworks such as non-profit status (Gemeinnützigkeit) and the gGmbH form provide recognition pathways.

Main areas of operation include, social services, education and training, environmental protection, migrant integration, employment of disadvantaged groups.





Table 2 Key indicators of the SE sector in Germany

Number of social enterprises	70.000
Contribution of the social economy sector to GDP and/or employment	~4,1% of total employment 2.300.000 people
Growth rate	Not available

Social Public Procurement

Regarding existing guidelines, toolkits, handbooks or online platforms, Germany offers various resources to support socially responsible public procurement, including:

- Kompass Nachhaltigkeit (Sustainability Compass): A comprehensive **online platform** that provides guidance, tools, and case studies on sustainable public procurement.
- Kompetenzstelle für nachhaltige Beschaffung (KNB): The Competence Centre for Sustainable Procurement offers **support, templates, and best practices**.
- Fairgabe Netzwerk: **Regional initiatives**, such as the “Fairgabe” in North Rhine-Westphalia, promote fair and social procurement practices.

As for **legal provisions** supporting SPP, social criteria can legally be integrated into public procurement in Germany through:

- Gesetz gegen Wettbewerbsbeschränkungen (GWB) – Act against Restraints of Competition
- Vergabeverordnung (VgV) – Procurement Ordinance
- UVgO – Sub-threshold Procurement Regulation

These allow contracting authorities to include **social and environmental considerations** in award criteria, contract performance clauses, and eligibility conditions. EU directives (2014/24/EU) are fully transposed into national law, enabling targeted engagement with social enterprises.

In addition, in Germany, there are some **learning opportunities** available, while not yet widespread in formal education. Some emerging training opportunities are:

- KNB Workshops and Webinars: Provide regular sessions on legal and practical aspects of SPP
- Regional Chamber Programs: e.g., Handwerkskammer and IHK offer local seminars





- Universities and Applied Sciences: Some institutions include sustainable procurement in public management or sustainability programs
- Informal learning: Via NGOs and social enterprise networks like SEND e.V.

Responsibility for shaping and implementing Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SPP) and social economy policy in Germany is distributed across multiple levels of government and institutions, reflecting the federal and decentralized nature of the country's governance system.

A. Federal-Level Institutions

1. Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI)

The **Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community** (BMI) plays a central role in the implementation of sustainable procurement within the federal administration of Germany. It oversees the Procurement Office (BeschA), which is the largest civilian procurement agency in the federal government. Furthermore, the Ministry hosts the Competence Centre for Sustainable Procurement (KNB), serving as the main advisory body on matters related to sustainable procurement. In addition, the BMI chairs the Interministerial Working Group on Sustainable Procurement (IMA nÖB), which is responsible for coordinating sustainable procurement efforts across all federal ministries.

2. Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK)

The **Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action** (BMWK) is responsible for shaping the overarching legal framework governing public procurement in Germany, including legislation such as the GWB and VgV. The Ministry promotes key objectives such as economic efficiency, innovation, and the active participation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It also oversees the Competence Centre for Innovative Procurement (KOINNO).

3. Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

The **Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development** (BMZ) addresses the international dimensions of procurement policy. Its focus lies on integrating principles of fair trade and human rights into global supply chains. The BMZ supports initiatives like *Servicestelle Kommunen in der Einen Welt* (SKEW) and promotes tools such as the *Kompass Nachhaltigkeit* platform

4. Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS)

The **Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs** (BMAS) plays a key role in integrating social objectives into public procurement. It addresses crucial issues such as labor standards, accessibility, social inclusion, and non-discrimination. BMAS is also responsible for defining the target groups relevant to social procurement, such as long-term unemployed individuals and persons with disabilities, ensuring that procurement practices actively support these populations. In addition,





the Ministry issues procurement directives applicable within its administrative domain and across its subordinate institutions, guiding them toward socially responsible procurement approaches.

5. Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV)

The **Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection** (BMUV) is responsible for guiding the environmental dimension of sustainable public procurement in Germany and works through agencies such as the Federal Environment Agency (UBA).

6. Federal Ministry of Defence (BMVg)

The **Federal Ministry of Defence** (BMVg) is responsible for managing substantial procurement activities, primarily through its dedicated procurement agency, the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Equipment, Information Technology and In-Service Support (BAAINBw). Although the Ministry operates under specific regulations tailored for defense procurement, such as the VSVgV, it remains aligned with the overarching principles of public procurement outlined in the GWB, including commitments to sustainability where applicable.

B. State-Level Institutions

State-Level Institutions in Germany play a crucial role in regulating procurement below the EU thresholds. Each of the **16 federal states** typically adopts the national UVgO framework but applies state-specific modifications through their own procurement laws (Landesvergabegesetze). These laws may include mandatory provisions related to social and environmental objectives, such as the enforcement of fair trade practices or compliance with ILO labor standards. Procurement responsibilities are often distributed among state ministries of Economic Affairs, Interior, Finance, or Social Affairs. To guide public buyers, administrative regulations (Verwaltungsvorschriften, or VwV) are issued, which are frequently binding for municipal authorities. In support of sustainable public procurement (SPP), some states have also established dedicated sustainability units or competence centers to offer guidance and build capacity at the local level.

C. Municipal-Level Institutions

Municipal-Level Institutions in Germany, comprising **cities, towns, and districts**, are key players in public procurement, collectively accounting for an estimated half or more of the country's total public procurement spending. At the municipal level, social procurement is increasingly integrated through local procurement guidelines and city council resolutions that mandate sustainable or fair trade practices. Municipalities also embed social criteria directly into their tendering processes, including in award criteria and contract clauses. Many participate in initiatives like Fairtrade Towns, which promotes ethical procurement practices across local government operations. Concrete examples of municipal action include the procurement of fair workwear in Würzburg and Dortmund,





the implementation of mandatory use of recycled paper in Freiburg, and inter-municipal cooperation on sustainability initiatives in Ravensburg

2.2 Italy

Facts about Italy

- Has the third largest economy in Europe
- Faces challenges of economic stagnation and aging demographic
- Has one of the most structured legal frameworks of Social Enterprises
- Has an official registration system for social economy organisations
- Hosts 393k SEs

General Background

Italy is a founding member of the European Union and the eurozone, with a long-standing tradition of regional governance, social solidarity, and strong public institutions. With a population of around 59 million, it is **the third-largest economy** in the EU by nominal GDP. Italy has a diversified economy based on a mix of advanced manufacturing, world-leading design industries, a vibrant service sector, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of its productive fabric—accounting for over 99% of all businesses.

The country's North is highly industrialized and export-oriented, while the South (the "Mezzogiorno") suffers from persistent underdevelopment, lower employment rates, and high levels of poverty and social exclusion. Italy maintains a robust welfare system, however, **economic stagnation**, **demographic ageing**, and regional inequalities have created increasing pressure on public services and fiscal sustainability. In 2024, the median age reached 48.7 years, and the birth rate dropped to one of the lowest in Europe, aggravating the aging population crisis and shrinking the workforce.

In this evolving context, the role of the social economy and social enterprises is gaining recognition as a tool for addressing socio-economic challenges and promoting territorial cohesion. Italy has one of the most structured **legal frameworks for social cooperatives** in Europe, yet the potential of Social Public Procurement (SPP) remains largely underused. Despite EU encouragement and the availability of legal instruments (e.g., reserved contracts, social clauses), public authorities are still slow to integrate social value into procurement policies. The current policy momentum around green and





inclusive transitions makes Italy a promising, albeit complex, context for empowering a new generation of professionals who can leverage SPP to unlock the full potential of social enterprises.

Table 3 Key socioeconomic indicators for Italy

Total population	59.138.234
Employment rate	62,9% (2024)
Unemployment rate	6,5% (April 2025)
GDP per capita (USD)	39.003,32

Social Economy

Italy has one of the **most structured and diverse social economy** ecosystems in Europe, with deep historical roots and a wide range of organizational forms. The sector has gained increasing relevance in addressing socio-economic inequalities, promoting territorial cohesion, and supporting employment inclusion, especially in vulnerable or marginalized communities.

The social economy in Italy includes a broad **spectrum of entities**, from traditional social cooperatives to more recently defined social enterprises under national law. **Social cooperatives** are the most prominent actors, legally recognized since the 1990s and categorized as either Type A (providing social, health, and educational services) or Type B (facilitating the work integration of disadvantaged groups). These organizations are democratically governed, reinvest profits into their mission, and play a crucial role in welfare delivery and community development.

Alongside cooperatives, **associations, foundations, and mutual aid societies** operate across various sectors such as culture, sport, housing, and environmental sustainability. Since the introduction of Legislative Decree No. 155/2006 and the subsequent Third Sector Reform (Decrees No. 106/2016 and No. 112/2017), Italy has formalized the concept of "social enterprise" as a legal status applicable to various legal forms, including limited liability companies, as long as they pursue social objectives and follow specific governance and profit reinvestment rules.

Italy benefits from a rich ecosystem of **support structures** that promote, represent, and develop the social economy. National umbrella organisations like Legacoop Sociali, Confcooperative Federsolidarietà, and the Forum del Terzo Settore provide advocacy, training, policy dialogue, and capacity building for thousands of affiliated entities. Research and policy institutions such as EURICSE (European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises) and AICCON (Italian Association for the Promotion of the Culture of Cooperation and Nonprofit) produce strategic data, academic studies, and impact analyses that inform both public and private stakeholders.





Italy was one of the first European countries to adopt a dedicated legal **definition of social enterprise**, starting with Legislative Decree 155/2006 and further strengthened by the Third Sector Reform (2016–2017). To qualify as a social enterprise, an organisation must:

- Pursue a clearly defined social mission (e.g. work integration, welfare services, education, culture)
- Operate in a stable, entrepreneurial way (not merely occasional or voluntary)
- Reinvest at least 50% of profits into its social objectives
- Adopt inclusive and democratic governance mechanisms
- Submit an annual social report (bilancio sociale)

These criteria aim to ensure that social enterprises maintain a strong focus on social impact while functioning as professional and economically sustainable actors.

Social enterprises in Italy operate in a wide **range of sectors**, often aligned with public interest objectives. The most common fields include, work integration of disadvantaged groups (especially through Type B cooperatives), health and social care services, education and training, environmental services and sustainable agriculture, urban regeneration and housing, cultural and creative industries and lastly social tourism and circular economy initiatives.

As for **registration systems**, since 2021, the Single National Register of the Third Sector (RUNTS) has become the official registration system for social economy organisations, including recognised social enterprises. RUNTS is managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and ensures transparency, legal status, and access to public funding and fiscal benefits.

Interactive dashboards on the size, distribution, and performance of the Italian social economy can be accessed through the **EURICSE Statistical Portal**: <https://euricse.eu/en/>

Table 4 Key indicators of the SE sector in Italy

Number of social enterprises	393.000
Contribution of the social economy sector to employment	8,80%
Growth rate	3-5%

Social Public Procurement

Italy offers several **guidelines and toolkits** supporting socially responsible procurement. For instance, the **Buying Social Guide** by the European Commission, while European in origin, is widely referenced





by Italian contracting authorities. At the national level, the **Public Procurements Code** (DLG 50/2016, amended by Legislative Decree 209/2024) explicitly embeds social clauses and allows authorities to reserve tendering opportunities for entities like social cooperatives that employ disadvantaged people.

Italy's procurement code offers two key **mechanisms that empower Social Public Procurement**:

1. **Social Clauses**: Articles 57 and 61 permit contracting authorities to include labor and social integration requirements directly in tender notices (e.g., mandating the employment of persons with disabilities or the disadvantaged—and even to reserve contracts exclusively for qualifying social enterprises)
2. **Reward Criteria**: As of December 2019, procurement law includes evaluation bonuses for companies demonstrating positive social impact, including environmental, labor, or social performance, ensuring tenders are not only cost-driven.

As for formal and informal **training opportunities**, they are gradually emerging in Italy:

- Regional procurement authorities run workshops and webinars to help local administrations implement social clauses.
- National entities, including ANAC, Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy (MiSE), and Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, offer occasional training sessions on socially responsible procurement.
- Umbrella organisations (e.g., Legacoop Sociali, Forum del Terzo Settore, AICCON) sometimes partner with universities to run courses on SPP within broader social economy curricula, though nationwide structured certification programs remain limited.

Lastly, **responsibility** for SPP in Italy is shared across institutions. **ANAC (National Anti-Corruption Authority)** oversees procurement compliance and ensures enforcement of legal and social obligations. The **Italian Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy (MiSE)** co-designs procurement policies and coordinates digital procurement platforms. The **Ministry of Labour and Social Policies manages the RUNTS** registry and awards fiscal benefits linked to social economy entities participating in procurement. In addition, **local public authorities** (regions, provinces, municipalities) are often the main implementing bodies, especially in decentralised areas that pilot SPP practices—some regions, like Lombardy and Trentino, have developed their own social clause guidelines.





2.3 Greece

Facts about Greece

- Its' economy is based mostly on the tertiary sector
- Faces challenges of high unemployment rate and aging demographic
- The term "social enterprise" is relatively new in the Greek context
- Has no guidelines or strategic plan for the implementation of Social Public Procurements
- Has an official registration system for social economy organisations
- Hosts almost 3k SEs

General Background

Greece is located in the **Southeastern Europe**, comprising the southern part of the Balkan area and having thousands of islands in the Aegean and Ionian Seas. It borders with Albania, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Turkey. It covers an area of 132,049 square kilometers and has an extensive coastline of 13,676 kilometers, including the islands in the Aegean and Ionian Seas. This ranks Greece in the 11th place among the countries with the longest coastline. Greece's population is 10.482.487 people, 51.1% of them are female and 48.9% male.

Greece's GDP was 237.573 million based on temporary data of 2024. **Greece's economy** is based mostly on the tertiary sector, with significant contributions from tourism, services, shipping, industry, and agriculture. In 2023, agriculture contributed around 3.34% to the GDP of Greece, 15.28% came from the industry and 68.64% from the service sector. **Employment rate** in Greece averaged 84.7% from 2001 until 2024, reaching an all-time high of 92.7% in the second quarter of 2008 and a record low of 72.2% in the fourth quarter of 2013. The number of unemployed persons³ for the month of April 2025 amounted to 811,324 persons, decreased by 6.9% than April 2024. 54.2% have a continuous unemployment duration of 12 months or more, while 45.8% have a continuous unemployment duration of less than 12 months. The highest number of unemployed individuals is recorded in the Region of Attica, amounting to 263,385 persons (32.5%), and in the Region of Central Macedonia, amounting to 160,313 persons (19.8%).

With 22.7% of the population aged 65 and above, Greece faces challenges related to an **aging demographic**. In addition, inflation (2,0%) and stagnant wages contribute to a cost-of-living crisis, affecting public sentiment and leading to protests and strikes. Poverty risk was approximately at 26.0% in 2023.





Table 5 Key socioeconomic indicators for Greece

Total population	10.482.487 (2021)
Employment rate	90,5% (2024)
Unemployment rate	8,3% (April 2025)
GDP per capita (USD)	24.720

Social Economy

The term "**social enterprise**" is relatively new in the Greek context and **absent from Greek legislation**. Under the Law 4430/2016, "Social and Solidarity Economy" is defined as "the sum of economic activities based on an alternative form of production, distribution, consumption, and reinvestment, grounded in the principles of democracy, equality, solidarity, cooperation, and respect for people and the environment."

The same Law (article 3) defines the criteria for an organization to be recognized as part of the social economy.

a. **Social Cooperative Enterprises** (SCEs) as defined in Article 14, are civil cooperatives governed by Law 1667/1986, with a statutory purpose of serving collective and social benefit, as outlined in paragraphs 3 and 4 of Article 2. They are legally recognized as commercial entities. They are categorized as **Social Cooperative Enterprises of Inclusion** (including Inclusion SCEIs for Vulnerable Groups and Inclusion SCEs for Special Groups), **Social Cooperatives of Limited Liability, Worker Cooperatives**.

Main areas of operation of SEs (2021) is education with 11% of share, following are wholesale and retail trade (excluding motor vehicles and motorcycles), activities of organizations and food service activities with approximately 7%.

At the national level, **Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in Greece is coordinated** by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Additionally, it is regulated by four other ministries: the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Economy and Development, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Rural Development and Food. Law 4430/2016 established the Special Secretariat for Social and Solidarity Economy, a governing body responsible for identifying, supporting, and monitoring the SSE sector.

The institutional representation of the actors of Social and Solidarity Economy is becoming increasingly stronger, and the Secondary Associations of Social Solidarity Economy actors are





responding to their role. Eleven out of the thirteen Regions of Greece have **established Associations of Social Solidarity Economy Entities** in 2023 with a democratic approach.

Greece has **12 regional unions** recognized under Law 4430/2016, representing social enterprises and promoting social entrepreneurship across the country. They act as support centers, offering business development, social innovation, and training programs. At the national level, the Panhellenic Confederation serves as the umbrella organization, representing 8 of these unions. The KAPA Network (Center for Support & Development of Cooperative Enterprises) also supports the sector through cooperative education and policy advocacy.

Greece has seen strong growth in its social economy ecosystem, with an increasing number of **advisory bodies, support offices, accelerators, and network unions**. Eleven of the country's thirteen regions now have active secondary unions offering support to those interested in volunteering, joining, or creating a social enterprise. Academic interest has also grown, with postgraduate and lifelong learning programs emerging, such as those at the Hellenic Open University and the University of Crete. Initiatives like the Popular University of Social and Solidarity Economy (univsse.gr) promote citizen engagement. The government supports the sector through awareness events and spaces like the reopened "Merchants Arcade", which hosts social enterprises and their products.

In addition, some initiatives are not exclusively aimed at social economy entities but can still be relevant:

- The Athens Startup Incubator is managed by the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry, with support from the Municipality of Athens: ATHENS STARTUP INCUBATOR (theathensincube.gr).
- The Municipality of Athens also operates an accelerator: <http://www.innovathens.gr/en>

Many foundations, NGOs, and networks support civil society initiatives and may assist social economy entities, such as:

- Incubation and acceleration programs (for startups): ACEin | Athens Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, [Orange Grove](#)
- Advisory services: [Militos Consulting](#), [Social Dynamo](#)
- Training: [HIGGS](#), [Athens Makerspace](#)
- Capacity building and access to finance: [Microloans and Microfinance | Action Finance Initiative](#), [Business Development Services | The People's Trust](#)

Lastly, there is a system ([Greek registration system for SEs](#)) in order to register an enterprise as part of the Social and Solidarity Economy. The **registration** procedure includes submission of an electronic





application with the organization's Articles of Association attached, along with additional required documents (outlined in the Ministerial Decision and varying according to the type of entity). Specifically, in the case of establishing Worker Cooperatives, member insurance (as self-employed professionals) is also required. With the registration certificate and the commencement of operations, the enterprise may begin commercial activity.

Table 6 Key indicators of the SE sector in Greece

Number of social enterprises	2.609
Contribution of the social economy sector to employment	1.549 Annual Work Units (2021) 45.598.399 (2021)
Growth rate	2.144 SEs in 2022, 2.609 SE in 2025 Growth rate 6,75% annually

Social Public Procurements

In Greece, there is a legal framework that allows Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) organizations to participate in public sector tenders, while Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP) is also gradually being encouraged through the **Action Plan for Social Economy** that includes action to be implemented by 2027. More specifically, the 6th action of this Plan is dedicated to the “Capitalization of Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP) in the development of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)” and the 7th action is also related to SSEs organizations and refers to “Training of Social and Solidarity Economy organizations on the framework for public procurement”. For the 6th action of the Action Plan for Social Economy the General Secretariat for Employment Support, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Single Public Procurement Authority are **responsible bodies**.

There are **no guidelines or strategic plan** for the implementation of Social Public Procurements but to develop specific documents for SPPS is one of the expected results of the 6th action mentioned.

The **Ministry of Development** is responsible for the planning and implementation of all economic programs and tools related to funding as well as the activities of the businesses of SSE. It participates in the public procurement processes alongside the **Ministries of Interior and Justice**, and the **Single Public Procurement Authority**. The Ministry of Interior is jointly responsible for public procurements to SSE organizations. The **Ministry of Health** is responsible for the operation of the Panhellenic Federation of Social Cooperatives with Limited Liability. The **Ministry of Rural Development** is responsible for agricultural cooperatives and women's cooperatives. Finally, the **Ministry of Environment and Energy** is responsible for energy communities.





As for socially responsible public procurements, SSE organizations come into contact with municipalities (Local Authorities of the First Degree) mainly during the execution of Socially Responsible Public Procurements (SPPs) and the conclusion of **programmatic procurement**. Additionally, first-degree local authorities have the capacity to create a supportive environment for SSE initiatives, provided they have the resources and the willingness to undertake such action.

2.4 Spain

Facts about Spain

- Has the fourth largest economy in the Eurozone
- Faces challenges of aging population
- Has a social economy with a wide variety of organisations
- Follows guidelines based on EU directives to support Social Public Procurements
- Lack an official registration system for social economy organisations
- Hosts 43k SEs

General Background

Spain is a **Southern European** country located on the Iberian Peninsula, known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse landscapes, including beaches, mountains, and historic cities. It has a population of approximately 49.15 million people and is the fourth-largest economy in the Eurozone. Spain's economy is diverse, with significant contributions from the services sector, which accounts for around 70% of GDP and includes tourism, finance, and information technology. The industrial sector, including manufacturing, construction, and energy, makes up about 25% of GDP, while agriculture contributes around 2-3% to the economy, with key products such as olives, wine, and citrus fruits. Despite its economic strengths, Spain faces several social challenges, including high unemployment rates, particularly among young people, and a significant issue with income inequality.

The country also grapples with an **aging population**, which puts pressure on healthcare and pension systems. Social exclusion remains a concern, especially for vulnerable groups like immigrants, women, and the elderly, further exacerbated by the economic disparities between urban and rural areas.





Table 7 Key socioeconomic indicators for Spain

Total population	49.153.849
Employment rate	58,57%
Unemployment rate	10,6%
GDP per capita (USD)	33.509

Social Economy

In Spain, the social economy encompasses a wide variety of **organizations**, including cooperatives, mutual societies, associations, and foundations. These entities are primarily focused on creating social impact and include social enterprises (SEs), which aim to address social challenges while being economically sustainable. Several national and regional umbrella **bodies** support social enterprises, such as CEPES (Spanish Business Confederation of Social Economy), which is one of the main organizations advocating for the social economy. Additionally, there are various regional networks that provide training, consultancy, and networking opportunities for SEs.

In Spain, a social enterprise is **defined** as an organization that operates under a social economy model, aiming to serve the general interest rather than maximizing profit. SEs must reinvest profits into social or environmental projects, prioritize inclusivity, and operate democratically, involving stakeholders in decision-making processes.

The **main areas** where social enterprises operate include:

- Social inclusion and employment: Supporting disadvantaged groups such as the unemployed, disabled, and migrants.
- Sustainable development: Promoting environmentally friendly practices and green solutions.
- Health and social services: Providing care and support services, especially for vulnerable groups.

To be recognized as a social enterprise in Spain, an organization must meet certain **criteria**, including:

- Social mission: Its primary objective must be addressing a social or environmental issue.
- Profit reinvestment: Profits must be reinvested to further its social mission.
- Inclusive governance: It must operate with democratic decision-making processes, often involving employees or beneficiaries.





Spain **does not have a specific official registration** or certification system for social enterprises. However, organizations may voluntarily join networks like CEPES or seek recognition as part of the Social Economy to demonstrate their commitment to these principles.

Table 8 Key indicators of the SE sector in Spain

Number of social enterprises	43.000
Contribution of the social economy sector to employment	10%
Growth rate	2,5% per year

Social Public Procurement

Spain follows **guidelines** that encourage the integration of social and environmental considerations in public procurement. These are mainly based on EU directives, such as the EU Public Procurement Directives. In addition, platforms like Convalores support social enterprises and provide tools to navigate the public procurement market .

Spanish **law** supports social procurement, encouraging public authorities to engage with social enterprises by considering social value in procurement processes. The Public Sector Contracts Law (Ley 9/2017) includes provisions that allow for the inclusion of social criteria in contract awards.

As for **learning opportunities**, there are several vocational education and training (VET) providers offer courses related to social procurement. The **key government bodies** responsible for SPP in Spain include the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation, which oversees the legal framework, and regional bodies that implement local strategies.





2.5 Malta

Facts about Malta

- Its' economy is characterized by high-income status
- Faces challenges of poverty and social exclusion
- Has a no official, in-force legal framework for SEs
- Lacks dedicated national SPP guidelines
- The learning and training opportunities on SPP offered are fragmented
- Hosts the low number of 750 SEs

General Background

Malta, a small yet economically dynamic **island nation in the Mediterranean**, serves as a significant member state of the European Union. Its economy, characterized by its high-income status, is predominantly driven by the services sector, which contributed approximately 80.6% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2024 and accounted for around 81.3% of total employment. Within services, key sub-sectors include a robust tourism industry (contributing around 15% of GDP), a well-established financial services sector, and a rapidly expanding online gaming (iGaming) industry. The industrial sector plays a smaller but vital role, contributing roughly 11.7% of GDP and employing 17.6% of the workforce, with manufacturing, particularly in microchips and pharmaceuticals, being prominent. Conversely, agriculture is a marginal economic activity, representing only 0.7% of GDP and employing approximately 1.1% of the workforce.

As of 2024, Malta's total population stands at approximately 539,607. The country boasts an exceptionally **high employment rate**, reaching 83.0% in 2024, significantly surpassing the EU-27 average. Correspondingly, the unemployment rate remains remarkably low, recorded at 2.7% in 2024. GDP per capita was estimated at EUR 40,634 (nominal) and USD 67,682 (Purchasing Power Parity) in 2024, reflecting a strong economic output per individual.

Despite these strong macroeconomic indicators, Malta faces persistent social challenges, particularly concerning **poverty** and **social exclusion**. The "At Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion" (AROPE) rate was estimated at 19.7% in 2024, a slight decrease from 19.8% in 2023, yet it still indicates a notable portion of the population at risk. Vulnerable groups are disproportionately affected; in 2024, the AROPE rate for persons aged 65 and over stood at 31.7%, while for those under 18 years, it was 25.9%. Single-parent households also exhibit a significantly elevated risk of poverty. These figures





underscore the necessity for continued policy interventions to address structural inequalities and ensure comprehensive social inclusion across all demographic segments within the Maltese society.

Table 9 Key socioeconomic indicators for Malta

Total population (Year of data)	539,607 (2024)
Employment rate	80,4% (15-64 age group)
Unemployment rate	2,7% (2024)
GDP per capita (USD)	40.634

Social Economy

Malta has a rich heritage of **voluntary associations and cooperatives**, with social initiatives dating back centuries. While a "de facto" social economy exists, formal social enterprise development is nascent. A study identified approximately 750 "de facto" social enterprises, including Voluntary Organisations (VOs), cooperatives, and cultural/sports clubs, which contribute significantly to job creation and inclusiveness. Formalization through the Social Enterprise Act is essential for tailored support and scalability. Malta's social economy primarily consists of organizations operating with social objectives. VOs are the largest group (~394), formalized by the Voluntary Organisations Act (2007) and supported by the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector (MCVS). Cooperatives (~57) are governed by the Cooperative Societies Act (2001), with the Malta Cooperative Federation (MCF) and Koperattivi Malta providing support and lobbying for recognition. Additionally, around 299 cultural and sports clubs function as de facto social enterprises. The Social Enterprise Act (SEA) will require social enterprises to adopt legal forms such as a company, partnership, or cooperative.

Currently, there is **no official, in-force legal framework** solely for social enterprises in Malta. The Social Enterprise Act (Act No. IX of 2022), published on February 22, 2022, is a significant milestone but is not yet in force, its commencement depends on a Government Gazette notice. The Act defines a social enterprise through two pathways:

- 1) at least 60% of income from trade for a social purpose, or
- 2) at least 30% of full-time equivalent workers are disabled or disadvantaged.

Key recognition criteria include a social mission, profit reinvestment (max 25% distribution over three years), legal form (company, partnership, or cooperative), and autonomy from government. The Act mandates a new Regulator and Register for Social Enterprise Organisations. The delay in its commencement hinders access to specific benefits like the Micro Invest scheme.





Support for Malta's social economy comes from various sources. Key networks include the Malta Cooperative Federation (MCF), Koperattivi Malta, and the Social Entrepreneurs Association Malta (SEAM), which actively lobbies for the Social Enterprise Act. Governmental bodies like the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector (MCVS), Office of the Commissioner for VOs, and Board of Cooperatives also provide support. Funding sources include EU programs (e.g., ESF+), Malta Microfinance Ltd, APS Bank, and the promised Micro Invest scheme extension (contingent on SEA being in force).

Social enterprises in Malta operate across **diverse sectors**, combining social goals with entrepreneurial approaches and reinvesting profits for social, cultural, or environmental objectives. Key areas include social services (health, elderly, disabled, childcare), education and training, employment and work integration (a key SEA pathway), environmental sustainability, cultural and fair trade, holistic services, and rural tourism. These activities align with national strategic priorities and contribute to societal well-being.

The **main challenge** is the Social Enterprise Act (SEA) not yet being in force, creating regulatory limbo and hindering sustainability and scalability. Opportunities include the SEA's eventual commencement, unlocking financial support (like the Micro Invest scheme), promoting inclusivity, fostering international collaboration (via SEAM's Euclid Network membership), and introducing social impact reporting. The sector's future depends critically on the SEA's timely implementation.

Malta's social economy is poised for formalization with the Social Enterprise Act, but its "not yet in force" status delays its potential. To realize this, the most critical recommendation is the immediate commencement of the **Social Enterprise Act**, followed by establishing its Regulator and Register, coordinating support mechanisms, enhancing awareness, leveraging EU funding, promoting social impact measurement, and continuous monitoring.

Table 10 Key indicators of the SE sector in Malta

Number of social enterprises	750
Contribution of the social economy sector to employment	1,3%
Growth rate	Not available





Social Public Procurement

Malta's **social procurement is evolving**. The Social Enterprise Act (SEA), **defines social enterprises** by either 60% income from a social purpose or 30% disadvantaged/disabled workers. It mandates profit reinvestment (max 25% distribution) and a new Regulator/Register. The SEA is not yet in force, creating uncertainty and delaying benefits like the Micro Invest scheme extension but full potential relies on SEA activation, awareness, and training. Malta's **Public Procurement Regulations** (S.L. 601.03) permit "Reserved Contracts" (Regulations 161-165) for sheltered workshops and social enterprises integrating disabled/disadvantaged persons (min. 30% employees). Despite these provisions, SRPP maturity is low due to limited awareness.

In addition, **Public Finance Management Act** is responsible for principal legislation forming Malta's legal framework for public procurement, **Voluntary Organisations Act** formalizes and legalizes voluntary organizations, which often fulfill de facto social enterprise functions and **Cooperative Societies Act** caters for cooperatives, which also often fulfill de facto social enterprise functions.

Malta **lacks dedicated national SRPP guidelines**. The EU-funded "WeBuySocialEU" project promotes SRPP. The eTenders (ePPS) platform is mandatory for public procurement but lacks explicit SRPP features, hindering tracking and implementation.

Training is fragmented. The University of Malta and MCAST offer relevant degrees. Professional training is available from the Institute for the Public Services (IPS) and private academies. EU-funded projects like WeBuySocialEU and Deal4Good specifically target SRPP training. Social economy organizations (MCF, MCVS, SEAM) also provide support and advocacy.

Key bodies include the **Ministry for the Economy, Enterprise and Strategic Projects** (economic growth) and the **Ministry for Inclusion, Voluntary Organisations** (inclusion, voluntary sector). **The Department of Contracts** (DoC) is the central public procurement authority. Other relevant entities are the Malta Business Registry (MBR), Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations (CVO), Cooperatives Board, Malta Enterprise, and Servizzi Ewropej f'Malta (SEM).

Challenges include the delayed SEA commencement, low SRPP awareness, fragmented support, and limited e-procurement features for social outcomes. Recommendations are to expedite SEA activation, develop national SRPP guidelines, enhance capacity building, improve e-procurement data, strengthen inter-ministerial coordination, and promote Reserved Contracts.





2.6 Romania

Facts about Romania

- Its' economy focuses on services, industry and agriculture sectors
- Faces challenges of poverty and social exclusion
- It provides certificate to social enterprises
- It does not have a centralized toolkit or dedicated online platform focused on SPP
- The learning and training opportunities related to SPP remain underdeveloped
- Hosts almost 3k SEs

General Background

Romania, located in **Eastern Europe**, is known for its rich history, diverse landscapes, and cultural heritage. It has a population of approximately 19 million and is a member of the European Union, benefiting from economic integration while facing structural challenges. The economy is driven by three **main sectors**: services, industry, and agriculture. Services dominate, contributing around 60,7% of GDP and employing nearly half of the workforce, with strong growth in tourism and IT. Industry accounts for 26,7% of GDP, with manufacturing, automotive, and construction playing key roles. Agriculture, though less significant in GDP at 4,5%, employs 18% of the workforce, with Romania being a major grain producer in the EU.

Despite economic progress, Romania faces social challenges that threaten long-term stability. **Poverty** and **social exclusion** affect 32% of the population, the highest rate in the EU. The aging population and emigration of skilled labor reduce workforce availability, while tax evasion and inadequate healthcare further strain economic resilience. Addressing these issues requires strategic investments in education, infrastructure, and social inclusion programs to ensure sustainable growth.





Table 11 Key socioeconomic indicators for Romania

Total population	19.053.815 (2021)
Employment rate	63% (2024)
Unemployment rate	5,7% (April 2025)
GDP per capita (USD)	18.404,3 (2023)

Social Economy

In Romania, the field of social economy is regulated by Law no. 219/2015 on Social Economy, as well as by Government Decision no. 585/2016, which approves the methodological norms for applying the provisions of Law no. 219/2015. The term social enterprise is **defined by law** as a private legal entity that proves, through its founding and organizational documents, that it follows both the definition and core principles of the social economy set out in the law.

To be officially recognized as a social enterprise, an organization needs to obtain a **social enterprise certificate**. Eligible organizations include associations and foundations, first-degree cooperatives, federations, credit cooperatives, mutual aid societies for employees and pensioners, unions of legal entities, and other types of private legal entities. The status of a social insertion enterprise is certified by granting the social mark. The social brand represents the form of certification of social insertion enterprises in order to recognize their direct contribution to the achievement of the general interest and/or to the improvement of the situation of the vulnerable group. The social brand contains the certificate attesting the status of a social enterprise of insertion, with a validity of 3 years from the date of issue, as well as the specific element of visual identity, which is mandatorily applied to the products made, or the works performed or the documents proving providing a service.

These organizations can apply for certification as long as their founding documents clearly show that their activities are aimed at achieving a social goal, they follow the **principles** of the social economy and they meet the following **conditions**:

- they serve a social purpose or act in the general interest of the community;
- they reinvest at least 90% of their profits into their social mission and statutory reserves;
- they agree to transfer any remaining assets, in case of liquidation, to another social enterprise;
- they promote fairness in the workplace, with equitable salaries and a pay ratio that does not exceed 1 to 8 between the highest and lowest earners.





Key networks supporting social enterprises include RISE Romania, Social Economy Coalition, FONSS, Ashoka Romania, and NESsT, offering funding, training, and advocacy.

Table 12 Key indicators of the SE sector in Romania

Number of social enterprises	2.947 (2025)
Contribution of the social economy sector to employment	1,7%
Growth rate	No data available

Social Public Procurement

Romania **does not have a centralized toolkit or dedicated online platform** exclusively focused on social public procurement (SPP). However, several regulatory frameworks and initiatives support its implementation. The **National Strategy for Public Procurement** (2015–2020) highlighted gaps in integrating social objectives, while Law no. 448/2006 and Law no. 98/2016 enable reserved contracts for sheltered units and enterprises supporting employment for persons with disabilities. Despite these legal provisions, their application remains limited, and engagement with social economy actors in procurement processes is inconsistent.

In 2024, **ADV Romania Group**, the **Romanian Social Economy Network** (RISE), and the **Social Finance Association** initiated a legislative amendment requiring public authorities managing procurement budgets over €3 million to allocate 0,5% to contracts with **Work Integration Social Enterprises** (WISEs). Though current laws allow such contracts, public authorities rarely implement them due to lack of obligation and limited awareness. The amendment has passed in the Senate and is under review in the Chamber of Deputies. Additionally, discussions with the Romanian Government and ANAP seek to introduce a mandatory percentage for direct procurement from WISEs to improve accessibility.

Training opportunities related to SPP remain underdeveloped. Organizations like IES (Institute of Social Economy) and RISE Romania provide workshops and policy dialogues, but structured learning programs specifically addressing social procurement—such as tendering, pricing, and compliance—are not widely available. Limited outreach and procedural complexity further discourage participation, emphasizing the need for simplified procurement mechanisms and capacity-building efforts.

Several **institutions oversee SPP** policy in Romania:

- National Agency for Public Procurement (ANAP): Regulates procurement procedures and provides technical guidance.





- Ministry of Labor and Social Protection: Manages sheltered unit programs under Law 448/2006.
- Department for Sustainable Development (Prime Minister's Office): Coordinates procurement strategies within broader social policy frameworks.
- Social Economy Organizations (RISE Romania, Ashoka, NESsT): Promote legislative reform, training initiatives, and policy development.
- Local Public Authorities: While responsible for procurement, they often lack specialized knowledge or structured policies supporting social economy actors.

To further develop SPP, ADV Romania and its partners organized a **webinar** in December 2024, bringing together representatives from public authorities and social enterprises to discuss procurement mechanisms and reserved contracts for WISEs. Following its success, ANAP has agreed to expand training efforts in 2025, supporting broader adoption of social procurement practices.

2.7 Bulgaria

Facts about Bulgaria

- 66% of its' economy is service-oriented
- Faces challenges of aging population
- Has an Act that legally defines a social enterprise
- Its' legal framework for Social Economy supports SPP but lacks strong mandates
- Capacity-building efforts on SPP exist but are still developing
- Hosts a low number of 170 SEs

General Background

Bulgaria's economy is predominantly **service-oriented**, with the services sector comprising approximately 66% of the GDP. Industry follows at about 26%, and agriculture at 6,8%. The country has experienced steady economic growth, with GDP per capita increasing by 9,6% in 2024. However, Bulgaria faces significant social challenges, including an aging population, with 24% aged 65 and over,





and a high age dependency ratio of 61,3%. These demographic trends contribute to labour shortages and increased social support needs.

Table 13 Key socioeconomic indicators for Bulgaria

Total population	6.437.360
Employment rate	70,2%
Unemployment rate	4,18%
GDP per capita (USD)	17.409

Social Economy

Bulgaria's social economy is a **developing sector**, primarily comprising cooperatives, associations, foundations, and other entities that prioritize social impact. Key support comes from organizations like the Bulgarian Social Enterprise Network (BULSEN) and a growing network of six regional focus centers that provide assistance and training.

The sector is underpinned by the **Social and Solidarity-Based Enterprises Act of 2018**, which legally defines a social enterprise. Criteria for recognition typically include: a primary social mission benefiting the community, measurable social added value, democratic governance, and the reinvestment of most profits back into the social objective. An official registration system for social enterprises exists under the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Social enterprises predominantly operate in areas such as social services and providing employment for vulnerable groups, as well as in manufacturing and environmental activities.

Table 14 Key indicators of the SE sector in Bulgaria

Number of social enterprises	170
Contribution of the social economy sector to employment	0,7%
Growth rate	Not available





Social Public Procurement

Bulgaria supports Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SPP) through strategic documents, tools, and platforms such as strategic plans and guidance, including the **Public Procurement System** (AOP) which offers guidance on integrating green and social criteria while it has a centralized digital platform with explaining public procurement procedures. In addition, some toolkits are also available from the ROMACT guidelines and the Interreg Circular Procurement Guidebook.

The **legal framework** for Social Economy in Bulgaria shows that Bulgaria's laws support SPP but lack strong innovation mandates. In Public Procurement Act, the Article 12 allows "reserved contracts" for social enterprises with at least 30% disadvantaged staff while it also enables social and green clauses. Additionally, the Social Enterprises Act (2018), encourages public sector engagement with registered social enterprises. The National Strategy promotes procurement from specialized enterprises (e.g., cooperatives for people with disabilities).

As for **learning opportunities** offered in Bulgaria, capacity-building efforts exist but are still developing. For example, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Public Procurement Act (AOP) offers procurement training to address gaps. Some workshops and forums are also available, provided by NGOs, AOP, and EU-funded projects like Interreg and CO-RESP. In this context EU support is very important as Interreg and Cohesion Funds often include SPP capacity-building.

Lastly, in Bulgaria the **key bodies** supporting SPP are:

- The Ministry of Finance, which leads procurement policy and legislation.
- The Public Procurement Agency (AOP), offering guidelines, training, and platform management.
- The Ministry of Labour & Social Policy (MLSP) which is responsible for managing the social enterprise register and SPP policy.
- The Ministry of Environment and the Energy Efficiency Agency which both contribute to green/social criteria development.





2.8 Cyprus

Facts about Cyprus

- Over 80% of its' economy is service-based
- Faces challenges of aging population
- Has not defined social and solidarity economy in any legal or official text
- Has a Registry of SEs
- Has no specific law or guidelines that define the implementation of SPP
- Offers no SPP training programs

General Background

Cyprus is a **Mediterranean island** nation situated at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa, known for its rich cultural heritage, strategic location, and divided geopolitical status. The economy of Cyprus is primarily service-based, with services accounting for over 80% of GDP and employment, driven largely by tourism (~4 million tourist arrivals in 2024, a record-breaking year), financial services, and shipping. Industry, including manufacturing and construction, contributes approximately 10%, while agriculture plays a minor role, employing only a small fraction of the population and contributing less than 2% to GDP. Despite economic resilience and growth in recent years, Cyprus continues to face several social challenges. **Unemployment**, although declining, remains a concern for youth and certain vulnerable groups. The country also grapples with rising living costs, income inequality, and social exclusion, particularly among migrants and low-income households. Furthermore, an **aging population** presents long-term pressures on healthcare and pension systems.

Table 15 Key socioeconomic indicators for Cyprus

Total population	966.400 (2023)
Employment rate	65–79 % in 2025
Unemployment rate	~5,1 % in 2025
GDP per capita (USD)	~41.100





Social Economy

The social and solidarity economy is not defined in any legal or official text in Cyprus. Cyprus only enacted its Social Enterprises Act in 2020, which was amended in December 2023 when the regulation was adopted for the creation of the **Registry for Social Enterprises**. The Registry is managed by the Registrar of Cooperative Societies & Social Enterprises, under the Cooperative Societies Service, which is a governmental national Agency. Since December 2023, the official registry is still in its early stage.

The country **defines the social enterprise** as follows:

1. General-purpose SEs – pursue social, cultural, or environmental goals.
2. Social-inclusion SEs – aim to integrate vulnerable groups (e.g., persons with disabilities).

According to Social Enterprises Act, A social enterprise is an enterprise registered in the Register of Social Enterprises as a social enterprise of general purpose or as a **social integration enterprise**. Registered social enterprises must provide goods or services with at least seventy percent (70%) of its revenue coming from business activities, apply predetermined procedures regarding the distribution of profits, be managed in a business-like, responsible and transparent manner, with the participation of members, employees and/or customers, and implement remuneration policies and practices to limit the wage gap. Social enterprises of general purpose pursue their social mission through the promotion of social, cultural and/or environmental actions, and reinvest at least eighty percent (80%) of their surplus in their social purpose. Social integration enterprises pursue their social objectives through the integration in their labour force of persons with disabilities and individuals belonging to vulnerable groups and reinvest at least forty percent (40%) of their surplus in their social purpose.

Until now, social economy in Cyprus spans various legal forms, including, **Cooperatives** (long-standing, regulated under Cooperative Societies Law), **Associations and Foundations** (common forms for NGOs and community groups), **Private Ltd Companies** by shares or guarantee, and partnerships, operating as social enterprises under the 2020 Social Enterprises Law. In 2020 there were 581 SSE entities in Cyprus, over 50% of which were Associations, while 3529 people were employed in all SSEs.

The main focal point is the **Cooperative Societies Service (CSS)**, which is the competent public national authority for Cooperative Societies, Social Enterprises, as well as for the promotion of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Cyprus.





Complementary, there are:

- Ministry of Labour, Welfare & Social Insurance
- Ministry of Commerce & Industry
- Ministry of Finance
- National Authority for Innovation
- Cyprus Network for Social Entrepreneurship: principal community of SEs
- Centre for Social Innovation

Social enterprises and social economy organizations work across social inclusion (employment of disabled/vulnerable groups), environmental projects and circular economy, cultural and community services and youth engagement and tech-driven innovation (e.g. Future Worlds Center initiatives).

Lastly, **registration** of a SE in the Registry for Social Enterprises requires submission within 20 working days, with a decision due within 30 days.

Table 16 Key indicators of the SE sector in Cyprus

Number of social enterprises	Cyprus adopted its Social Enterprises Act (Law 207[I]/2020), but the registry remains in early stages. As of 2023, only a few entities have formally registered, and comprehensive data is not yet available.
Contribution of the social economy sector to employment	OECD figures indicate that some 581 social and solidarity economy (SSE) entities—including cooperatives, associations, and foundations—created approximately 3.529 jobs as of 2020; estimated to generate up to 10% of Cyprus's GDP, based on the turnover of participating organisations.
Growth rate	There is no official data

Social Public Procurement





There is **no specific law or guidelines** that define the implementation of socially responsible public procurement (SPP) in Cyprus. Cyprus' national law Public Procurement and Related Issues (73(I)2016) is the basic legislation that covers tenders and public contracts. Law N.73(I)/2016 is aligned with the EU Directive 2014/24/EU, enabling the integration of social criteria in tenders.

Concerning the inclusion of **Social Clauses in Public Contracts**, Law 73(I)/2016 allows Contracting Authorities (CAs) to incorporate clauses (requirements) into public procurement procedures that contribute to the achievement of social objectives, such as promoting social and/or labor market inclusion of vulnerable groups, combating discrimination or advancing gender equality.

To achieve the above, social clauses must:

- Be linked to the subject-matter of the contract
- Be appropriate to the stage in which they are included (award or execution)
- Respect fundamental principles (equal treatment, transparency, proportionality)

Such clauses can be applied to all contracts, regardless of their nature or value at any stage of the procurement process (award or execution). This ensures that public investment delivers additional social value. However, it is emphasized that the incorporation of social clauses must **apply equally to all economic operators**. Social clauses must not introduce direct or indirect discrimination against any operator.

Specifically, **Article 7 of Law 73(I)/2016** allows awarding public contracts to “Entities integrating persons with disabilities or from other disadvantaged groups, when $\geq 30\%$ of workforce are from these groups, following a Council of Ministers decision”. This means that the law provides the possibility of awarding contracts to organizations whose main purpose is the social and occupational integration of persons with disabilities or disadvantaged persons or to award the implementation of contracts from sheltered employment programmes or organizations, in the case of more than 30% of the employed persons being people with disabilities or from socially excluded groups, after the executive decision of the Council of Ministers.

Article 39(1)(b) - Technical Specifications defines that CAs are obliged, for contracts intended for use by natural persons, to design technical specifications that take into account accessibility criteria for persons with disabilities or a design-for-all approach: “For all contracts intended for use by natural persons—whether the general public or the CA’s staff—technical specifications must consider accessibility criteria or universal design. If EU legislation has established mandatory accessibility standards, then these must be explicitly referenced in the technical specifications.”

Article 40(1) – Labels defines that CAs may (but are not obliged to) require a specific label as proof of compliance with environmental, social, or other characteristics in contracts for works, goods, or services.





Article 57(2) – Exclusion Grounds defines that CAs are required to exclude economic operators who have failed to meet obligations regarding tax or social security payments, as determined by a final judicial or administrative decision.

Article 58(1) – Selection Criteria foreshadows that CAs may define selection criteria based on:

- Suitability to pursue professional activity
- Economic and financial standing
- Technical and professional ability

Article 67(2) – Award Criteria foreshadows that CAs may define social aspects as award criteria: The “most economically advantageous tender,” according to the CA, may be determined by price or cost, including life-cycle costing, or the best price-quality ratio, which can include various qualitative, environmental, and social aspects. These may include quality, including technical value, design for all users, accessibility, environmental/social/innovative aspects and the qualifications and experience of personnel executing the contract, if personnel quality significantly affects contract performance.

Article 70 – Contract Performance Clauses foreshadows that CAs may impose specific conditions for contract execution, provided these are linked to the subject-matter of the contract and are stated in the procurement notice or documentation. These conditions may include economic, environmental, social, innovation, or employment-related aspects.

Articles 74 to 77 - Special Award Regime for Social and Other Specific Services says that certain services, particularly social, health, and educational services, exhibit specific characteristics and as a result, Member States require significant discretion in shaping the provider selection process.

This **special regime** ensures, the possibility to apply qualitative selection and award criteria, the simplification and flexibility of procedures and the possibility for Contracting Authorities to exclusively reserve participation in procurement procedures for such contracts to social economy entities whose purpose is to provide the services covered by the special award regime.

Article 76(2) - Principles of awarding contracts: “Contracting Authorities may take into account the need to ensure the quality, continuity, accessibility, affordability, availability, and comprehensiveness of services, the specific needs of different categories of users, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, user involvement and empowerment and innovation.”

Article 77 - Reserved contracts for certain services

Based on a decision of the Council of Ministers, Contracting Authorities may award public contracts to specific organizations, by means of a notice referring to this Article, exclusively for the health, social, and cultural services listed in Article 74, which are covered by specific CPV codes. The organization referred to must cumulatively meet some conditions, such as pursue a public service





mission related to the provision of the services, reinvest profits, be based on employee ownership or participatory principles and it must not have been awarded a contract by the same Contracting Authority for the specific services under this Article during the previous three years. The maximum duration of a contract awarded to these organizations shall not exceed three years.

Lastly, there are **no Cyprus-based specialized SPP programs** for training and education while the main government bodies or institutions responsible for SPP are:

- The Public Procurement Directorate of the Treasury of the Republic of Cyprus: Oversees Law 73/2016 compliance, and registers best practices including social criteria
- Council of Ministers: Provides executive approval for the social-employment contract exemption ($\geq 30\%$ vulnerable workforce)
- Ministries of Labour & Social Insurance, and Commerce & Industry: Likely to coordinate SPP frameworks and funding support





3. Selection of User Cases & Desk Analysis

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the **data collection and analysis** process conducted within the framework of Work Package 2 (WP2), aimed at acquiring in-depth knowledge on social public procurement practices across partner countries. It begins by a detailed account of the methodology used for collecting and processing data. The chapter further presents the results of the data analysis, including both country-specific findings and a comparative analysis across all participating regions. It concludes with the identification of key blocking points that hinder effective implementation, followed by a series of actions proposed for each identified barrier.

3.1 Data Collection

The specific objective of WP2 is to **investigate the development gaps** faced by both vendors (Social Enterprises) and buyers (Contracting Authorities) in the area of Social Public Procurement (SPP). To achieve this, targeted data needed to be collected from SEs and CAs in each partner country. The aim was to assess their familiarity with SPP and evaluate their level of readiness to engage in such practices. The data collection focused on gathering insights related to technical capacity, regulatory frameworks, perceived barriers and opportunities, as well as general knowledge and understanding of SPP. This section outlines the methodology and describes the data processing procedures used.

3.1.1 Methodology

The data collection was based on a structured **questionnaire survey** developed by the UniWA team. The aim was to gather meaningful insights from participants on the topic of Public Procurement, with a specific focus on Social Public Procurement (SPP). The design of the questionnaire prioritized clarity, brevity, and relevance to ensure high participation rates and avoid overwhelming respondents with lengthy or complex questions.

Each questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete and was **disseminated online** via Google Forms. In some cases, the questionnaire was administered through live interviews, during which partners presented the questions directly to representatives of Social Enterprises (SEs) or Contracting Authorities (CAs).

The SE questionnaire consisted of 26 questions presented as a single, continuous section. It was structured to address **three core thematic areas**:





1. Policy framework and procurement processes

This section explored the SEs' knowledge and familiarity with the subject of Public Procurement and SPP, including national procedures, relevant policies, existing plans and strategies, and the use of social clauses or criteria by public bodies (the government or any competent body).

2. Experience in public procurement and SPP

This section examined the SEs' experience in participating in public tenders, including sectors of interest, key challenges faced, lessons learned, problems encountered and perceived benefits or drawbacks during the procedure. It also inquired about the main means SEs use to discover tender opportunities and what types of support schemes and initiatives for SE operation (e.g., policy, funding, advisory, incentives) are available and what they offer to the SE.

3. Barriers and opportunities

This final part aimed to understand and identify the blocking points SEs face in participating in public procurement and SPP processes, and to collect suggestions on how these barriers could be addressed.

As for the questionnaire for CAs, it included 24 questions, also presented as a single unit, covering the following areas:

1. Policy framework

Questions in this section aimed to map out the landscape of the existing key government agencies or institutions responsible for SPP and Social Economy policy and the existing national/regional/local plans or strategies for SPP and Social Economy.

2. Public Procurement processes, SPP implementation and criteria/clauses

This section focused on the technical and procedural aspects of procurement, such as award procedures, use of electronic systems, monitoring mechanisms, and the incorporation of the Do No Significant Harm principle. It also assessed whether stakeholder engagement or end-user consultation is part of the process, and what types of SPP clauses or criteria are applied.

3. Barriers and opportunities

Finally, this section aimed to identify the main challenges in implementing SPP from the perspective of contracting authorities along with possible solutions, while also exploring available training and capacity-building initiatives.





The first step was the **selection of the user cases** to be interviewed, the target groups, Social Enterprises (SEs) and Contracting Authorities (CAs), were identified using the extensive networks of project partners but also available online catalogs of Social Enterprises.

3.1.2 Data processing

The following steps were followed to collect, process, and analyze the questionnaire responses:

- Questionnaire distribution: The questionnaires were completed by **selected Social Enterprises (SEs) and Contracting Authorities (CAs)** in each project partner's country.
- Data export: All responses were collected via Google Forms and **exported** in CSV format.
- Translation: Each partner **translated** the responses into English to ensure consistency and comparability across countries.
- Data submission: Translated responses were submitted to the lead partner of Work Package 2 (WP2), the University of West Attica (UniWA).
- Data consolidation: UniWA compiled all responses from partner countries into a single **unified excel file** for processing.
- Data cleaning: The dataset was **reviewed** to identify and correct inconsistencies, incomplete responses, and formatting issues to ensure data quality before analysis.
- Data analysis: The responses were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. **Quantitative analysis** involved creating visual representations such as pie charts and bar graphs to identify trends and distributions. **Qualitative analysis** involved reviewing and synthesizing open-ended responses to extract key insights and thematic findings.

3.2 Data analysis

3.2.1 Methodology

The methodology used for analyzing the data collected in this study was designed to capture both the breadth and depth of insights provided by respondents, ensuring a holistic understanding of the current landscape of Social Public Procurement across multiple countries. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining **quantitative** and **qualitative** analysis techniques.

Quantitative data, derived primarily from closed-ended survey questions, was processed using statistical methods to identify patterns, frequencies, and distributions. This included calculating





averages, percentages, and rankings to assess familiarity with procurement frameworks, participation levels in public and social procurement procedures, and perceived barriers or enablers. The results were then visualized through **bar graphs, and tables**, making trends and differences more accessible and easier to interpret. These visual tools provided a clear snapshot of where SEs and CAs stand in terms of awareness, capacity, and engagement with SPP.

In parallel, qualitative analysis was conducted on the open-ended responses collected from the interviews. This involved a **review, categorization, and synthesis** of responses to extract key messages, recurring challenges, and context-specific insights. Themes such as legal uncertainty, lack of technical assistance, communication gaps, and institutional culture emerged as central to understanding the operational and strategic barriers to SPP. This narrative layer of analysis helped deepen the understanding of why certain trends exist and how respondents perceive their own roles and limitations within the procurement ecosystem.

The analysis was first conducted **on a country-by-country basis**, allowing for a nuanced examination of national contexts. Each country's responses from SEs and CAs were reviewed separately, highlighting localized practices, specific legal or administrative conditions, and contextual challenges.

Once country-specific findings were established, a **comparative cross-country analysis** was carried out. This stage of the methodology was crucial in identifying common patterns, contrasting national approaches, and recognizing shared obstacles or successful practices. It enabled the formulation of more generalized insights and policy recommendations relevant across different settings while also respecting national specificities.

This structured methodological approach, blending **statistical analysis, thematic interpretation, and comparative reflection**, ensures that the findings are not only data-driven but also grounded in the lived experiences and perspectives of key actors in the SPP landscape.

3.2.2 Questionnaire Results per country

The following section presents the results gathered from each country based on the interviews with Social Enterprises (SEs) and Contracting Authorities (CAs). For each country, the key insights from SE and CA responses are outlined, supported by tables and charts to illustrate the findings more clearly.

Germany

Insights from Social Enterprises' Responses

The following findings are based on the analysis of data collected through the questionnaire completed by social enterprises.





Table 17 Questionnaire results for Germany

Results from SEs responses	
Factor	Score
Average number of employees	71
Level of familiarity with Public Procurement and corresponding policy framework	2,2/5
Level of familiarity with Social Public Procurement and corresponding policy framework	2,7/5
Percent of SEs who have participated in Public or Social Procurement	50%
Percentage of SEs have the capacity to participate in SPP procedures	50%
Percentage of SEs who can participate in SPP procedures but face difficulties	100%

As illustrated in the table above, the SEs interviewed had an average of 71 employees, indicating a moderate organizational size. However, their overall familiarity with public procurement remains relatively low, scoring just 2,2 out of 5. Familiarity with socially responsible public procurement (SPP) was slightly higher, with an average rating of 2,7, suggesting only a moderate level of awareness. Despite this, half of the SEs reported having participated in SPP procedures. Importantly, all respondents noted encountering challenges during the tendering process, highlighting persistent barriers to effective participation.

Knowledge on Public and Social Procurement

Based on the questionnaire responses collected from Germany, it is evident that the overall level of **knowledge** among Social Enterprises (SEs) regarding Public Procurement and Social Public Procurement (SPP) remains **limited and unevenly distributed**. Just two SEs considered their understanding good or very good.

This knowledge gap stems from several underlying factors. Many SEs are structured in ways that do not require or prioritize engagement with public procurement systems. The process of applying for and managing public contracts is often viewed as bureaucratic, time-consuming, and resource-intensive—barriers that discourage especially small or resource-constrained organizations. Moreover, a lack of trust in public institutions and the complexity of legal frameworks further





contribute to the limited interest or capacity to engage with SPP mechanisms. When asked specifically about their awareness of national or regional strategies and action plans related to the Social Economy and SPP, most SEs were either unaware or uncertain.

Experience on Public and Social Procurement

The overall experience with public and social procurement (SPP) is marked by a mix of cautious engagement, **limited frequency**, and sector-specific involvement. Half of the SEs interviewed had participated in public or social procurements but the frequency of participation remains low to moderate, typically ranging from one to five tenders per year. Four SEs did not provide responses to these questions, which may indicate either non-participation or lack of relevant experience.

While **electronic tendering** systems were widely used, they were often perceived as overly complex, inconsistent, creating a barrier for less experienced or smaller SEs. Positive experiences were generally linked to external support from public authorities or partner organizations, while negative experiences involved bureaucratic language, unclear or irrelevant selection criteria, strong market competition, and a sense of disadvantage due to lobbying by larger competitors.

The SEs **accessed** tenders through various means: public procurement platforms, direct communication from contracting authorities, email alerts, keyword-filtered website searches, and newsletters from networks or subscribed organizations.

Motivations for participating in tenders varied across organizations but generally centered on strategic growth and social impact. SEs reported engaging in procurement processes to access new markets, launch or promote products and services, increase organizational visibility, generate funding for operations and development, and contribute to social missions such as job creation for marginalized groups.

Support needs and mechanisms were also addressed in the responses. SEs emphasized the importance of **training** and **funding** programs to enhance their capacity to participate in tenders. Advisory services and networks were cited as useful.

Barriers and opportunities

The **most commonly reported issue** in participating in SPP is difficulty finding interesting tenders, cited by over 60% of respondents. This is followed by the cost of compiling a tender, limited organizational capacity, and tight timescales for preparing tenders, each mentioned by almost 40% of SEs. Additional barriers include using public procurement platforms, meeting financial guarantee requirements, and lack of access to guidance or communication with public authorities. Less frequently mentioned, but still notable, are concerns like topics relevant to women being overlooked, bureaucratic complexity, and influence from lobbying. In order to overcome these blocking points, participating in trainings on tender preparation was the most recommended solution.



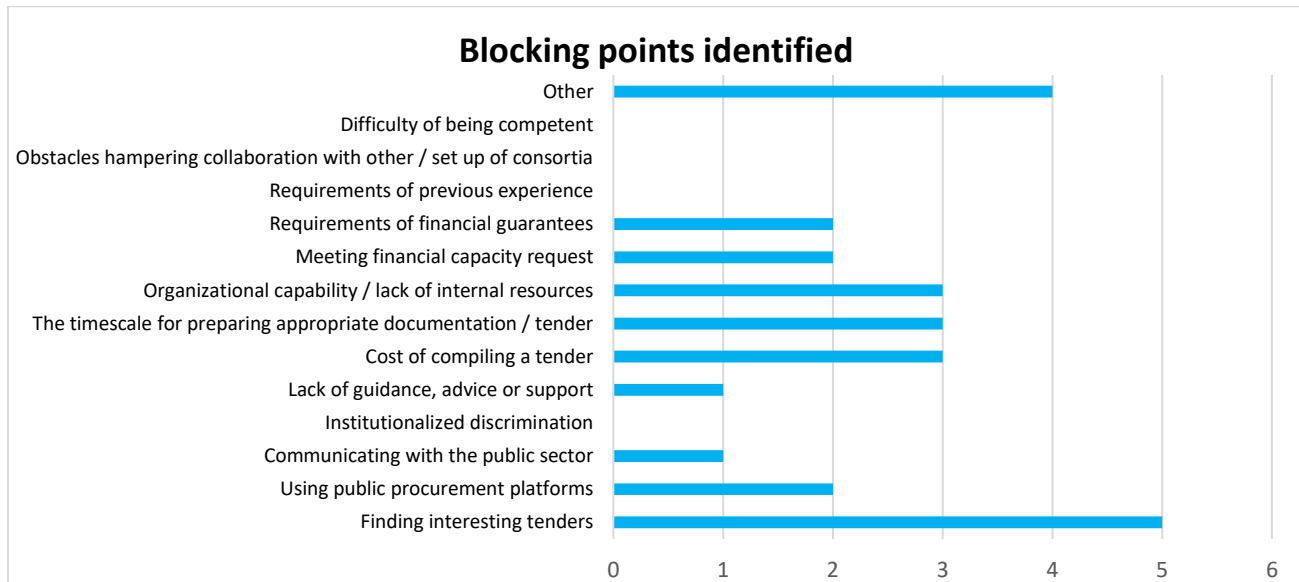


Figure 2 Chart showing identified blocking points in Germany

Insights from Contracting Authorities' Responses

Policy Framework and Experience in Public Procurement

Questionnaire respondents demonstrated **strong knowledge** of the legal framework for public and social procurement, including the social economy, relevant action plans, strategies, and criteria. Half reported frequent involvement in SPP across multiple sectors. They felt unsure of handling such procedures and considered involving external experts to support their participation.

Public procurement in Germany typically follows open, restricted, or negotiated procedures, regulated by national law and supported by platforms like eVergabe. Tendering is managed electronically, and while monitoring is common, it is usually informal and integrated into internal project management rather than based on a standardized national system. The **DNSH principle** is considered in public procurement, particularly for EU-funded projects like those under the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Its aim is to ensure that funded activities do not cause significant harm to environmental goals.

As for **involvement of stakeholders**, respondents had applied it in procurement procedures and confirm that it is common practice, especially in cases of highly technical procurements such as IT systems or infrastructure projects. It is also frequently used to help identify relevant sustainability criteria. In some cases, sustainability departments or interdisciplinary working groups are established to co-develop tender documents, ensuring that the procurement process aligns with both operational needs and broader policy objectives.





Barriers and opportunities

Based on the responses from the Contracting Authorities, public procurement in Germany faces three key barriers to effective implementation of social criteria. First, **lower-level staff** are often left to resolve competing priorities without clear guidance or authority, making it difficult to integrate social goals. Second, many officials believe existing national laws (e.g., minimum wage, anti-discrimination) already cover social standards, **reducing motivation** to go beyond legal compliance. Third, practical challenges—such as lack of training, outdated IT systems, limited collaboration, and legal uncertainties—make implementation feel overly complex. These factors combined hinder broader use of socially responsible procurement practices.

Training opportunities it is stated that they would be useful but not enough on their own. What really matters is empowerment, having the tools, clear strategies, and authority to apply knowledge when it's needed. Without real-time application, training is often forgotten. Low barriers to action, practical support, and organizational direction are more effective than occasional workshops that may never be put into practice based on the procurement professionals that answered the questionnaire.

Italy

Insights from Social Enterprises' Responses

The following findings are based on the analysis of data collected through the questionnaire completed by social enterprises.

Table 18 Questionnaire results for Italy

Results from SEs responses	
Factor	Score
Average number of employees	3
Level of familiarity with Public Procurement and policy framework	3,5/5
Level of familiarity with Social Public Procurement and policy framework	3/5
Percent of SEs who have participated in Public or Social Procurement	70%
Percentage of SEs have the capacity to participate in SPP procedures	80%
Percentage of SEs who can participate in SPP procedures but face difficulties	100%





The data on the above table reveals that the average social enterprise interviewed employs just three people, highlighting their small-scale structure. Despite this, their **familiarity** with public procurement is above **average** at 3,5 out of 5, while familiarity with social public procurement (SPP) is slightly lower at 3 out of 5. Notably, 70% of the SEs have already participated in public or social procurement processes, and 80% report having the capacity to engage in SPP procedures. However, all respondents who are capable of participating also face significant **difficulties**, pointing to persistent barriers even among well-prepared SEs.

Policy Framework and Experience in Public Procurement

Based on the interview findings from the Italian SEs, awareness and understanding of public procurement frameworks, over half of the SEs reported having a good or intermediate grasp of general procurement procedures, while only one expressed low familiarity, citing a lack of trust in the process. When it comes to SPP, most SEs described their knowledge as average, with only a few reporting either high or low familiarity. **Awareness** of national or regional strategies on SPP and the social economy was evenly split: about half of the SEs were aware of such frameworks, often referencing broad national initiatives related to sustainability or social inclusion. However, many remained unaware or uncertain, especially regarding frameworks for strategic purchasing partnerships. Only 8 out of 20 SEs said they were aware of specific social clauses in tenders while the remaining 12 expressed uncertainty, indicating a broader lack of visibility on how social criteria are applied in practice.

Regarding their **experience**, out of 20 respondents, 12 reported participating in traditional public tenders (not specifically linked to social criteria), while only 2 had taken part in SPP tenders. Two others attempted to participate but ultimately did not submit an offer, and 4 had never engaged in any public procurement processes. The limited participation in SPP tenders suggests ongoing barriers, such as a lack of familiarity with procedures, difficulties navigating digital tender platforms, and limited visibility of tenders with social impact criteria. Despite encountering difficulties, many SEs viewed public procurement as an **opportunity for new partnerships** and market expansion. One recurring challenge is the short timeframes and reliance on municipal websites to identify opportunities, which often prevents SEs from responding promptly. Respondents also stressed the importance of support structures.

Barriers and opportunities

The analysis of responses from SEs highlights several key barriers that hinder their participation in Social Public Procurement (SPP) procedures. 25% of SEs stated that they lack project management, technical and legal skills while they identified the following barriers as well. The most commonly cited issue is the **lack of guidance, advice, or support**, reported by 90% of respondents, underlining a widespread need for clearer information and assistance throughout the procurement process. This is followed by the requirements for previous experience, which 70% of SEs identified as a major





hurdle. Communication with the public sector was cited as a barrier by 45% of respondents, pointing to difficulties in establishing effective dialogue with contracting authorities. In addition, 40% of SEs noted challenges meeting financial guarantee requirements. Further obstacles include organizational capacity limitations, mentioned by 25% of respondents, and obstacles to collaboration or forming consortia, identified by 30%. These highlight internal and structural difficulties that prevent SEs from competing on equal footing with larger or more experienced bidders. Less frequently reported difficulties were short timescales for preparing documentation, institutional discrimination, difficulty being competent. Lastly, no SE stated that they had trouble finding relevant tenders.

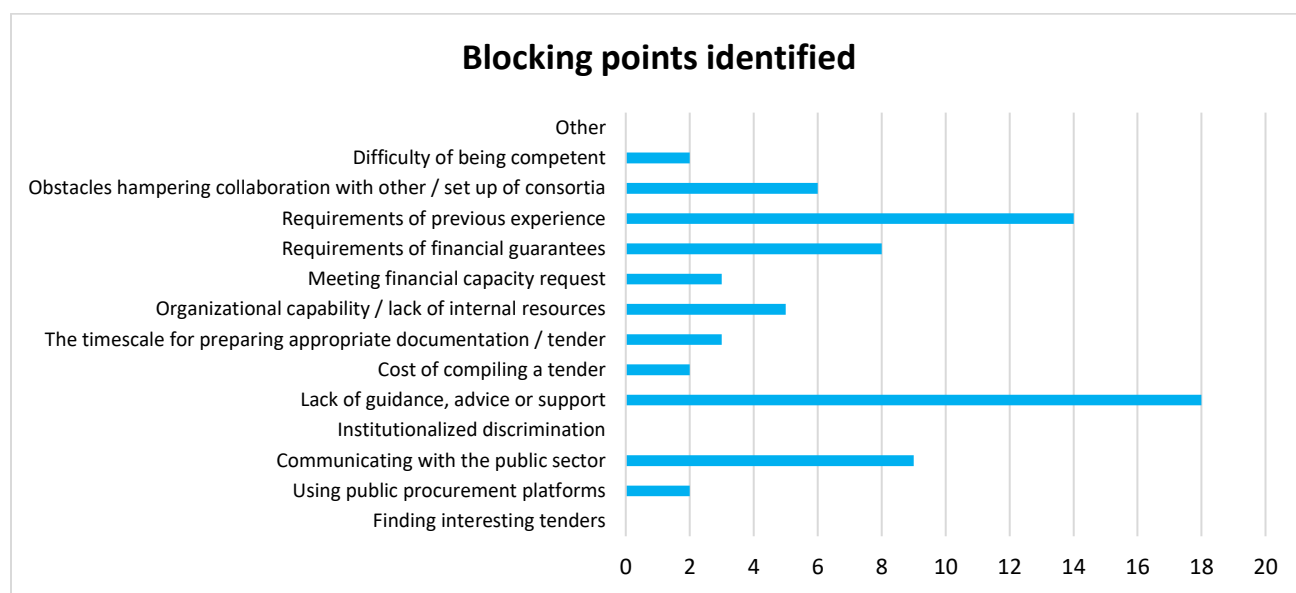


Figure 3 Chart showing identified blocking points in Italy

To overcome these barriers, SEs suggest practical solutions such as the development of a centralized platform to streamline procurement opportunities and offer clear documentation guidelines. They also recommend access to advisory services alongside targeted training programs. Some SEs proposed fostering partnerships with expert companies, organizing B2B networking events, and facilitating early engagement with buyers to better prepare for upcoming tenders.

Insights from Contracting Authorities' Responses

Policy Framework and Experience in Public Procurement

The responses from Contracting Authorities in Italy indicate that their overall **knowledge** of Social Public Procurement is **moderate** even though half of them stated that they have applied in SPP. While one respondent rated their knowledge as good and another as very good, most described it as average, primarily due to limited involvement or responsibilities in public procurement. A key reason identified was the lack of technical assistance and adequately trained personnel to prepare and





submit SPP tenders. Similarly, awareness of existing action plans, strategies, and relevant policy frameworks was also rated as average.

Most CAs said that they are aware of the **Do No Significant Harm (DNSH)** principle, which is increasingly integrated into public procurement in Italy, particularly in connection with investments funded by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. The DNSH principle was rated 3/5 important. The DNSH principle was rated as moderately important, receiving a score of 3 out of 5.

Seventy-five percent of the CAs stated that they possess the necessary **skills** to develop and publish an SPP tender, although they would still consider involving an external expert. Lastly, none of the respondents reported involving end-users or other stakeholders in the tender preparation process.

Barriers and opportunities

Interviews with Contracting Authorities identified three main challenges in the implementation of SPP in Italy. First, there is a widespread **lack of awareness** and knowledge of SPP principles among both public sector bodies and suppliers. This is largely due to limited training opportunities and insufficient dissemination of sustainability strategies. Second, the **complexity and fragmentation of procurement procedures** across national and regional platforms make implementation inconsistent and administratively burdensome. Third, **cultural and market resistance** remains a significant barrier, as both public and private actors often hold prejudices about the value of SPP, and there is a limited supply of certified or compliant providers in the market.

To address these **barriers**, respondents proposed a range of solutions. Improving awareness and understanding through targeted training sessions and accessible online platforms, promoting dialogue and collaboration between public institutions and businesses. Despite the existence of training programmes, not all respondents were aware of them.

Greece

Insights from Social Enterprises' Responses

The following findings are based on the analysis of data collected through the questionnaire completed by social enterprises.





Table 19 Questionnaire results for Greece

Results from SEs responses	
Factor	Score
Average number of employees	9
Level of familiarity with Public Procurement and corresponding policy framework	2,9/5
Level of familiarity with Social Public Procurement and corresponding policy framework	2,7/5
Percent of SEs who have participated in Public or Social Procurement	17%
Percentage of SEs have the capacity to participate in SPP procedures	33%
Percentage of SEs who can participate in SPP procedures but face difficulties	72%

The data analysis reveals that on average, SEs employ nine people, reflecting their generally small size. The self-reported level of familiarity with public procurement and its policy framework stands at 2,9 out of 5, while familiarity with SPP-specific policies is slightly lower, at 2,7 out of 5. Only 17% of SEs have previously participated in public or social procurement procedures, indicating **limited engagement** with these mechanisms. While 33% of SEs report having the capacity to take part in SPP processes, a significant 72% of those capable participants still **face difficulties** in doing so, suggesting that even when SEs possess the ability to engage in SPP, they are often hindered by other barriers.

Policy Framework and Experience in Public Procurement

Based on the interview responses, the SEs knowledge in Public and Social procurement procedures is close to **average** due to reasons of **low interest and awareness** on this matter and also financial reasons as well. Knowledge on existing action plans, strategies, SPP criteria/clauses and existing systems is also very low. Most do not participate in public tenders and the SEs who do participate, do it 2-5 times per year.

In terms of their **experience** with public procurement, many Social Enterprises described the process as **complex, time-consuming, and costly**. While some acknowledged certain benefits, such as increased transparency, digital accessibility, and time savings in specific cases like health-related services, they also emphasized significant downsides. A recurring concern was the need for





specialized knowledge and external support, such as legal or accounting expertise, which adds to the financial and administrative burden. Others described the experience as frustrating and discouraging due to **unclear frameworks**, vague criteria, and an impersonal approach. For smaller organizations, particularly those relying on **limited staff** and volunteers, the extensive documentation and procedural demands made participation feel nearly impossible.

Some of the interviewed Social Enterprises reported using **online platforms** to search for tenders, with some assigning a **dedicated staff member** to monitor opportunities. Others rely on information provided by their accountant, certification services, or public procurement portals. A key motivation for participating in tenders is the potential for **new collaborations**, which many see as a gateway to broader partnerships. Additionally, access to new markets and the possibility to launch innovative products were cited as important incentives. To address the challenges they face, SEs highlighted the need for targeted **training programs as the primary solution**. However, supportive measures such as financing schemes and tax incentives were also seen as valuable tools to encourage and facilitate greater participation.

Barriers and opportunities

A significant portion of Social Enterprises identified key barriers preventing their participation in public procurement processes. The most frequently cited issue, reported by 53% of respondents, was the **lack of guidance, support, and advisory services** to navigate procurement procedures. Additionally, 47% pointed to the requirement for **financial guarantees** as a major obstacle. Difficulties in establishing communication with public authorities and identifying relevant tender opportunities were noted by 41% of SEs. Time constraints, the cost of preparing tender documentation, and challenges in using procurement platforms were concerns for 23,5% of respondents. Moreover, 18% indicated that the requirement for prior procurement experience acted as a barrier to entry, while 12% raised concerns about **systemic obstacles**, including institutional discrimination and limited opportunities for meaningful collaboration with public entities.



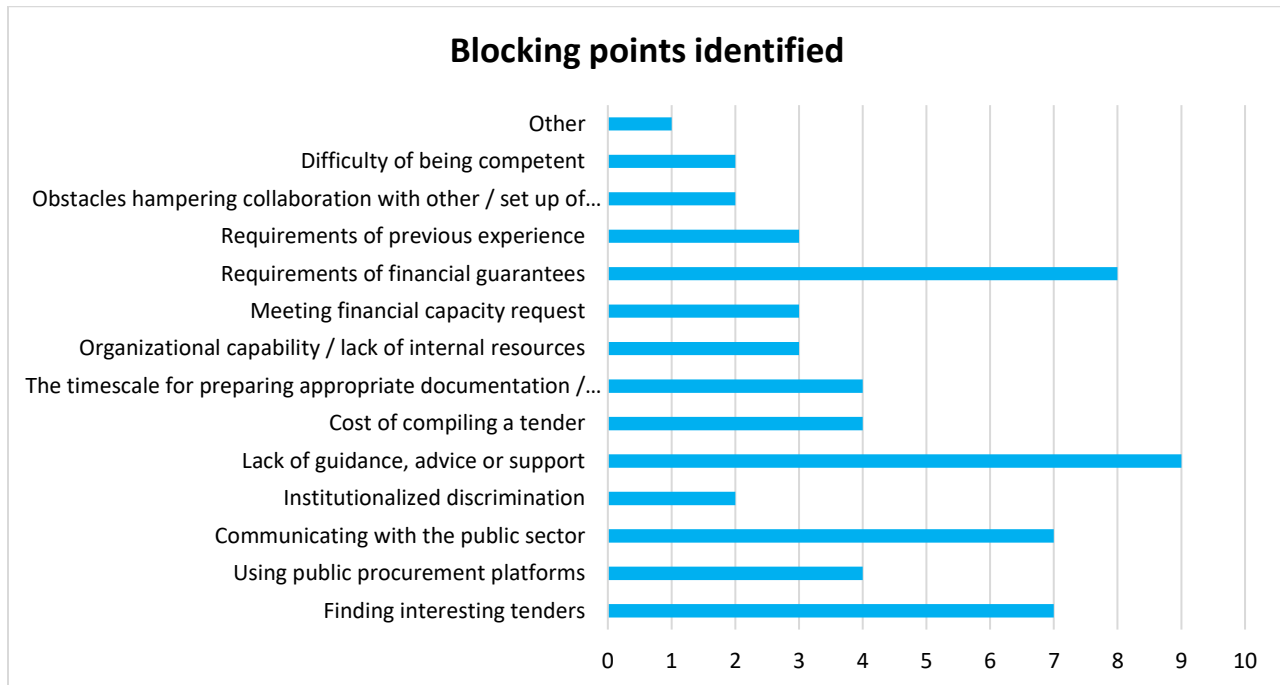


Figure 4 Chart showing blocking points identified in Greece

Insights from Contracting Authorities' Responses

Policy Framework and Experience in Public Procurement

The majority of Contracting Authorities who responded to the questionnaire demonstrated an **average level of knowledge** regarding SPP. Among them, only one respondent reported having a good understanding, while another indicated very limited knowledge. The primary reasons cited for this lack of familiarity were financial constraints and limited engagement with SPP practices. When asked specifically about their knowledge of the policy framework, 40% rated their understanding as good. However, responses varied significantly, with others describing their knowledge as average, poor, or very poor, indicating a lack of consistency across institutions. Notably, none of the respondents were aware of existing SPP clauses, national action plans, or strategic frameworks.

According to interview feedback, the most commonly used **award procedure** in Greece is the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT). This aligns with Directive 2014/24/EU, which encourages a move away from awarding contracts based solely on price, thereby allowing greater consideration of social criteria in public procurement decisions (Article 67).

Regarding the **Do No Significant Harm** (DNSH) principle, 50% of respondents were familiar with the concept but considered it to be of low relevance in the context of procurement.

Additionally, none of the CAs reported **involving end-users or external stakeholders** in the preparation phase of tenders. While most stated that they possess the necessary project





management, legal, and technical capacities to develop and publish SPP tenders internally, they also acknowledged that they have never sought external expertise to address potential skills gaps.

Barriers and opportunities

Most respondents, stated that they remain hesitant to move beyond the "lowest price" approach, viewing **social criteria** as legally unclear, complex, and burdensome. This is compounded by the absence of a national strategy, standardized social criteria, and practical guidelines. There is also no dedicated online platform or section for SPP within existing procurement systems.

Institutional capacity was identified as another major challenge, particularly at the local and regional levels, where contracting authorities often lack sufficient human resources and expertise. Social Enterprises also face constraints, including limited capacity to participate in procurement procedures. Additionally, political will to promote SPP remains weak, and there is little systematic monitoring to assess its use or impact.

Despite these challenges, key **opportunities** include improving awareness and understanding of SPP, strengthening regulatory clarity, and investing in capacity building for both public authorities and Social Enterprises. The development of a national SPP strategy, along with targeted support and monitoring tools, could significantly enhance implementation and impact. To enhance SPP in Greece, several practical measures include developing toolkits and model documents, capacity-building programs organized for both Cas and SEs, support by clear guidance, designated SPP focal points, and updated functionalities on the existing platforms.

Spain

Insights from Social Enterprises' Responses

The following findings are based on the analysis of data collected through the questionnaire completed by social enterprises.

Table 20 Questionnaire results for Spain

Results from SEs responses	
Factor	Score
Average number of employees	4
Level of familiarity with Public Procurement and corresponding policy framework	3/5





Level of familiarity with Social Public Procurement and corresponding policy framework	3,1/5
Percent of SEs who have participated in Public or Social Procurement	40%
Percentage of SEs have the capacity to participate in SPP procedures	85%
Percentage of SEs who can participate in SPP procedures but face difficulties	65%

Based on the above table, the social enterprises interviewed, have an average of 4 employees, revealing a small-scale structure, and a **moderate level** of familiarity with public procurement and its policy framework, scoring around 3 to 3,1 out of 5. While 40% of these SEs have participated in public or social procurement processes, a much higher percentage have the **capacity** to engage in Social Public Procurement procedures. However, despite this capacity, 65% of them still face difficulties when attempting to participate in SPP.

Policy Framework and Experience in Public Procurement

Based on interviews in Spain, SEs generally have **limited familiarity** with public procurement frameworks. A few, have moderate understanding but most find procurement complex and bureaucratic, which discourages participation. Familiarity with Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SPP) is even lower, while SEs support its principles, they lack knowledge of specific procedures, legal tools, and SPP strategies, reflecting poor communication from policymakers. **Knowledge** of SPP criteria in tenders is low, with confusion over vague or inconsistent social clauses and concerns about greenwashing.

Regarding **experience** in tender procedures, they highlight the limited direct involvement of Spanish SEs in formal public procurement, particularly in tenders with SPP clauses. Only 35% of the interviewed organizations have participated in procurement procedures, most of them both public and SPP. Based on their responses CAs typically engage with public entities via informal networks rather than public procurement platforms, citing administrative burden and complexity. Their **motivation** for procurement involvement includes mission alignment, stable revenue, and reputation, but complexity and lack of expertise limit formal tender participation.

Barriers and opportunities

The questionnaire responses reveal that the most common obstacle faced by SEs is the **lack of guidance, advice, or support**, reported by more than 10 respondents, which represents more than 50% of all responses. This is followed by challenges related to the timescale for preparing appropriate documentation or tenders, and difficulties in finding interesting tenders, each cited by 7 respondents. Around 20% of respondents identified both the requirements of financial guarantees





and a lack of internal resources or organizational capacity as key barriers. Meanwhile, some pointed to issues such as meeting financial capacity requirements, the cost of compiling tenders, and difficulties using public procurement platforms, each mentioned by 4 respondents. Less noted were the obstacles of communicating with the public sector and the institutionalized discrimination.

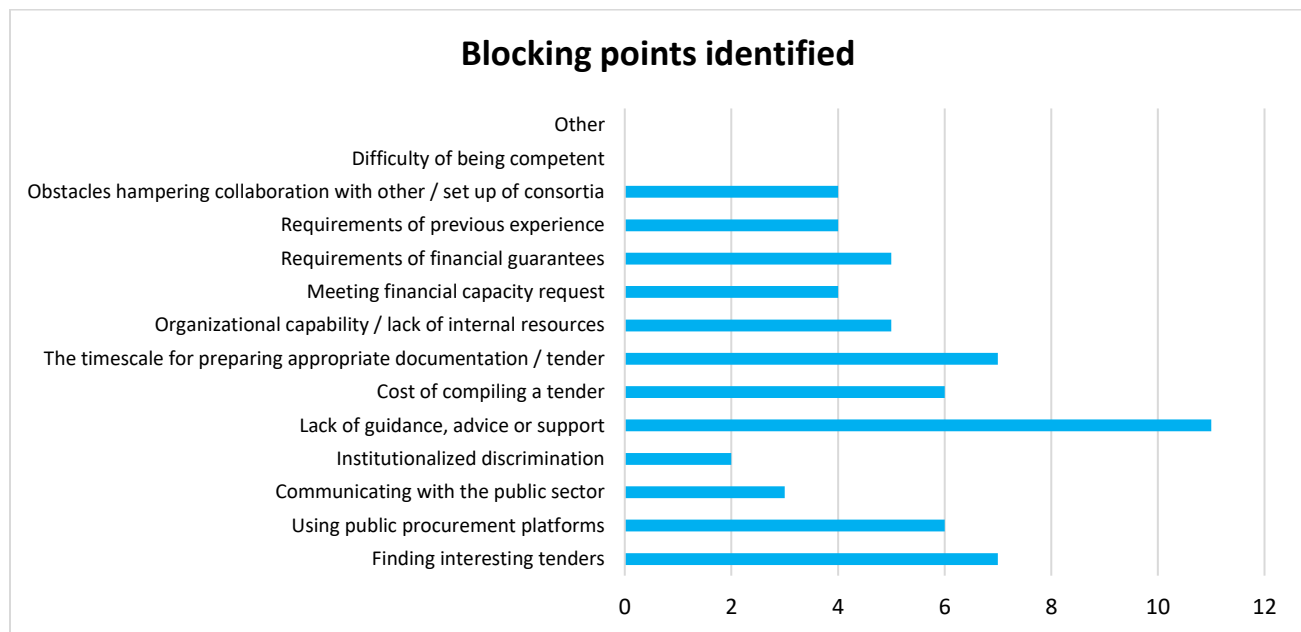


Figure 5 Chart showing identified blocking points in Spain

Insights from Contracting Authorities' Responses

Policy Framework and Experience in Public Procurement

The interviewed CAs rated their knowledge of Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SPP) **highly**, with an average score of 4,3 out of 5, and most describing their understanding as **very good**. Their familiarity with relevant policy frameworks also received a strong average rating of 4,2 out of 5. All respondents indicated that they are aware of existing action plans, strategies, and applicable criteria or clauses related to SPP.

Based on the responses, the most common **public procurement procedures** are the open procedure for larger contracts and the restricted procedure for more complex ones. Tenders are managed through a central **platform**, a mandatory electronic system for publishing and submitting bids. Contract monitoring and evaluation are conducted via specialized platforms, used by public entities like UPV, to ensure compliance with terms, including social and environmental clauses. As for the **DNSH principle**, it is increasingly incorporated into public procurement policies, particularly in line with the EU Green Deal and Spain's climate action plans.





In addition, three out of five respondents reported **involving end-users** in the process, noting that end-users and other stakeholders are often consulted, especially when the tender concerns public services or products that directly affect the community. Lastly, CAs stated that they face project management, legal and technical issues during SPP procedures.

Barriers and opportunities

The most commonly identified barriers to advancing SPP include a widespread resistance to change and a **lack of incentives**, both financial and institutional. Respondents highlighted a lack of training and awareness across both the public and private sectors, which hinders the effective implementation of SPP. Traditional procurement practices, often rigid and risk-averse, pose a challenge to innovation, while administrative complexity and excessive requirements further discourage participation, especially from smaller or social enterprises. **Budget constraints** and limited resources to invest in sustainable infrastructure or technologies also act as significant deterrents. Additionally, a lack of **institutional commitment**, professional competence, and consistent follow-up to ensure compliance with social or environmental criteria weakens the overall impact of SPP efforts.

Malta

Insights from Social Enterprises' Responses

The following findings are based on the analysis of data collected through the questionnaire completed by social enterprises.

Table 21 Questionnaire results for Malta

Results from SEs responses	
Factor	Score
Average number of employees	25
Level of familiarity with Public Procurement and corresponding policy framework	2,9/5
Level of familiarity with Social Public Procurement and corresponding policy framework	2,7/5
Percent of SEs who have participated in Public or Social Procurement	40%





Percentage of SEs have the capacity to participate in SPP procedures	70%
Percentage of SEs who can participate in SPP procedures but face difficulties	43%

Based on the above, Social Enterprises in Malta report an average of 25 employees, suggesting a relatively **moderate organizational size**. Their familiarity with public procurement and its policy framework is rated at 2,9 out of 5, while knowledge specific to Social Public Procurement is slightly lower at 2,7. Participation levels are average, with 40% of SEs having taken part in public or social procurement procedures. Additionally, 70% report having the capacity to engage in SPP, though 43% of these believe they would encounter significant difficulties, indicating the presence of critical barriers despite their readiness to participate.

Policy Framework and Experience in Public Procurement

The collected data reveals significant **knowledge gaps** among SEs regarding both public procurement and SPP. Forty percent of SEs rated their understanding of public procurement as below average, with no respondents indicating a very good or excellent level of knowledge. In contrast, 80% reported an average understanding of the SPP policy framework, suggesting a slightly better, but still limited, familiarity with SPP specifically. Crucially, 90% of SEs were unaware or uncertain about existing governmental SPP strategies, and none were familiar with SPP criteria or clauses. In fact, 40% believed that such criteria do not exist. These findings highlight a pressing need for improved education, guidance, and visibility of SPP policies and tools.

Experience with public procurement among SEs in Malta remains limited. Half of the SEs surveyed have never participated in public tenders, and only four have some experience with general procurement processes not SPP specific. One SE reported an incomplete attempt at submission, indicating only partial engagement. In terms of SPP, 57% of SEs have never participated, while 33% have done so occasionally, and only 11% participate regularly.

Additionally, 40% of SEs are not actively seeking tenders, and only a minority use structured tools like public procurement platforms (30%), tender alert services (20%), or dedicated staff (20%) for tracking opportunities. While 80% are motivated by the potential for new market opportunities, and 30% see tenders as a way to launch new products or services, awareness of support mechanisms remains uneven. Only 40% are aware of tax incentives, 20% recognize funding schemes, and just 10% mention training programmes, while 30% report no known incentives at all. These patterns suggest that, despite commercial interest, SEs face clear **challenges in capacity, awareness, and access**, which limit their active participation in SPP.

Barriers and opportunities

Based on responses from Social Enterprises, 80% identified **tight tender preparation timelines**, difficulties in **finding relevant opportunities**, and **institutionalized discrimination** as major barriers





to participating in public procurement. Additionally, 60% cited challenges in communicating with public authorities and obstacles to effective collaboration as significant blocking points. A further 40% pointed to the complexity of using public procurement platforms, insufficient guidance, and the high cost of preparing tender submissions. Less frequently mentioned, but still relevant, were requirements for prior experience, the need for financial guarantees, and limited internal resources.

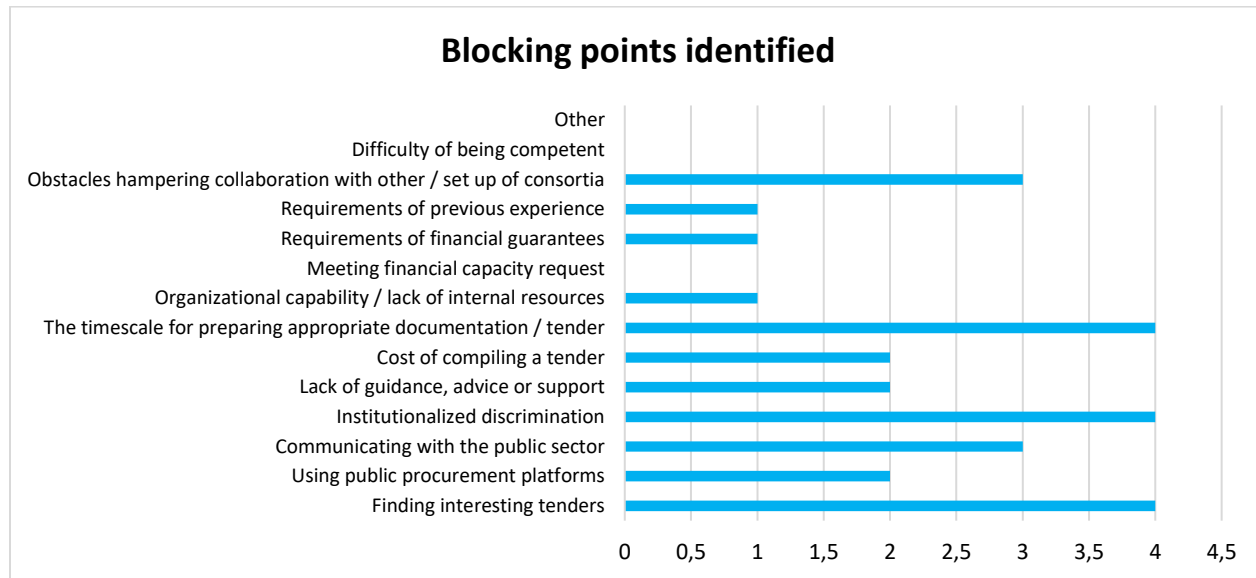


Figure 6 Chart showing blocking points in Malta

Nevertheless, **training and consultancy services** emerge as the most commonly proposed cross-cutting solutions. Enhancing digital infrastructure, particularly through centralized procurement platforms, is seen as essential for improving access and participation. Additionally, fostering early engagement and collaborative mechanisms between SEs and public authorities is viewed as a critical step toward overcoming structural barriers and building more inclusive procurement practices.

Please note that engaging with public authorities in Malta was proven particularly challenging. Despite multiple outreach attempts, there was limited responsiveness, largely due to the unclear institutional framework surrounding Social Public Procurement (SPP) in the country. Additionally, it was often difficult to identify and connect with the appropriate responsible persons within the relevant public bodies, which hindered efforts to secure meaningful input or participation.

Bulgaria

Insights from Social Enterprises' Responses

The following findings are based on the analysis of data collected through the questionnaire completed by social enterprises.





Table 22 Questionnaire results for Bulgaria

Results from SEs responses	
Factor	Score
Average number of employees	19
Level of familiarity with Public Procurement and corresponding policy framework	3/5
Level of familiarity with Social Public Procurement and corresponding policy framework	2,7/5
Percent of SEs who have participated in Public or Social Procurement	10%
Percentage of SEs have the capacity to participate in SPP procedures	70%
Percentage of SEs who can participate in SPP procedures but face difficulties	71%

Based on the data on the above table, Social Enterprises in Bulgaria have an average of 19 employees, indicating a **modest organizational size**. Their self-assessed familiarity with public procurement procedures is moderate, with an average rating of 3 out of 5. However, knowledge of Social Public Procurement frameworks is slightly lower, at 2,7. Only 10% of SEs have previously participated in public or social procurement processes, suggesting **limited engagement**. Despite this, 70% report having the capacity to participate in SPP procedures. However, of those, 71% face significant challenges, highlighting persistent barriers in navigating procurement systems and requirements.

Policy Framework and Experience in Public Procurement

Social Enterprises in Bulgaria, particularly smaller and less-established ones, generally **lack the administrative capacity, technical expertise, and awareness** needed to effectively engage in public procurement processes. While some SEs, especially those involved in EU-funded projects or part of larger cooperative structures, demonstrate a better understanding, the majority remain unfamiliar with procurement procedures. Awareness of SPP as a distinct policy tool is limited. Most SEs are unaware that public tenders can include social or environmental objectives, and knowledge of SPP clauses or criteria in tender documents is virtually non-existent, except among a few organizations with exposure to EU programmes or NGO networks. Despite national frameworks such as the National Concept for the Social Economy (2021–2025) and upcoming initiatives under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, communication gaps between policymakers and SEs persist. As a result, the





strategic potential of SPP remains largely untapped due to poor dissemination and limited practical guidance.

Engagement of Bulgarian SEs in public procurement remains limited and sector-specific, with participation mainly concentrated in areas such as social services, food supply, consulting, and environmental products. While the use of the national Public Procurement System (AOP) has enabled electronic access to tenders, many SEs face challenges navigating its technical complexity. Issues such as short deadlines, strong price competition, limited internal resources, and unfamiliarity with e-procurement systems hinder wider participation.

Nevertheless, SEs that have participated in SPP tenders have found value in the inclusion of social criteria, such as employment of vulnerable groups and fair labor practices, and recognize procurement as a means to scale their impact and enhance financial sustainability. Public contracts offer SEs legitimacy, increased visibility, and the opportunity to diversify revenue streams. Support networks and advisory services from NGOs have been instrumental in **improving access and understanding**. However, for SEs to fully leverage public procurement opportunities, continued capacity-building, clearer guidance, and stronger enforcement of social clauses remain essential.

Barriers and opportunities

The most commonly identified barrier to participating in public procurement, cited by 63% of Social Enterprises, is the difficulty in **finding relevant** and suitable tender opportunities. This is followed by the **high cost** of preparing tender submissions, reported as a significant obstacle by 44% of respondents. Additionally, 38% of SEs highlighted the **lack of guidance**, advisory support, and technical assistance as key challenges. Financial guarantee requirements were identified by 31% as a deterrent, while 25% pointed to barriers such as insufficient internal resources, lack of prior experience, and difficulties in **communicating with public authorities**. Less frequently mentioned—but still relevant—obstacles include tight submission deadlines, perceived competitiveness issues, institutionalized discrimination, and the complexity of using public procurement platforms.



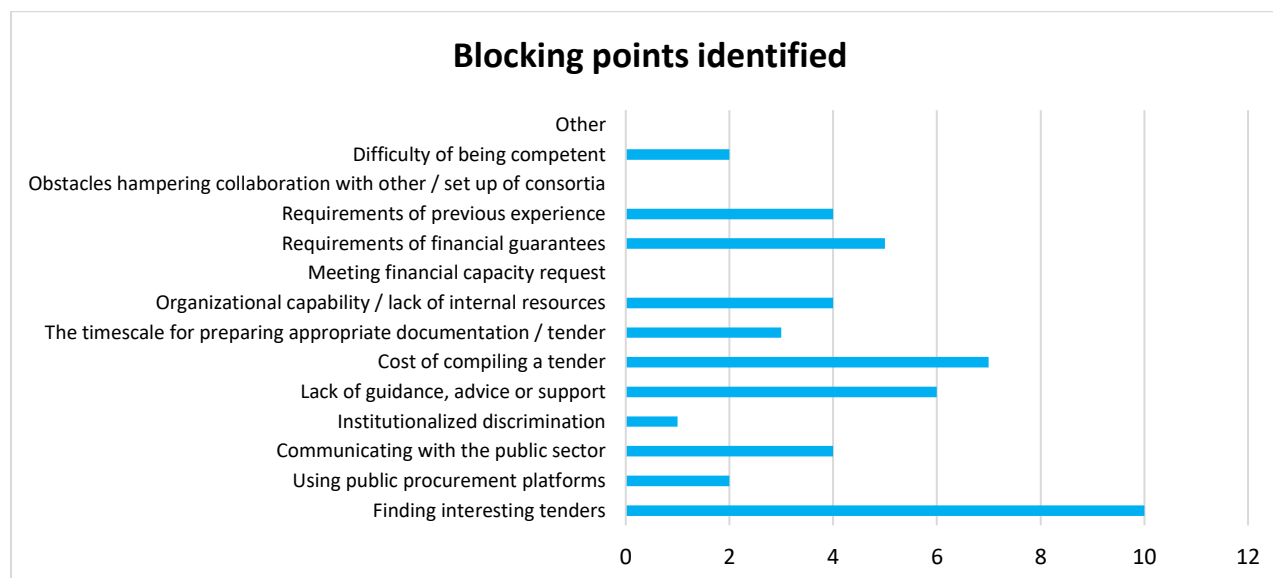


Figure 7 Chart showing blocking points in Bulgaria

To address the main barriers hindering SEs participation in public procurement, several targeted solutions are recommended. Simplifying tender procedures, extending deadlines, and improving the usability of e-procurement platforms can significantly reduce administrative burdens. Capacity building through training, mentoring, and technical assistance is essential to strengthen SEs' ability to engage in procurement processes. **Financial support mechanisms** such as bid preparation grants and guarantees can ease cash flow constraints, while risk mitigation tools can make contracts more accessible. On the policy level, **raising awareness of SPP**, incorporating mandatory or weighted social criteria, and introducing reserved contracts or quotas for SEs would help create a more inclusive market. Encouraging partnerships and enhancing transparency through monitoring and reporting will further foster trust and long-term engagement in SPP.

Insights from Contracting Authorities' Responses

Policy Framework and Experience in Public Procurement

Based on the responses, Contracting Authorities in Bulgaria demonstrate an **average level** of knowledge regarding Socially Responsible Public Procurement, with a self-assessed score of 3,2 out of 5. Most respondents reported being aware of existing action plans, strategies, and relevant SPP criteria and clauses. In practice, however, the majority of public procurement awards continue to rely on the lowest price criterion, with the use of the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) approach remaining rare. Only one CA indicated actual **experience** in implementing SPP procedures. Awareness of the **"Do No Significant Harm"** (DNSH) principle appears limited and uncertain among respondents.





Furthermore, **stakeholder engagement** in tender preparation is minimal, with only one CA reporting the involvement of end-users or external stakeholders in the process. While most CAs believe they have the capacity to develop and publish SPP tenders, many face project management and technical challenges that often lead them to consider seeking external expertise.

Barriers and opportunities

Contracting Authorities reported several key challenges hindering their ability to effectively implement Socially Responsible Public Procurement. A common barrier is the **limited organizational experience with SPP**, with some authorities noting that such procedures are not currently initiated or planned within their scope. A significant constraint is the shortage of legal personnel qualified to prepare procurement procedures, compounded by the lack of systematic training opportunities for legal staff. Frequent amendments to the Public Procurement Act (PPA) further complicate compliance and operational clarity, placing additional strain on already limited legal resources. Moreover, although the “most economically advantageous tender” criterion is used, it often results in the selection of low-budget contractors who lack the technical capacity, skilled personnel, or professional qualifications required for quality service delivery.

Additional challenges include a general **lack of knowledge and experience** in public procurement among staff, insufficient training in SPP-specific requirements, and limited financial and budgetary resources. To overcome these issues, Contracting Authorities emphasize the need for targeted **capacity-building measures**, including structured training programmes, up-to-date legal guidance, and increased financial support to enhance institutional readiness for implementing SPP.

Romania

Insights from Social Enterprises' Responses

The following findings are based on the analysis of data collected through the questionnaire completed by social enterprises.

Table 23 Questionnaire results for Romania

Results from SEs responses	
Factor	Score
Average number of employees	6
Level of familiarity with Public Procurement and corresponding policy framework	3/5





Level of familiarity with Social Public Procurement and corresponding policy framework	2,7/5
Percent of SEs who have participated in Public or Social Procurement	40%
Percentage of SEs have the capacity to participate in SPP procedures	71%
Percentage of SEs who can participate in SPP procedures but face difficulties	53%

Based on the above table, Social Enterprises in Romania tend to be **small in size**, with an average of just six employees, which may impact their administrative and operational capacity. Their familiarity with public procurement procedures is **moderate**, with a self-assessed score of 3 out of 5, while understanding of Social Public Procurement frameworks is slightly lower at 2,7. **Participation remains limited**, with only 40% of SEs having taken part in public or social procurement processes. Notably, 71% of respondents indicated they have the capacity to engage in SPP procedures, however, more than half (53%) of those capable still encounter significant challenges.

Policy Framework and Experience in Public Procurement

Most social enterprises in Romania report **limited knowledge** and confidence when it comes to public procurement, with over 70% of respondents rating their understanding as average or poor. Awareness of Socially Responsible Public Procurement is even lower, with fewer than 10% of SEs are familiar with specific clauses or governmental strategies related to SPP. Only two respondents could cite concrete examples of social procurement provisions. This knowledge gap is compounded by **limited communication and guidance from public authorities**, making it difficult for SEs to understand how they might meet SPP criteria or benefit from related opportunities. Despite the existence of national strategies and legal provisions, their visibility and practical application remain weak among SEs, highlighting the need for more accessible, targeted training and awareness-raising initiatives.

While approximately 50% of surveyed SEs in Romania have participated in public procurement tenders, only a small fraction, less than 20%, have **experience** specifically with SPP tenders. Among those who did participate, engagement tends to be occasional and concentrated in sectors such as cleaning services, event organizing, and archiving. Success rates are low, only three SEs reported winning contracts, and only one provided feedback on SPP clauses. Use of the **electronic procurement system** (SEAP) is mixed, with some SEs appreciating the learning experience, while others struggle with bureaucracy and unclear procedures. SEs primarily pursue tenders to access new markets, gain financial stability, and build institutional partnerships, although some do so out of necessity due to the nature of their services. Despite the availability of support, such as training





programs, funding schemes, and advisory services, practical barriers persist, leaving many SEs underprepared and underserved in their efforts to engage in social procurement.

Barriers and opportunities

Based on the responses, 52% of social enterprises identified **short deadlines** for tender preparation and difficulties in communication with public authorities as key barriers. Additionally, 38% reported challenges in **finding relevant tenders** and cited **financial guarantee requirements** as significant obstacles. One-third (33%) of SEs pointed to limited internal resources as a constraint, while 29% struggled to meet requirements related to prior experience and financial capacity. Lastly, 19% highlighted the high cost of preparing a bid and difficulties navigating public procurement platforms as further impediments to participation.

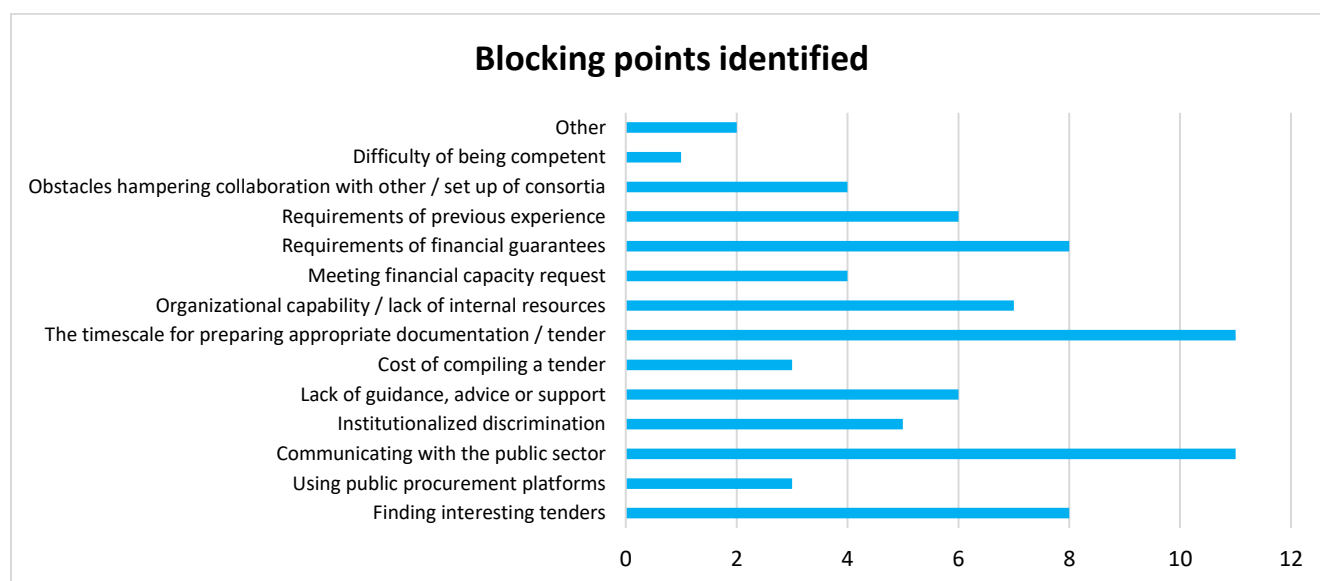


Figure 8 Chart showing blocking points in Romania

To address the key barriers SEs face in accessing SPP opportunities, several practical solutions emerged from collective responses. First, SEs strongly advocate for regular, high-quality training programs focused on bid preparation, documentation, and early engagement with contracting authorities. Complementary consultancy services can provide tailored guidance, while B2B events and early-stage buyer interactions can enhance collaboration and confidence. Second, respondents call for a shift from lowest-price selection to a **“best value for money” approach** that prioritizes social impact, innovation, and sustainability. Simplifying documentation and reducing bureaucratic hurdles are also essential to creating a fairer playing field. Finally, the development of centralized, user-friendly platforms to list public tenders, combined with improved advisory support and stronger communication between SEs and public institutions, would significantly enhance access, transparency, and participation in the procurement process.





Insights from Contracting Authorities' Responses

Policy Framework and Experience in Public Procurement

Based on the questionnaire responses, contracting authorities in Romania demonstrate a slightly **above-average understanding** of Socially Responsible Public Procurement procedures, with an average self-assessed score of 3,4 out of 5. However, their knowledge of specific action plans, strategies, and SPP clauses is notably lower. Only 2 out of the 7 interviewed CAs have actually implemented SPP procedures. Most CAs reported **lacking the technical expertise and legal capacity** required to develop and publish SPP tenders independently, and many indicated they would rely on external expertise to address these gaps.

Among the seven public institutions surveyed, the **predominant procurement criterion** remains the “lowest price,” cited by 57% of respondents. This reflects a cost-driven approach that continues to dominate many public tenders. In contrast, 43% reported using the “Most Economically Advantageous Tender” (MEAT) method, typically among institutions with greater familiarity with public procurement frameworks. While MEAT enables the integration of social and environmental considerations alongside cost, its adoption remains limited.

Awareness of the **“Do No Significant Harm” (DNSH) principle** is relatively high, with four out of seven respondents indicating familiarity. However, actual implementation of DNSH in procurement procedures remains low, even among those aware of it. This gap suggests a clear need for targeted training and improved integration of DNSH standards into procurement guidelines.

Stakeholder engagement in the tendering process is also minimal. Only one institution (14%) reported involving external stakeholders, such as associations or foundations, during tender preparation. The remaining 86% confirmed no involvement of end-users or community representatives. This points to a broader systemic issue: stakeholder consultation is rare and tends to occur informally rather than as a structured or routine part of procurement planning.

Barriers and opportunities

The main barriers to implementing SPP include legal and policy gaps, highlighted by nearly half of the respondents, who pointed to **unclear legislation, insufficient regulations specific to SPP**, and institutional resistance stemming from ambiguous legal frameworks. **Skills and knowledge deficiencies** emerged as the most frequently mentioned challenge. Many contracting authorities reported limited awareness of SPP, lack of adequate training, insufficient legal and project management expertise, and a low understanding of important principles such as “Do No Significant Harm” (DNSH).

Other barriers include **excessive bureaucracy, outdated IT** infrastructure, difficult economic conditions for social enterprises, and limited trust or collaboration between public agencies and social actors. Some respondents also reported instances of discrimination against vulnerable suppliers, further complicating participation.





Regarding capacity-building efforts, most respondents acknowledged the existence of **training programs** provided by authorized trainers, ANAP, universities, and specific institutions, such as DGASPC Botoşani, which offers training every two years. However, the consensus is that these initiatives are insufficient, often being too theoretical, infrequent, or generic. There is a strong need for practical, hands-on workshops featuring real case studies and active community involvement to better equip contracting authorities for effective SPP implementation.

Cyprus

Insights from Social Enterprises' Responses

The following findings are based on the analysis of data collected through the questionnaire completed by social enterprises.

Table 24 Questionnaire results for Cyprus

Results from SEs responses	
Factor	Score
Average number of employees	14
Level of familiarity with Public Procurement and corresponding policy framework	2/5
Level of familiarity with Social Public Procurement and corresponding policy framework	1,5/5
Percent of SEs who have participated in Public or Social Procurement	5%
Percentage of SEs have the capacity to participate in SPP procedures	90%
Percentage of SEs who can participate in SPP procedures but face difficulties	56%

Social enterprises interviewed in Cyprus typically have an average of 14 employees. Their familiarity with public procurement and the related policy framework is **relatively low**, scoring an average of 2 out of 5, while their understanding of social public procurement is even more limited, with a score of just 1,5 out of 5. Despite this, 90% of SEs report having the capacity to participate in SPP procedures. However, only 5% have actually taken part in public or social procurement processes. Over half of the SEs (56%) who are capable of participating still face significant difficulties when





engaging with SPP, indicating barriers that prevent broader and more effective involvement in these procurement opportunities.

Policy Framework and Experience in Public Procurement

The level of **knowledge** among social enterprises (SEs) in Cyprus regarding public procurement is notably low. Half of the respondents (50%) rated their understanding of the policy framework and procedures as **very poor**, with an additional 20% indicating poor knowledge. Only a small fraction reported average (15%) or good (15%) understanding, and none indicated very good familiarity. The situation is even more pronounced when it comes to Social Public Procurement (SPP), where 65% of respondents reported very poor knowledge and 30% poor, leaving just 5% with a good understanding. No SEs claimed average or very good familiarity with SPP. The most cited reason for this knowledge gap was a general **lack of interest**, followed by **limited financial resources**, which points to both motivational and structural barriers in understanding procurement systems. Awareness of key instruments such as action plans, strategies, or SPP clauses is also very limited, only one respondent referenced ESG criteria, while the rest were unaware or uncertain of their existence.

Experience with public procurement among SEs in Cyprus is **minimal**. A striking 90% of respondents reported they have never participated in any public or social procurement tender. Among the remaining 10%, only one SE had actually participated in a public procurement process, while another had considered it but ultimately did not submit a bid. None of the SEs reported participation in an SPP tender specifically. Those who do seek tender opportunities typically rely on SME associations and public procurement platforms, which are perceived as more accessible and efficient.

The main **motivations** for exploring procurement include opportunities for new collaborations (noted by 70% of respondents) and accessing new markets (45%), with launching new products or services being a less common driver (30%). Although funding mechanisms and schemes are widely recognized (100% awareness), awareness of other forms of support such as tax incentives, targeted labelling, or training programmes remains very low, suggesting a significant gap between policy availability and practical accessibility.

Barriers and opportunities

Social enterprises in Cyprus face a range of challenges when attempting to participate in Social Public Procurement (SPP). The most frequently reported barrier is the **lack of guidance, advice, or support**, cited by 80% of respondents. This is followed by difficulties meeting financial guarantee requirements (60%) and the need for prior experience (55%), which often disqualifies newer or smaller SEs. Other significant obstacles include the **cost of compiling a tender** (45%) and limited internal resources or organizational capacity (35%). Less commonly mentioned, but still present, are issues such as difficulty finding relevant tenders, poor communication with public authorities, and limited competence in navigating procurement systems. A small number also cited challenges like using procurement platforms, institutional discrimination, and the difficulty of forming consortia.



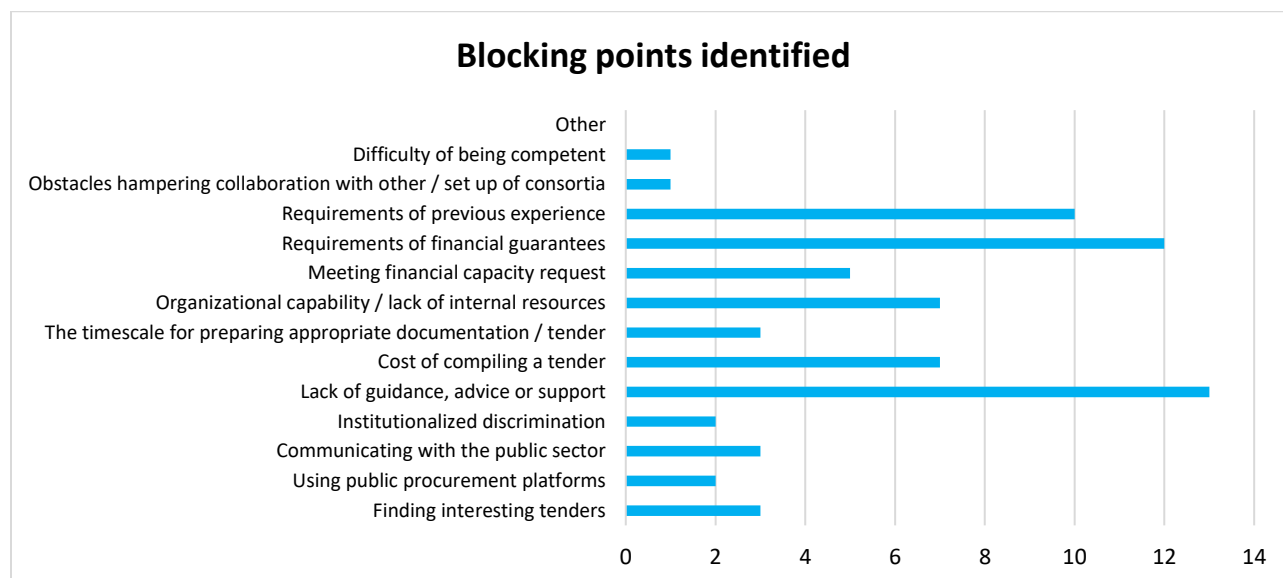


Figure 9 Chart showing blocking points in Cyprus

To address these barriers, the most widely supported solutions are practical and capacity-focused. A strong majority (90%) support **participating in training on tender preparation**, while 60% advocate for access to consulting services. Half of the respondents see value in a centralized website that aggregates public tender opportunities. Additional suggestions include organizing B2B events to foster consortia (35%), encouraging early engagement with procurers (25%), and improving procurement processes to prioritize quality over price (15%). Less frequently proposed were collaboration with established companies (10%) and discovery visits (5%). In summary, the most effective solutions are those that build capacity, offer professional support, and improve access to transparent and user-friendly tender information.

Insights from Contracting Authorities' Responses

Policy Framework and Experience in Public Procurement

Based on the responses gathered, the knowledge of contracting authorities regarding SPP procedures is **slightly above average**, with an overall score of 3,4 out of 5. Their familiarity with the broader policy framework is moderate, averaging 3 out of 5. However, awareness of existing action plans, strategies, and specific SPP-related clauses remains limited. Notably, none of the interviewed CAs have implemented or applied SPP in practice.

In Cyprus, there is currently no specific law or set of guidelines dedicated solely to the implementation of SPP. Despite the legal framework encouraging the use of the **Most Economically Advantageous Tender** (MEAT) approach, contracting authorities in practice still rely predominantly on the lowest price criterion, limiting the uptake of socially responsible criteria.





The **electronic public procurement system** (e-PPS) supports the full tendering lifecycle and is a key tool in promoting transparency, security, and efficiency in public procurement processes. It allows for online tender submission, evaluation, and contract management. However, some stakeholders face technical barriers and difficulties using the system, which hinders its full potential. Regarding the application of the **“Do No Significant Harm” (DNSH) principle** in public tenders, most respondents assess its implementation as moderate, with a notable portion viewing it as low, and no one perceiving high or very high application levels.

Encouragingly, a significant majority (80%) of surveyed organizations report **involving end-users and stakeholders**, primarily business support organizations and external experts, in their tender preparation processes. Involvement from municipalities and local communities, while present, remains limited. This engagement is typically aimed at improving the relevance and impact of tenders and ensuring that procurement meets real community and organizational needs.

Barriers and opportunities

The main barriers to implementing Socially Responsible Public Procurement in Cyprus include, the **weak legal and regulatory framework** as a fundamental obstacle. The absence of a formal definition for SPP, along with a lack of specific criteria or clauses in existing legislation, results in uncertainty and inconsistent implementation. In addition, there is a **low institutional capacity** and **limited resources** among public procurers. Many public officials lack adequate knowledge not only of SPP but of public procurement processes in general. As a result, they often default to traditional methods, such as awarding contracts based solely on the lowest price, due to lack of confidence and an unclear legal framework. Lastly, **inadequate political commitment and institutional support** further hinders progress. SPP has not been prioritized politically, and the local market is not yet mature enough to offer a sufficient pool of social enterprise bidders.

Despite these challenges, several opportunities can help unlock the potential of SPP in Cyprus. Establishing **clear policy guidelines**, action plans, and financial **incentives** can mobilize contracting authorities and promote the integration of social criteria in tenders. Investing in capacity building and targeted **training programs** for public procurers would enhance their confidence and competence in applying SPP principles. Additionally, promoting **cross-functional collaboration** within public institutions, by creating interdepartmental working groups, could support the development of tenders that integrate social objectives. On the market side, **awareness campaigns** and **incentives** to support the creation and engagement of social enterprises in public procurement can strengthen supply readiness. Although 60% of respondents noted that some training programs are available, such as those organized by the Directorate of Financial Control of European Funds, a significant number remain unaware of such opportunities, underscoring the need for better communication and accessibility.





3.2.3 Comparative analysis and Statistical analysis model

Comparative analysis of results

After completing the country-specific analyses, a comparative analysis was carried out to highlight the **most significant findings** across all participating countries. This comparison aims to identify both **key differences and commonalities** between partner countries, offering a clearer understanding of shared challenges and country-specific trends in public and social procurement.

Comparative Analysis of insights on SEs

The analysis begins with an examination of the **knowledge and familiarity of social enterprises** across all participating countries. The results, gathered from each national input, are illustrated in the bar chart below. The chart displays the average familiarity of SEs in eight European countries with Public Procurement (PP) and Social Public Procurement (SPP), using a scale from 1 to 5.

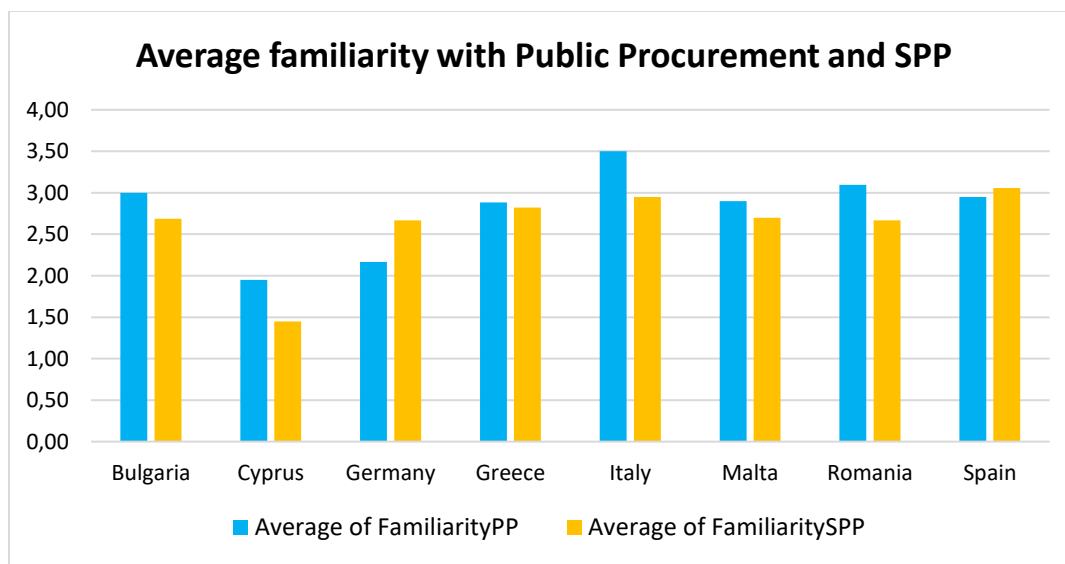


Figure 10 Familiarity of partner countries with PP and SPP

Based on the chart, **Italy** stands out with the **highest level of familiarity** in both areas, particularly with public procurement. This suggests a relatively strong engagement and understanding of procurement processes among Italian SEs. On the other end of the spectrum, **Cyprus** shows the **lowest familiarity**, especially with SPP, where the average drops to around 1,5, indicating a significant knowledge gap.

In general, most countries show slightly **higher familiarity with public procurement compared to SPP**. This trend suggests that while SEs may have some experience with procurement procedures, the specific knowledge and skills required for socially focused tenders are less widespread. Countries like Greece, Spain, and Romania show moderate and relatively balanced levels of familiarity in both





categories, with averages close to 3. Germany presents an interesting case where familiarity with SPP slightly exceeds that of public procurement.

Regarding the SEs' knowledge of national and regional SPP strategies, the results indicate a consistently **low level** across the entire sample, regardless of country. The pie charts below illustrate this trend.

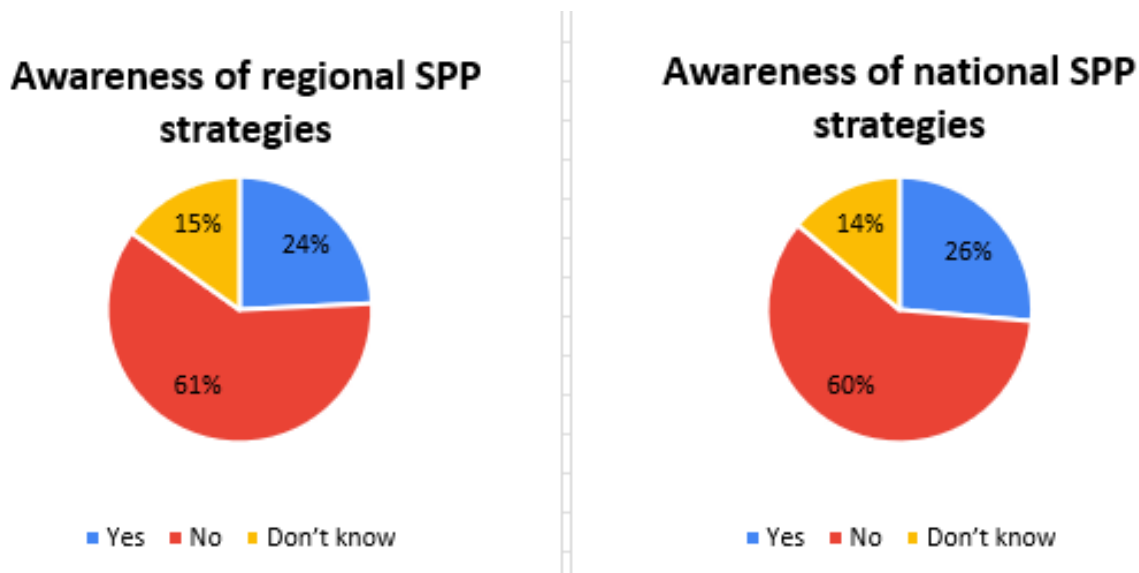


Figure 11 Awareness of SEs from partner countries on strategies

Regarding participation in tenders, the bar chart below illustrates the involvement of respondents from the eight partner countries in public procurement processes. The categories represented are: those who have **never participated** in tenders (blue), those who have participated in **public procurement tenders (not SPP)** (red), those who have taken part in **SPP tenders** (yellow), and those who **tried but did not submit an offer** (green).



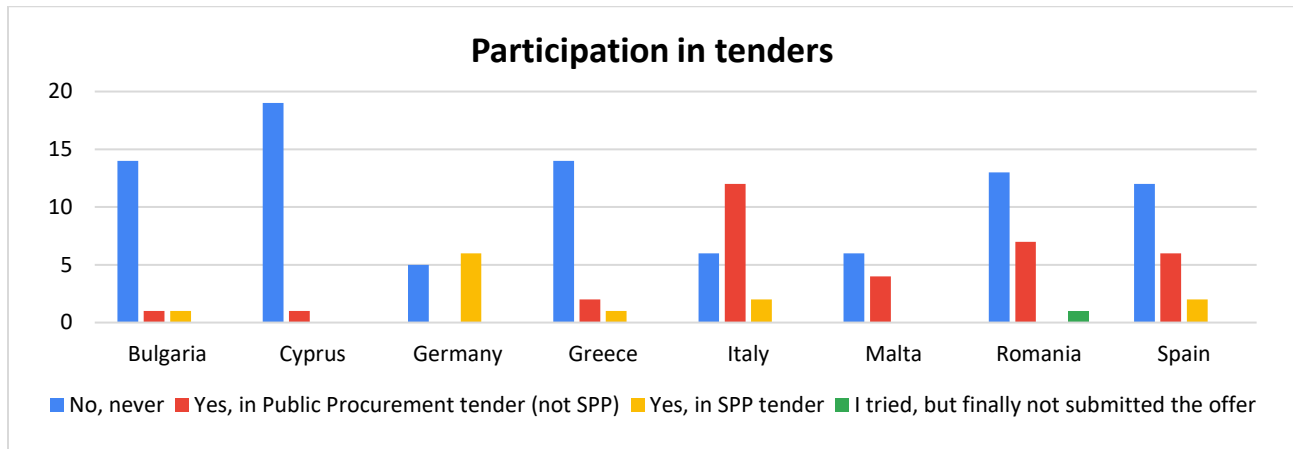


Figure 12 Participation of partner countries in PP and SPP

The chart shows that **non-participation is the dominant** across most countries. In particular, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Romania, and Spain have a high number of respondents who have never participated in any tenders. Cyprus stands out with the highest level of non-participation. Italy is an exception, with more respondents involved in public procurement tenders (not SPP) than those who have never participated. It also has the **highest visible engagement** with SPP tenders. Germany presents a more **balanced picture**, showing moderate levels of participation in both non-SPP and SPP tenders. Spain also shows some level of involvement in both areas, though non-participation still dominates. A small number of respondents in Romania reported attempting to participate but ultimately not submitting an offer. Overall, the chart highlights generally **low participation in SPP** tenders across all countries, with only Germany, Italy, and Spain showing any notable engagement.

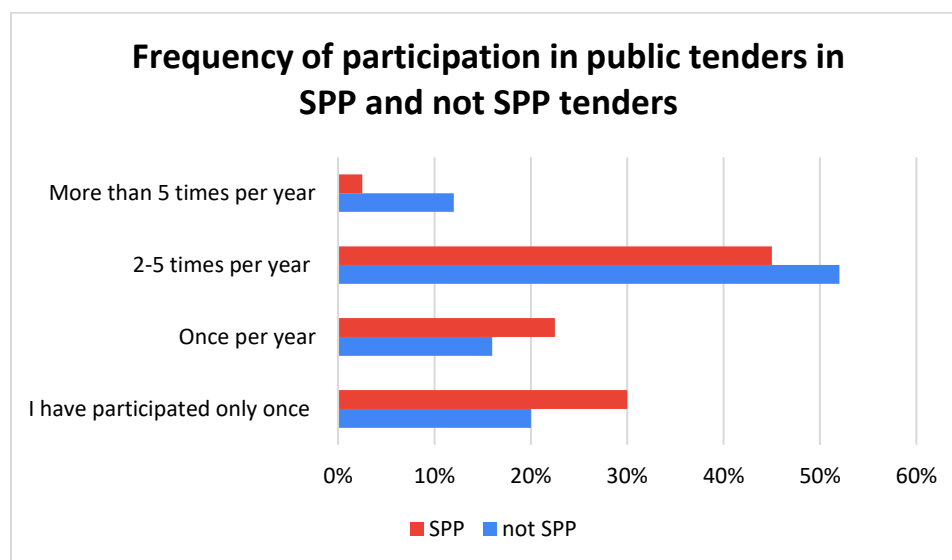


Figure 13 Frequency of participation in procurements





The above bar chart compares how often respondents from all partner countries have participated in SPP (Sustainable Public Procurement) and non-SPP tenders. The data shows that **participation is more frequent in non-SPP tenders** than in SPP tenders across all frequency categories. The **most common level** of participation for both types of tenders is **2–5 times per year**, with nearly 55% of respondents indicating this frequency for non-SPP tenders and around 45% for SPP tenders. When it comes to **one-time participation**, SPP tenders show a slightly higher percentage compared to non-SPP tenders, suggesting that for many, involvement in SPP is occasional or experimental. For once-per-year participation, both SPP and non-SPP tenders show lower rates, with SPP slightly higher. The category “more than 5 times per year” has the lowest participation overall, especially for SPP tenders, where it's nearly negligible. This highlights that **frequent participation in SPP tenders is rare**. In summary, the chart suggests that **non-SPP tenders are more frequently** engaged with than SPP tenders, and that frequent or consistent involvement in SPP remains limited.

Especially for SPP participation, the chart below illustrates **how often** respondents participate in Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) tenders. Participation is grouped into four frequency categories: those who have participated only once (blue), once per year (red), 2–5 times per year (orange), and more than 5 times per year (green).

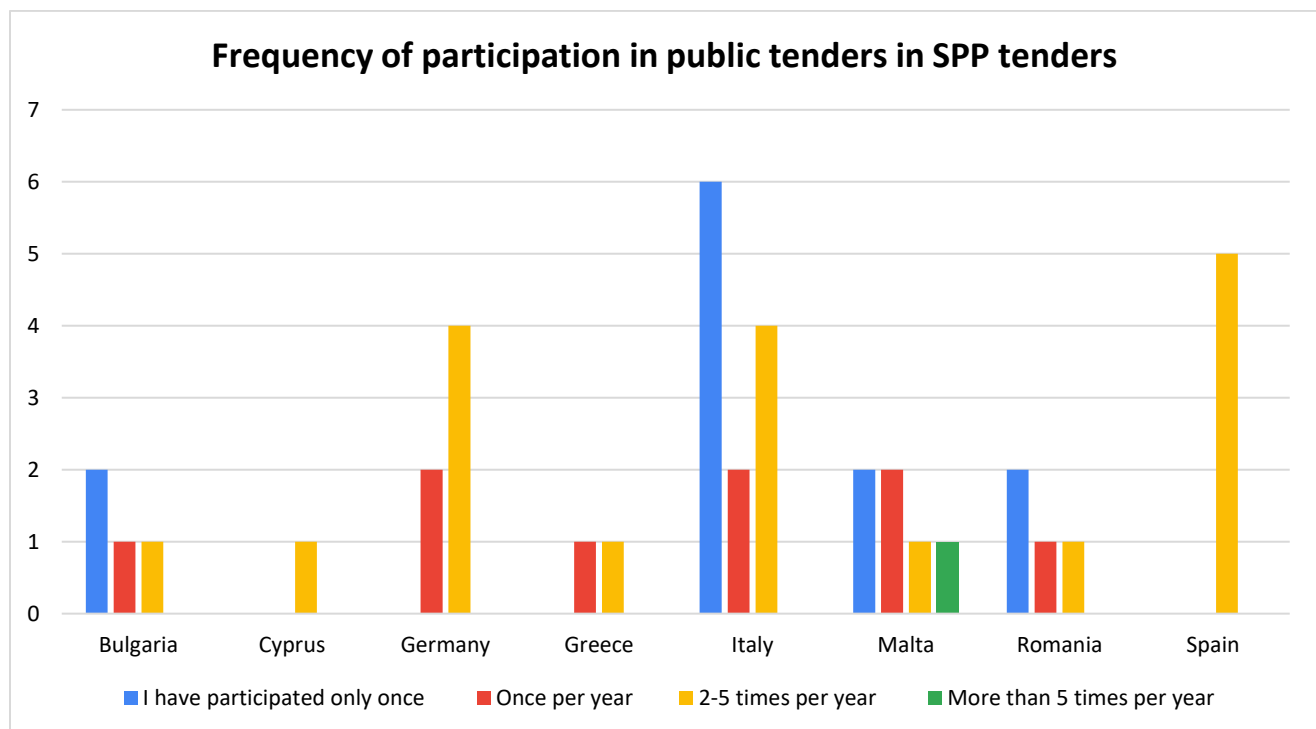


Figure 14 Comparative results for SPP participation





Italy shows the highest number of respondents who have participated only once, with six individuals falling into this category. This suggests that engagement in SPP tenders is somewhat widespread in Italy but not yet consistent. Germany and Spain lead in **regular participation**, each with five respondents indicating they take part in 2–5 tenders annually, pointing to a more stable but still moderate level of involvement. Malta and Romania present a relatively even distribution across all four frequency categories, indicating **no dominant trend in their participation habits**. In contrast, Greece, Cyprus, and Bulgaria report generally **lower levels of participation**, with the majority of respondents engaging only once or infrequently. Participation exceeding five times per year is rare across all countries and is observed only in Malta and Germany, with just one respondent in each reporting such high involvement.

Overall, the chart reveals that while there is some level of participation in SPP tenders across all countries, it tends to be **infrequent**. Frequent and consistent engagement remains limited, although countries like Italy, Germany, and Spain appear to be taking more proactive steps toward regular participation.

Lastly, the ability to participate in SPP procedures by preparing and submitting an offer was investigated in the comparative analysis. The above table presents the self-assessed **capacity of respondents** from the eight European partner countries to take part in Sustainable Public Procurement procedures. The responses are categorized into three groups: those who cannot participate (blue), those who can participate without problems (red), and those who can participate but with difficulties (orange).

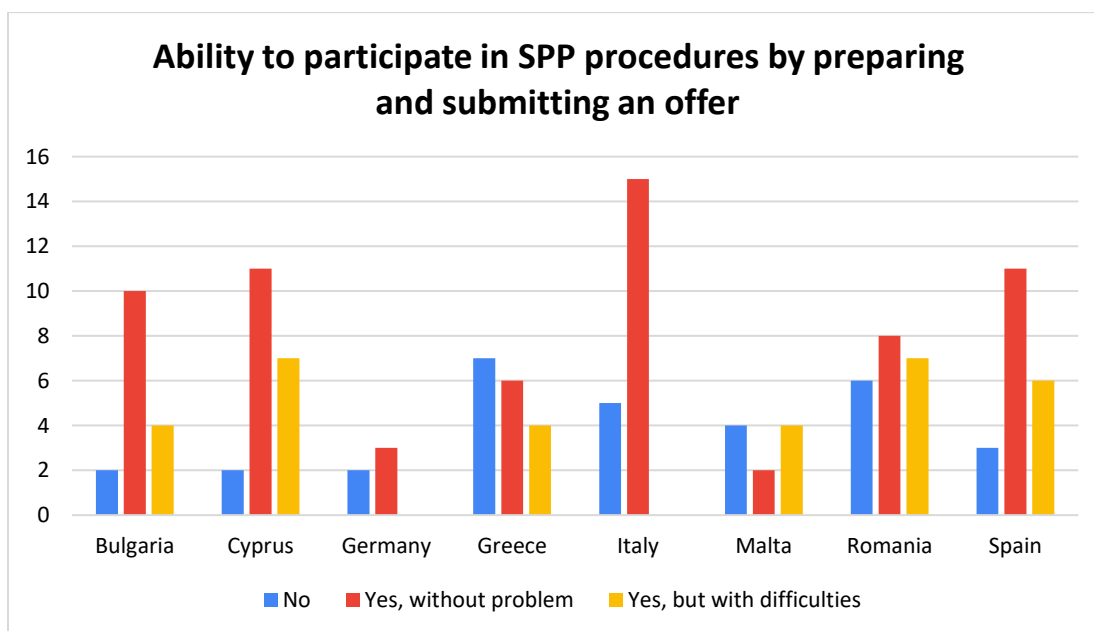


Figure 15 Ability of SEs from partner countries to participate in SPP





Italy stands out with the highest number of respondents (15) stating that they can **participate without problems**, indicating a relatively smooth and efficient process for offer preparation and submission. Cyprus and Bulgaria also show **strong levels of participation**, although a significant number in both countries report challenges in the process. In countries like Greece, Romania, and Spain, the ability to participate is more evenly split between those who experience no problems and those who face difficulties, suggesting **varying degrees of accessibility and administrative burden**. Malta shows a relatively low number of participants who can engage without issues, while a similar number report either difficulties or an inability to participate at all. Germany shows the lowest overall engagement, with very few respondents able to submit offers, either with or without difficulty. Overall, the chart highlights that while some countries have built relatively supportive frameworks for participating in SPP procedures, others still face structural or procedural barriers that hinder smooth participation.

Comparative Analysis of insights on CAs

A similar **comparative analysis** of results was conducted for the responses collected from CAs in the partner countries and key findings are shown below.

To begin with, the following chart titled presents the self-assessed average levels of familiarity that contracting authorities (CAs) have with public procurement (PP) and Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) across the eight European partner countries.

The **blue bars** represent the average familiarity with public procurement, while the **yellow bars** show the average familiarity with SPP. The scale used ranges from 0 to 6, where higher values indicate greater familiarity.

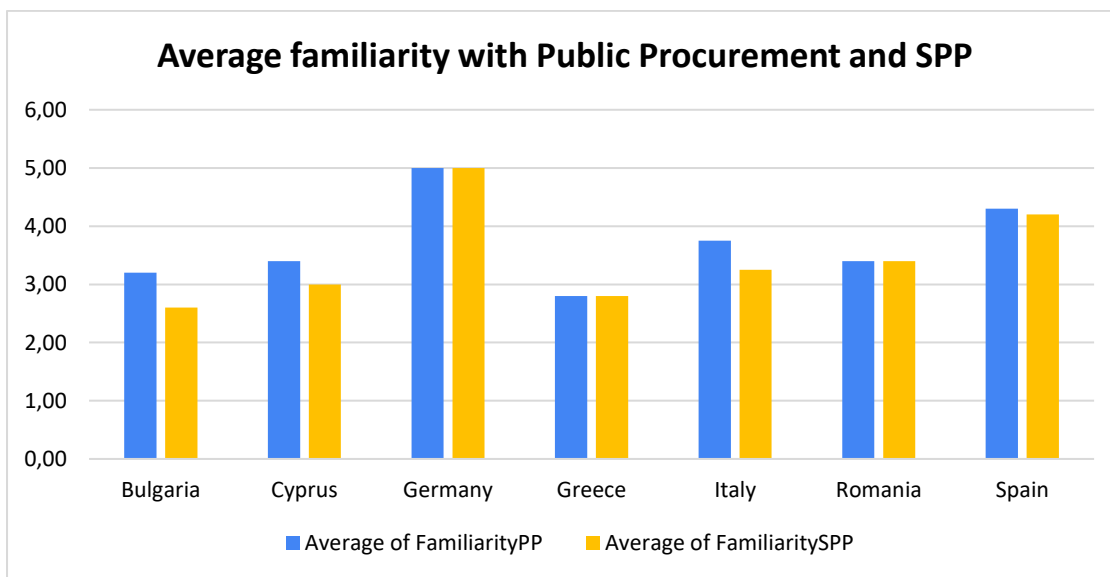


Figure 16 Familiarity of CAs from partner countries on PP and SPP





Based on the chart, Germany stands out with the **highest average familiarity** in both categories, reaching close to 5 out of 6, suggesting a strong understanding of both general and sustainable procurement procedures among its contracting authorities. Spain and Italy follow, with Spain showing slightly higher familiarity with public procurement than SPP, and Italy demonstrating a more balanced but slightly lower level of familiarity overall.

In countries like Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria, familiarity with public procurement and SPP is moderate, with average values hovering around 3. Notably, **Cyprus** has the **lowest levels of familiarity**, especially with SPP, indicating a potential knowledge gap or lack of institutional focus on sustainable procurement practices. Across nearly all countries, familiarity with public procurement tends to be **slightly higher than familiarity with SPP**, highlighting a broader trend where contracting authorities are more accustomed to traditional procurement processes than to the sustainability-oriented criteria and methodologies involved in SPP.

Overall, the chart suggests that while some countries (particularly Germany) have well-developed institutional familiarity with procurement practices, others may require **additional training**, awareness-raising, and capacity-building to effectively implement and support SPP initiatives.

In addition, the chart below presents the level of **knowledge of CAs regarding the existence of national or regional strategies or Action Plans aimed at supporting SPP**. The responses are grouped into three categories: those who are aware of such plans (shown in blue), those who are not aware (shown in red), and those who are uncertain (shown in yellow).

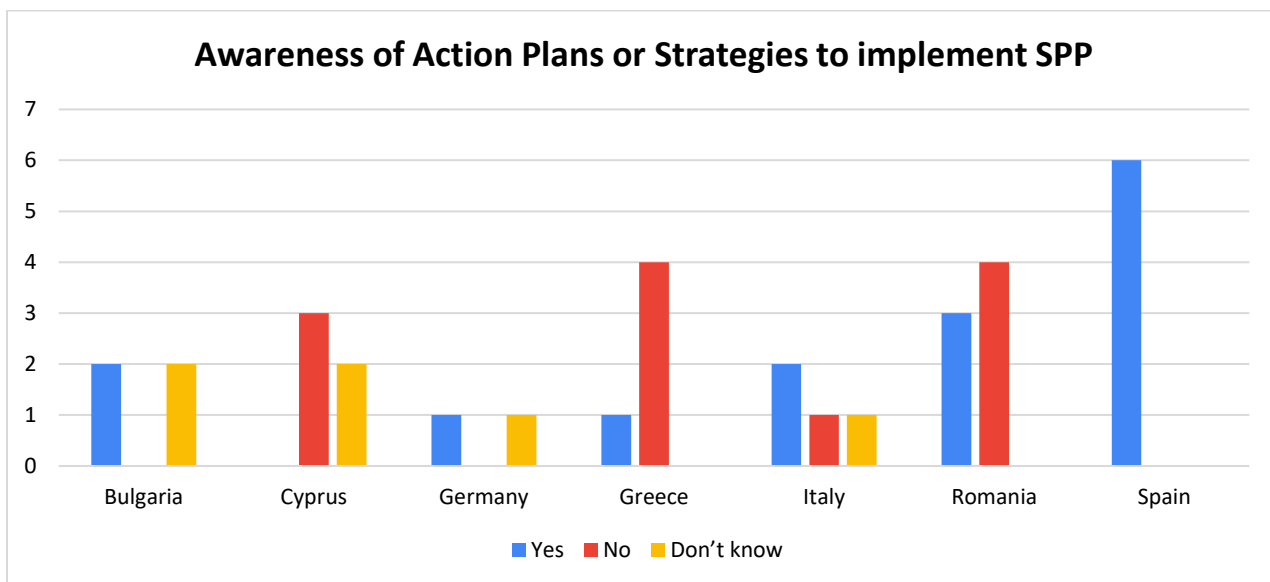


Figure 17 Knowledge of CAs from partner countries about Strategies on SPP

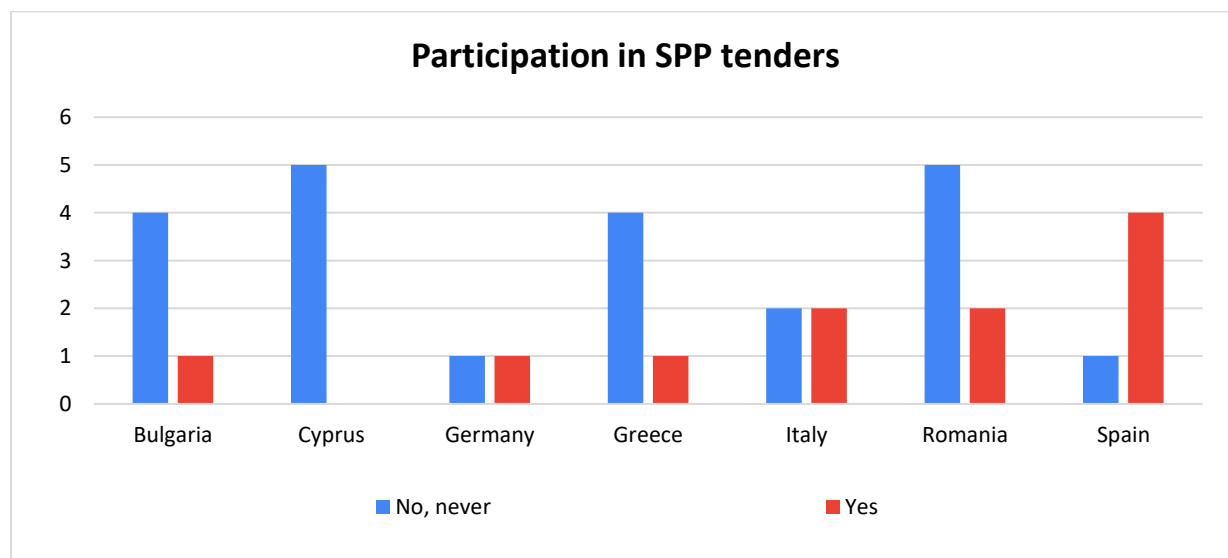




Spain stands out with the highest number of respondents confirming awareness of SPP action plans, indicating a comparatively strong communication or implementation of national strategies in this area. Romania follows, with a **mixed picture** that includes several respondents affirming their awareness, but also a significant number who report being unaware. Greece shows the highest level of non-awareness, with the majority of respondents stating they are not familiar with any such strategies. Cyprus also reflects a low level of awareness, with most responses falling into the “no” or “don’t know” categories. In countries like Germany, Bulgaria, and Italy, the responses are more evenly spread across all three categories, suggesting a **fragmented or inconsistent understanding** of SPP policy frameworks. Italy has a slight edge toward positive awareness but remains far from widespread clarity.

Overall, the chart reveals that awareness of action plans or strategies to implement SPP remains **limited and uneven** across countries. While Spain shows relatively strong familiarity, most other countries demonstrate either a lack of knowledge or uncertainty, highlighting the need for improved visibility, communication, and capacity-building efforts around national and regional SPP policies.

Regarding **participation in SPP procedures**, the following table includes all the information gathered from the questionnaire responses from interviewed CAs in all partner countries. The chart distinguishes between those who have **never participated** (blue bars) and those who **have participated** (red bars).



Across most countries, the **dominant response is non-participation**. Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, and Romania all report a notably higher number of contracting authorities that have never participated in SPP tenders. Cyprus and Romania, in particular, stand out with five respondents each indicating





no experience in SPP tenders, suggesting limited implementation or awareness of sustainable procurement practices in these contexts.

Germany and Italy display a more **balanced picture**, with an equal number of respondents having participated and never participated. This balance may reflect a more established but still developing practice of integrating sustainability criteria into procurement processes. Spain is the only country where the number of contracting authorities that have participated in SPP tenders exceeds those that have not, indicating relatively stronger adoption of SPP among public institutions.

Overall, the chart highlights the **low level of engagement with SPP tenders among contracting authorities** in most surveyed countries. While some progress is evident in places like Spain, and to a lesser extent Italy and Germany, the widespread non-participation in countries such as Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, and Romania points to a need for further institutional support, policy guidance, and training to increase uptake of SPP practices.

Regarding the **involvement of stakeholders** in the processes of the interviewed organizations, the chart below reflects the responses of contracting authorities (CAs). Responses are categorized as **Yes** (red), **No** (blue), and **Don't know** (yellow).

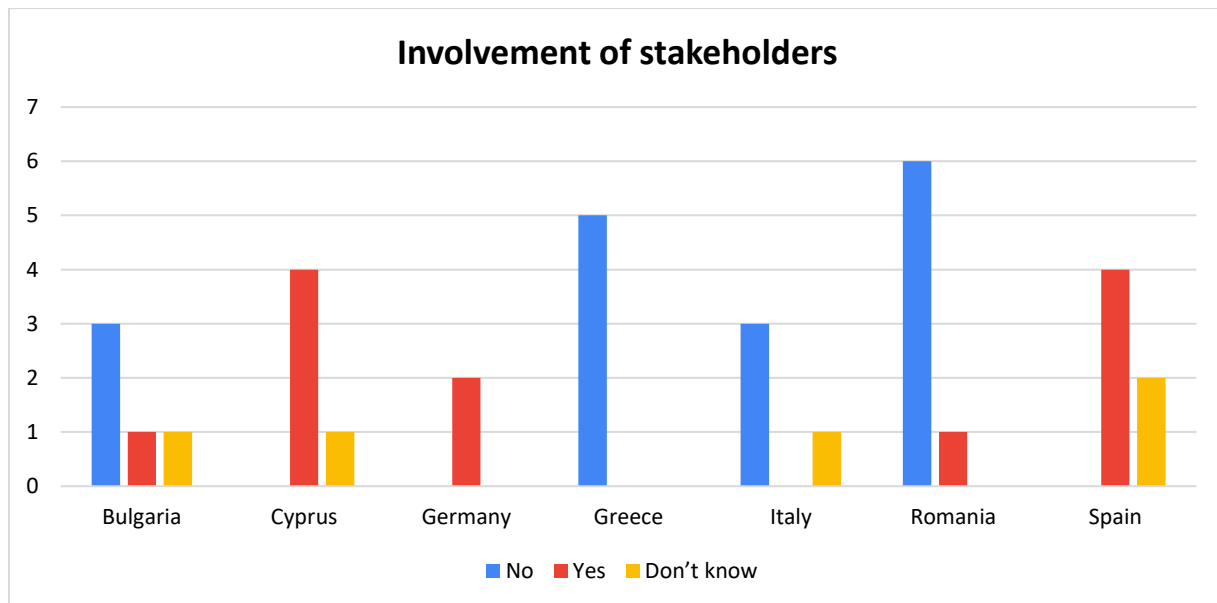


Figure 18 Involvement of stakeholders in SPP procedures by CAs

The overall trend reveals a **low level of stakeholder involvement** in most countries. Greece and Romania show the highest number of respondents indicating that stakeholders are not involved, with five and six responses respectively, suggesting limited collaboration or consultation in SPP planning or implementation. Italy also leans in this direction, with three respondents reporting no stakeholder involvement.





In contrast, Spain and Cyprus show the **strongest positive responses**, with four contracting authorities in each country confirming that stakeholders are involved. This may reflect more inclusive or participatory procurement practices in those national contexts. Germany also shows some engagement, though to a lesser extent, with two positive responses. The "Don't know" category appears across several countries, including Bulgaria, Italy, and Spain, indicating **uncertainty** among respondents about whether or not stakeholders are included. This suggests a possible lack of transparency or internal communication within public procurement processes.

In summary, the chart indicates that while a few countries such as Spain and Cyprus demonstrate stakeholder engagement in SPP, the general picture across the sample is one of **limited or absent involvement**. This highlights a need to strengthen inclusive practices and improve clarity on the roles of external stakeholders in sustainable procurement procedures.

Lastly, the following chart shows whether the CAs interviewed has the necessary **project management, technical, and legal expertise**. Responses are grouped into **Yes** (blue), indicating sufficient internal capacity, and **No** (red), indicating a lack of such capacity.

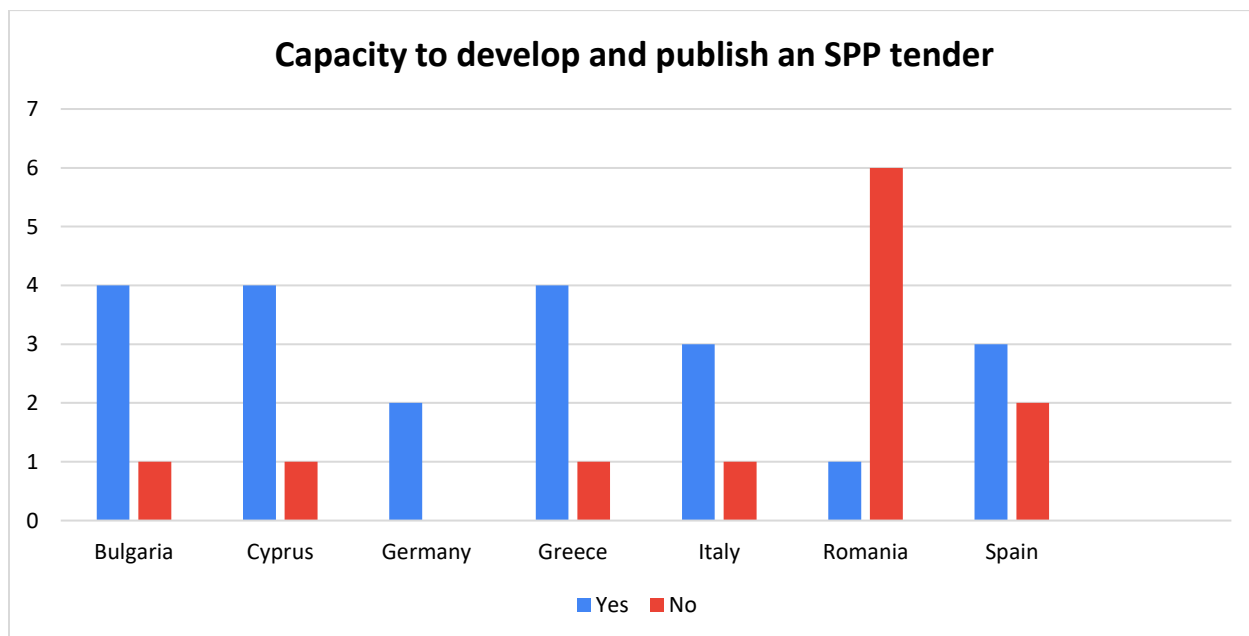


Figure 19 Ability of CAs from partner countries to develop and publish SPP

In most countries, the majority of respondents report having the capacity to develop and publish SPP tenders. Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Greece each have four contracting authorities affirming their **readiness**, suggesting a relatively solid base of institutional knowledge and resources in these contexts. Italy and Spain also report a majority of positive responses, though at slightly lower levels, indicating moderate capacity. Germany presents a **balanced picture**, with two respondents





confirming capacity and none indicating a lack of it, which may suggest either limited participation or a cautious level of confidence in existing skills.

Romania stands out as the only country where the majority of respondents report not having the necessary capacity, with six authorities stating they lack the required project management, technical, or legal skills to conduct an SPP tender. This indicates a significant **capacity gap** that could hinder the country's ability to implement sustainable procurement effectively.

Overall, the chart shows that while several countries demonstrate a **promising level of preparedness** to conduct SPP tenders, others face notable challenges. These findings suggest the need for targeted capacity-building efforts, especially in areas where internal resources or expertise remain insufficient to support the full development and execution of SPP procedures.

Statistical Analysis model

In addition to the comparative analysis of results, a statistical model was created. The **statistical analysis** aimed at identifying **key relationships and differences** among variables relevant to social public procurement (SPP) engagement across different countries. Using Pearson correlation coefficients, the relationship between Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita and the level of social enterprise participation in public tenders was examined, exploring whether economic context influences procurement engagement. Additionally, an ANOVA test was conducted to assess whether the level of **knowledge and familiarity** with SPP procedures significantly **varies between countries**. These analyses provide evidence-based insights into the structural and contextual factors that shape SPP readiness and participation across Europe.

The results revealed by the **Pearson Correlation model** are shown below along with their interpretation.

Table 25 Pearson Correlation results

Statistic	Value
t-value	2,3768
Degrees of freedom (df)	97
p-value	0,01943
95% Confidence Interval	(0,439, 0,813)*
Correlation (r)	0,6346





The correlation analysis demonstrates a **statistically significant and strong positive relationship** between GDP per capita and the frequency of Social Enterprise (SE) participation in public and Social Public Procurement (SPP) tenders. Using Pearson correlation tests, the results show that as GDP per capita increases, SE engagement in procurement processes, particularly SPP, also tends to rise. The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated at 0,63, with a corresponding p-value of 0,0194. Since the p-value is below the conventional significance threshold of 0,05, the correlation is considered statistically significant. Furthermore, the 95% confidence interval for the correlation does not include zero, confirming a positive relationship.

This finding suggests that SEs in more economically developed or affluent regions are better positioned, both in terms of capacity and opportunity, to participate in procurement procedures. Higher levels of **economic development** may correlate with more **mature support systems**, better institutional infrastructure, greater availability of training and resources, and more proactive public sector engagement, all factors that facilitate SE involvement in public tenders.

As for the ANOVA test, the results of are shown below.

Table 26 ANOVA test results

Source	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	Pr(>F)
Country	7	33,85	4,836	5,431	1,82e-05
Residuals	126	112,19	0,890		

The ANOVA test results indicate that familiarity with Social Public Procurement (SPP) differs significantly across countries. The p-value obtained from the analysis is 1,82e-05, which is well below the standard significance threshold of 0,05. This confirms that the observed differences in SPP familiarity among countries are **statistically significant**. Additionally, the F-statistic (F = 5,431) suggests that the variance in familiarity scores between countries is meaningfully greater than the variance within countries.





Table 27 ANOVA test results

	diff	lwr	upr	p adj
Cyprus-Bulgaria	-1,238	-2,213	-0,262	0,004
Germany-Bulgaria	-0,021	-1,132	1,090	1,000
Greece-Bulgaria	0,136	-0,877	1,149	1,000
Italy-Bulgaria	0,263	-0,713	1,238	0,991
Malta-Bulgaria	0,013	-1,160	1,185	1,000
Romania-Bulgaria	-0,021	-0,986	0,944	1,000
Spain-Bulgaria	0,368	-0,631	1,367	0,948
Germany-Cyprus	1,217	0,155	2,279	0,013
Greece-Cyprus	1,374	0,414	2,333	0,001
Italy-Cyprus	1,500	0,580	2,420	0,000
Malta-Cyprus	1,250	0,123	2,377	0,019
Romania-Cyprus	1,217	0,308	2,125	0,002
Spain-Cyprus	1,606	0,661	2,551	0,000
Greece-Germany	0,157	-0,940	1,254	1,000
Italy-Germany	0,283	-0,779	1,345	0,992
Malta-Germany	0,033	-1,212	1,279	1,000
Romania-Germany	0,000	-1,053	1,053	1,000
Spain-Germany	0,389	-0,695	1,473	0,954





Italy-Greece	0,126	-0,833	1,086	1,000
Malta-Greece	-0,124	-1,283	1,036	1,000
Romania-Greece	-0,157	-1,106	0,792	1,000
Spain-Greece	0,232	-0,752	1,216	0,996
Malta-Italy	-0,250	-1,377	0,877	0,997
Romania-Italy	-0,283	-1,192	0,625	0,979
Spain-Italy	0,106	-0,839	1,051	1,000
Romania-Malta	-0,033	-1,151	1,084	1,000
Spain-Malta	0,356	-0,792	1,503	0,980
Spain-Romania	0,389	-0,545	1,323	0,904

Post-hoc comparisons from the ANOVA test further revealed that **Cyprus stands out** as a country with significantly higher levels of familiarity with Social Public Procurement (SPP) procedures compared to several other European countries. Specifically, Cyprus showed statistically significant positive differences in SPP knowledge when compared to Germany, Greece, Italy, Malta, Romania, and Spain. This suggests that Social Enterprises (SEs) and contracting authorities in Cyprus are relatively more informed and experienced with SPP policy frameworks, criteria, and implementation than their peers in these countries. In contrast, Cyprus demonstrated significantly lower familiarity with SPP when compared to Bulgaria. This negative difference indicates that stakeholders in Bulgaria report a stronger grasp of SPP concepts and practices than those in Cyprus, making Bulgaria an outlier in the dataset.

Aside from these particular cases, **no statistically significant differences** in SPP familiarity were observed **among the majority** of the remaining countries included in the analysis. After adjustments for multiple comparisons, the p-values for most country pairs approached or equaled 1, implying that differences in their SPP knowledge levels are minimal or not statistically meaningful.

These findings underscore the uneven and **fragmented landscape of SPP familiarity** across Europe.





3.2.4 Identification of blocking points & Action plan

According to the application form, a key performance indicator (KPI) for the project is the **identification of 20 critical blocking points**, as determined by the consortium. These were derived from the analysis of questionnaire responses and interviews conducted with SEs and CAs. The identified blocking points are presented below and are categorized into three distinct types.

The blocking points have been grouped into the following distinct categories, based on the nature of the challenges they represent:

1. Access and Information Barriers

This category includes the challenges businesses face in identifying, interpreting, and entering public procurement processes. These barriers occur before a company can even begin preparing a tender. They include the difficulty of locating tenders that are relevant to their expertise, using complex or fragmented procurement platforms, and the lack of clear, accessible guidance on how to participate. Many firms—particularly smaller or less experienced ones—are discouraged from participating simply because they cannot access the right information or navigate the systems in place. This limits competition and reduces diversity in the supplier base.

2. Procedural and Administrative Barriers

These barriers emerge once a company decides to engage in the tendering process. They reflect the practical burdens of participating in public procurement, including the administrative workload, tight deadlines, resource constraints, and the complexity of forming partnerships or consortia. Even well-qualified businesses may struggle with the volume of documentation required, the cost of preparing a tender, or the inability to dedicate sufficient internal capacity to the process. These obstacles make public contracts less accessible for smaller, less-resourced firms and contribute to inefficiencies in supplier participation.

3. Qualification and Eligibility Barriers

This type refers to the formal criteria and conditions that a business must meet to be considered eligible for a contract. These include requirements related to financial strength, prior experience, and the provision of guarantees or certifications. While intended to ensure that suppliers are capable and reliable, these criteria often exclude otherwise qualified firms—especially new entrants, small enterprises, or those from underrepresented groups. In some cases, these barriers reflect structural biases or outdated risk management practices, contributing to persistent inequalities in access to public procurement.

The following tables show each identified **blocking point**, and for each a series of **actions** has been proposed to help overcome the obstacle and support the implementation of Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP). Some of these recommended measures were included as suggested options in





the questionnaire completed by the interviewees, and they been included in the action plan to address specific blocking points as presented in the table below. Additional measures have been added based on **insights from interviewees** and findings from the **desk research** the team conducted.





Table 28 Blocking points identified and Action Plans

No	Blocking point	Description	Type	Action Plan
1	Finding interesting tenders	The difficulty businesses face in identifying procurement opportunities that match their services, products, or geographic focus.	Access and Information Barriers	• Centralized website collecting opportunities in public tenders • Interacting with procurers at the start of the process • Consulting services • Discovery visits
2	Using public procurement platforms	The challenges encountered when navigating online systems used to publish and manage public tenders.	Access and Information Barriers	• Participating in training on tender preparation • Simplified and user-friendly platform design • Consulting services
3	Communicating with the public sector	Limitations in interactions between suppliers and public authorities during the procurement process.	Procedural and Administrative Barriers	• Interacting with procurers at the start of the process • Consulting services • Discovery visits • Establishing clear points of contact and feedback channels
4	Institutionalized discrimination	Systemic barriers that result in unequal treatment or disadvantage for certain types of businesses in public procurement.	Qualification and Eligibility Barriers	• Inclusive procurement criteria • More quality oriented public procurement





5	Lack of guidance, advice or support	Absence of accessible help or resources to assist businesses in understanding and participating in procurement procedures.	Access and Information Barriers	• Capacity-building programs • Practical toolkits and templates • Participating in training on tender preparation • Consulting services • Cooperating with well-established companies • Discovery visits
6	Cost of compiling a tender	Financial and resource-related burden of preparing a tender for a public contract.	Procedural and Administrative Barriers	• B2B events with companies to form consortia • Reduce over-documentation • Cooperating with well-established companies
7	The timescale for preparing appropriate documentation / tender	The short timeframes given to suppliers to prepare and submit their tenders.	Procedural and Administrative Barriers	• Participating in training on tender preparation • Consulting services • Reduce over-documentation • Practical toolkits and templates
8	Organizational capability / lack of internal resources	A company's limited staffing, skills, or capacity to manage and complete the tendering process.	Procedural and Administrative Barriers	• Cooperating with well-established companies • B2B events with companies to form consortia • Practical toolkits and templates
9	Meeting financial capacity request	The difficulty businesses face in proving they have the required turnover, assets, or	Qualification and Eligibility Barriers	• Cooperating with well-established companies • B2B events with companies to form consortia





		financial strength to qualify for a contract.		• More quality oriented public procurement • Securing additional funding and incentives
10	Requirements of financial guarantees	The obligation to provide instruments such as tender bonds or performance guarantees as part of the tender.	Qualification and Eligibility Barriers	• Cooperating with well-established companies • B2B events with companies to form consortia • Practical toolkits and templates • Alternative financial guarantees
11	Requirements of previous experience	The need to demonstrate completion of similar contracts in the past in order to be eligible for current tenders.	Qualification and Eligibility Barriers	• B2B events with companies to form consortia • Cooperating with well-established companies • Design with proportionate requirements
12	Obstacles hampering collaboration with other / set up of consortia	The difficulties in forming partnerships or consortia with other businesses to jointly tender for contracts.	Procedural and Administrative Barriers	• Participating in training on tender preparation • B2B events with companies to form consortia • Consulting services
13	Difficulty of being competent	The overall complexity of the procurement process and the high level of understanding and expertise required to participate effectively.	Access and Information Barriers	• Participating in training on tender preparation • B2B events with companies to form consortia • Cooperating with well-established companies • Consulting services
14	Favouritism in procurement	Situations where the fairness of the public procurement process is compromised by the	Qualification and Eligibility Barriers	• Consulting services





		undue influence of powerful stakeholders.		• More quality oriented public procurement • Discovery visits
15	Lack of sustainability criteria	Businesses struggle due to inconsistent or poorly communicated criteria related to sustainability, making it difficult to understand expectations or qualify for tenders.	Procedural and Administrative Barriers	• Mandatory sustainable criteria and targets • More quality oriented public procurement
16	Complexity of tender documents	The overwhelming length and complexity of tender documentation, which often requires significant time just to read, interpret, and understand.	Procedural and Administrative Barriers	• Participating in training on tender preparation • Reduce over-documentation
17	Bureaucratic issues	The overwhelming number of administrative steps, formal procedures, and rigid compliance requirements involved in public procurement.	Procedural and Administrative Barriers	• Interacting with procurers at the start of the process • Participating in training on tender preparation • Practical toolkits and templates • Consulting services
18	Lack of specialized staff	The absence of personnel with the specific expertise needed to successfully navigate the public procurement process.	Procedural and Administrative Barriers	• Participating in training on tender preparation • Consulting services • B2B events with companies to form consortia





				Cooperating with well-established companies
19	Insufficient availability of qualified suppliers	The shortage of suppliers who meet specific certification, quality, sustainability, or compliance standards required by public procurement tenders. The pool of certified or qualified vendors is small, competition is limited, and procurers struggle to find suitable candidates that fulfill all tender criteria.	Qualification and Eligibility Barriers	- Suppliers' development programs - Mandatory sustainability criteria and targets
20	Lack of knowledge about global strategies	Limited understanding of international frameworks, policies, or best practices related to procurement, sustainability, or economic development, that prevent organizations from aligning their tender or procurement policies with broader global goals	Access and Information Barriers	- Participating in training on tender preparation - Consulting services - Discovery visits
21	Lack of awareness on environmental issues	The insufficient understanding or attention among suppliers, public officials, or both regarding environmental	Access and Information Barriers	- Awareness raising campaigns - Consulting services - Discovery visits





		impacts and sustainability principles.		
22	Shortage of skilled legal expertise in public procurement	Challenges caused by an insufficient number of lawyers specialized in public procurement, combined with a lack of systematic training to keep them updated about the frequent changes in procurement laws that add complexity to their work.	Procedural and Administrative Barriers	• Participating in training on tender preparation • Consulting services • Cooperating with well-established companies • Reduce over-documentation
23	Underdeveloped policy framework	Absence or insufficiency of clear, coherent, and comprehensive policies that guide public procurement practices lacking specific strategies, goals, or regulations	Procedural and Administrative Barriers	• Social clauses tailored to administrative and legal contexts • Mandatory sustainability criteria and targets
24	Unwillingness to change and lack of incentives or formal obligations	The reluctance within organizations, both public and private, to adopt new practices, processes, or innovations. As well as absence of clear incentives, rewards, or motivations that encourage stakeholders to embrace change or formal obligations	Procedural and Administrative Barriers	• Collaboration with educational institutions • Digital platforms for courses on sustainability • Awareness raising campaigns • Discovery visits • Mandatory sustainability criteria and targets





Action plan per blocking point explained

BP1: Finding interesting tenders

In order to mitigate this obstacle, a **centralized website collecting opportunities in public tenders** could be developed. A single, user-friendly platform where all public procurement opportunities are aggregated makes it significantly easier for businesses to discover relevant tenders, reducing the need to search across multiple fragmented portals. In addition, **interacting with procurers at the start of the process** can also help in finding interesting tenders. Early-stage communication allows suppliers to understand upcoming needs and priorities before tenders are published. This helps them anticipate relevant opportunities and prepare accordingly, as well as suggest solutions that match their strengths and interests. **Consulting services** can also help businesses identify tenders that are both suitable and strategic, using their expertise to filter opportunities based on the business' profile. Lastly, **discovery visits** (e.g. to public institutions or procurement events) can help businesses better understand what public buyers are looking for, where opportunities

BP2: Using public procurement platforms

About overcoming the blocking point of difficulty of use of public procurement platforms, the development of a **simplified and user-friendly platform** is the main solution. Improving the usability of public procurement platforms helps suppliers access, understand, and respond to tenders more easily, reducing frustration and the risk of errors during registration or submission. In addition, the participation of tenderers in **training on tender preparation** will also support the mitigation of such obstacles by providing step-by-step guidance on how to use procurement portals, from creating accounts to submitting tenders. Last but not least, **consultancy services** would also be useful,





BP3: Communicating with the public sector

In order to mitigate this blocking point, **interaction with procurers at the start of the process** should be prioritised. This will create a space for suppliers to ask questions, express interest, and better understand the needs and priorities of the contracting authority, building trust, increasing transparency, and making it easier for businesses to tailor their offerings. Another recommendation includes **discovery visits** (e.g. to public institutions or sector-specific procurement events) for businesses to build familiarity with public buyers, understand their expectations, and create informal connections. **Consulting services** would be helpful in this case as well, acting as intermediaries who understand both the language of the private sector and the procedures of the public sector. Lastly, **establishing clear points of contact and feedback channels** with public authorities appointing named contact persons for each tender or department would encourage communication and make businesses feel supported.

BP4: Institutionalized discrimination

Inclusive procurement criteria would help the mitigation of **institutionalized discrimination** and encourage diversity and inclusion. For example, women-led companies, social enterprises, minority-owned businesses, or companies with inclusive hiring practices could be prioritized. Therefore, **more quality oriented public procurement** should be encouraged, shifting from traditional price-only focus.





BP5: Lack of guidance, advice or support

In order to limit this blocking point, **capacity building programs** can be organized to build suppliers' skills and knowledge and provide in-depth guidance on procurement rules, documentation, evaluation criteria, and submission strategies, helping participants navigate complex procedures more confidently and independently. Additionally, the development of **practical toolkits and templates** (FAQs, checklists or tender templates) can offer suppliers a clear starting point, especially for newcomers or small businesses without dedicated tendering staff. **Consulting services** would be helpful in this case as well, providing one-on-one support to businesses for legal, technical or financial issues, during the tendering process. In addition, **cooperating with well-established companies** to form consortia would be helpful for smaller or less experienced tenderers to learn by doing. Lastly, **discovery visits** would offer direct insight into how the public sector works, who to contact, and how tenders are developed bridging the gap between information and understanding.

BP6: Cost of compiling a tender

This obstacle could be limited with **B2B events with companies to form consortia** as by partnering with other businesses, suppliers can share the workload and split the cost of preparing a tender. In addition, **cooperating with well-established companies** can reduce the cost of compiling a tender for smaller businesses as they often already have templates, internal staff, and know-how in place. An additional measure would be the **reduction of over-documentation** requesting only essential documents upfront and additional paperwork only from shortlisted candidates reducing the cost of initial tendering.





BP7: The timescale for preparing appropriate documentation / tender

Regarding this blocking point, **participating in training on tender preparation** can help suppliers be proactive, prepared and more confident in responding within tight deadlines. In addition, **consulting services** can accelerate the process of preparing and submitting documentation, bringing templates, checklists, and experience that allow faster compilation of submissions. In this case **reduction of over-documentation** can also be helpful. Procurers can streamline requirements, requesting only essential documents upfront and additional paperwork only from shortlisted candidates, saving time for tenderers. Lastly, **practical toolkits and templates** (FAQs, checklists or tender templates) provided by the contracting authority also work as time-savers in tight deadlines.

BP8: Organizational capability / lack of internal resources

In order to handle this blocking point, **cooperating with well-established companies** can be a solution for smaller and less experienced companies as partnering with larger and experienced firms will allow them to access their existing resources. Similarly, **B2B events with companies to form consortia** can be useful to form partnerships where responsibilities and workload is shared. Lastly, having available **practical toolkits and templates** (employees CVs, financial statements, official documents) will reduce repetitive work and hours needed to prepare for the tendering process.

BP9: Meeting financial capacity request

This blocking point can be handled for smaller companies by **cooperating with well-established companies** that are larger and financially stable organizations allowing the consortium to meet financial capacity requirements. Similarly, **B2B events with companies to form consortia** allow enterprises to join forces and pool resources and balance financial requirements together, improving their eligibility. In addition, **more quality-oriented public procurements** less focused on financial capacity and price will make smaller enterprises with limited financial power competitive in the tender. Lastly, as more direct and impactful measure, **securing additional funding and incentives** can strengthen financial standing of smaller enterprises and enable them to meet eligibility thresholds.





BP10: Requirements of financial guarantees

Regarding financial guarantees, creating partnerships by attending **B2B events with companies to form consortia** or **cooperating with well-established companies** can help fulfill the guarantee requirements, making their participation possible. Additionally, **more quality-oriented public procurement** and prioritization of quality, innovation, or social impact could help mitigate this blocking point. Lastly, allowing **alternative financial guarantees** would be the most direct measure to this blocking point, instead of high capital requirements, buyers could accept insurance bonds, third-party guarantees, or milestone-based payments.

BP11: Requirements of previous experience

As for requirements of previous experiences in tenders, participating in training on tender preparation can help suppliers understand how to present their existing experience in a way that aligns with the tender. At the same way, consultancy services can help suppliers frame their experience in a more competitive way and identify relevant projects in their portfolio. In addition, **B2B events with companies** encourage the form of consortia that can collectively meet the experience criteria of the tender and become eligible. Similarly, **cooperating with well-established companies** can help smaller companies with less experience participate in the tender leveraging the experience capacity of their partner. Lastly, tender should **design with proportionate requirements**, meaning that contracting authorities can scale down experience requirements based on size, value and risk of the contract in order to encourage new players to participate.

BP12: Obstacles hampering collaboration with other / set up of consortia

To overcome this blocking point, **participating in training on tender preparation** will be helpful as these trainings often include modules on how to build or join consortia. In addition, **B2B events with companies** to form consortia create a direct matchmaking opportunity for companies to meet potential partners. In addition, **consulting services** can guide companies through the technical, legal, and administrative process of forming consortia. Lastly, **cooperation with well-established companies** can help smaller or newer actors access networks, compliance knowledge, and administrative capacity.





BP13: Difficulty of being competent

This blocking point is more general and can be limited by **participating in training on tender participation** to build technical, procedural and strategic knowledge to prepare strong tenders and improve organizational readiness. Partnerships are helpful as well, so **cooperating with well-established companies** to gain exposure to best practices and practical knowledge and participating in **B2B events to form consortia** can build long-term competence. Lastly, **consulting services** provided tailored guidance can help organizations improve their tender submissions, acting as a competence booster.

BP14: Favouritism in procurement

In this case, **discovery visits** that promote open dialogue and informal relationship-building and support new actors making them visible to contractors, help to overcome favouritism. In addition, **consulting services** can support navigating and challenging unfair procurement practices. Lastly, **more quality-oriented public procurement** can reduce favouritism when implemented transparently and based on clear, measurable criteria.

BP15: Lack of sustainability criteria

As for this blocking point, **more quality-oriented public procurement** is central and allows authorities to diverse from the price-only criterion and include environmental and social value in evaluations, encouraging more sustainable outcomes. In addition, a more direct measure would be the establishment of **mandatory sustainability guidelines and targets** in procurement policies by governments or municipalities.





BP16: Excessive Complexity of Tender Documents

The complexity of tender documents is a critical issue that can be addressed by **participating in training on tender preparation** that equips applicants with the knowledge and tools to navigate complex tender documents, understand legal and technical terminology, and prepare accurate submissions. In addition, **reduction of over-documentation** can also be helpful. Procurers can streamline requirements, requesting only essential documents upfront and additional paperwork only from shortlisted candidates, saving time for tenderers and simplifying the tendering process.

BP17: Bureaucratic issues

These issues can be mitigated by **interacting with procurers at the start of the process** this allows potential suppliers clarify procedural steps early, raise concerns about redundant or unclear requirements. Additionally, **consulting services** can help navigate bureaucracy efficiently and avoid procedural errors. Also, **participating in training on tender preparation** helps participants understand bureaucratic processes, required documentation, and compliance steps, reducing delays or missteps caused by lack of familiarity. Lastly, **practical toolkits and templates** (FAQs, checklists, guidelines) provided by each contracting authority will reduce workload and frustration during the tendering process.

BP18: Lack of specialized staff

As for this blocking point, **participating in training on tender preparation** will help address the skills gap by equipping existing staff with the knowledge needed to navigate procurement processes. This gap can also be filled with **consulting services** that guide organizations through tendering processes that they lack the staff of. In addition, partnerships could also help with this blocking points as **cooperating with well-established companies** will be useful for new actors that can share and benefit from specialized expertise without hiring new staff internally. Similarly, **B2B events** create opportunities for networking and finding partners with complementary skills, which can help overcome the lack of internal experts.





BP19: Insufficient availability of qualified suppliers

This issue is connected to the blocking points about requirements and can be mitigated with **supplier development programs** funded or supported by the government or EU agencies. In addition, the establishment of **mandatory sustainability criteria and targets** with social impact will make more enterprises consider such factors and then contracting authorities that want to take these criteria into account will have more options to choose from. Lastly, partnerships are again important, B2B events to form consortia and cooperation with well-established companies will make create opportunities for more enterprises to participate.

BP20: Lack of knowledge about global strategies

This blocking point can be addressed by **participating in training on tender preparation** that often introduce global strategies to participants helping them to align their tenders with strategic policy goals. In addition, **discovery visits** will directly expose participants to how regions, authorities, or companies integrate international best practices and strategies in procurement. Lastly, **consulting services** can bridge the gap between local practice and global strategy, helping both tenderers and procurers align tenders with strategic goals like sustainability, innovation, or inclusion.

BP21: Lack of awareness on social issues

For the mitigation of this issue, **discovery visits** can be very useful, by presenting real-life examples of sustainable procurement or organizations where social criteria are actively applied. In addition, **consulting services** can offer targeted advice on how to align tenders with social procurement priorities, improve social impact documentation, and understand relevant policies. Lastly, **awareness raising campaigns** with respected local figures as ambassadors, can promote social procurement principles, share success stories, and motivate wider community and supplier engagement.





BP22: Shortage of skilled legal expertise in public procurement

This blocking point can be mitigated by **participating in training on tender preparation** that often include legal modules that cover procurement laws, regulations, contract requirements, and compliance standards. **Consulting services** that can offer tailored guidance to organizations struggling with the complexities of procurement law can also be helpful. In addition, **cooperation with well-established companies** can provide access to practical legal knowledge and reduce legal risks for smaller or less experienced partners. Lastly, **reduction of over-documentation** would be useful in this case as well, requesting only essential documents upfront and additional paperwork only from shortlisted candidates can reduce the pressure on the staff that is unskilled in legal expertise.

BP23: Underdeveloped policy framework

This is a critical blocking point that can be addressed by the Government by adding **social clauses to administrative and legal context**, ensuring that social requirements are met. Similarly, the establishment of **mandatory sustainability criteria and targets** will ensure that all tenders consistently include clear environmental, social, or economic sustainability requirements, raising the overall standards of public contracts. In addition, targets can be measured with KPIs that provide the clear social outcomes.





BP24: Unwillingness to change and lack of incentives or formal obligations

In order to overcome this blocking point, **discovery visits** could be helpful to present suppliers and procurers the successful examples of socially responsible procurement in action, making them both consider integrating social criteria to their work. In addition, **collaboration with educational institutions** will help embed social responsibility concepts into the training of future procurement professionals. **Awareness raising campaigns** will also be helpful for shifting mindsets, explain the concept and answer questions across the broader procurement system. Lastly, **digital platforms for courses on sustainability and social responsibility** can be a useful learning opportunity and can lead to gradually changing attitudes and promote acceptance of socially responsible procurement. Lastly, to formally address this issue, **mandatory sustainability criteria and targets** (measured by KPIs) should be established.





4. Best practices

4.1 Objective

This chapter presents a collection of international case studies on best practices in the field of Social Public Procurement (SPP), compiled as part of the Deal4Good project (Work Package 2, Task 2.4). A total of ten outstanding examples of **successful collaboration between public authorities and social enterprises**, where social objectives are effectively integrated into public procurement processes, was identified and documented.

For the identification of best practices was completed by taking into account that, a best practice in SPP is defined as an **innovative, results-driven, and replicable model** in which public procurement is used strategically to achieve social goals. These may include the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in the labor market, the promotion of ethical labor standards, or the support of social enterprises as service providers. In total, 14 practices were identified.

The identification process involved 4 key steps:

1. **Desk research** and preliminary identification of promising initiatives
2. **Engagement with stakeholders** to assess the practices' impact and scalability
3. Optional **interviews** with representatives of selected practices
4. Detailed **analysis and documentation**

The insights drawn from these case studies aim to highlight common success factors, propose policy recommendations, and present practical strategies for overcoming challenges in SPP implementation. Ultimately, this work supports the broader goal of **enhancing the role of social enterprises** in public procurement and promoting inclusive and socially responsible spending across Europe and beyond.

In the following sections, the best practices are presented.





4.2 Case studies

Fair Trade as a Core Procurement Principle

Organisation: Isabel Martín Foundation

Website: fundacionisabelmartin.es

Country: Spain (Zaragoza)

Type: Social Enterprise

Sector: Fair trade, development cooperation, women's integration

Representative: Olga Estella Ibarbuen

Remarkable Aspect: Tangible Social Impact

Best Practice Description:

The Isabel Martín Foundation has effectively embedded fair trade principles into its organizational operations and procurement strategy. By partnering with cooperatives such as Creative Handicrafts in India, the Foundation sources ethically produced goods that are marketed and sold in Spain. This approach embeds fair trade values throughout its supply chain and enables Spanish consumers and institutions to access products that uphold social justice and ethical labor standards.

The Foundation also invests in the development of local producers and cooperatives, offering training and support to ensure compliance with fair trade certification requirements. These efforts help producers maintain sustainable production practices while aligning with broader social and environmental objectives.

Where possible, the Foundation incorporates fair trade products into public procurement contracts, contributing to ethical sourcing at institutional levels. Its model has proven adaptable across different sectors and regions, offering a replicable framework for organizations seeking to promote socially responsible procurement practices.

Sources: <https://fundacionisabelmartin.es/>

ISABEL MARTÍN FOUNDATION

The Isabel Martín Foundation is a Spanish NGO, state-wide, private, non-denominational and apolitical, which works on International Development Cooperation projects. The organization was born with the vocation of continuing the legacy of Isabel Martín, so it works for the empowerment of women, promoting education, dignity and justice, values for which she fought.

In addition, it focuses on unprotected children, community development and the promotion of people, according to the principles of community philanthropy.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Figure 20 Best practice from Spain "Fair trade as a core procurement principle"



Co-funded by
the European Union



Embedding Sustainability in University Procurement

Organisation: UPV (Universitat Politècnica de València)

Website: upv.es

Country: Spain

Type: Public Authority

Sector: Education

Representative: Carmen Bellver

Remarkable Aspect: Innovation

Best Practice Description:

UPV has embedded environmental sustainability at the core of its procurement policies, applying robust ecological criteria to a variety of service contracts, including catering, vending, and facility maintenance. These criteria are designed to reduce waste, encourage the use of environmentally friendly materials and methods, and ensure that suppliers adhere to sustainability benchmarks.

The university has developed a clear set of measurable environmental indicators, which it applies during the tendering process to evaluate supplier proposals. External audits are regularly conducted to verify contractor compliance with the set standards. This rigorous oversight reinforces accountability and encourages contractors to align with green procurement requirements.

Despite encountering challenges - such as limited market availability of sustainable alternatives and the need to balance institutional goals with business feasibility - UPV remains committed to its sustainability agenda. The university's approach demonstrates how public authorities can pursue environmental innovation in procurement while navigating regulatory and market constraints. The model is particularly relevant for other educational institutions seeking to enhance their environmental impact through procurement practices.

Sources: <https://www.upv.es/entidades/amapuoc/compra-verde/>



Figure 21 Best practice from Spain "Fair trade as a core procurement principle"



Co-funded by
the European Union



Turning Waste into Social Value

Organisation: Aceite Solidario

Website: aceitesolidario.org

Country: Spain (Valencia)

Type: Social Enterprise

Sector: Oil Recollection

Representative: José Ramón Cuesta

Remarkable Aspect: Scalability and Replicability

Best Practice Description:

Aceite Solidario is a social enterprise based in Valencia that operates an innovative and socially impactful program for collecting used cooking oil from institutional and commercial kitchens, including those in schools, hospitals, and hospitality establishments. This initiative supports environmental sustainability by promoting proper oil disposal and contributes to the circular economy by converting waste into a resource.

The funds generated through the recycling and resale of collected oil are reinvested into social enterprises that employ people with disabilities and those at risk of social exclusion. This dual Focus - environmental responsibility and social inclusion - aligns the initiative with several UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including clean water and sanitation, sustainable cities, and climate action.

Aceite Solidario has formed strategic partnerships with both public and private entities, including universities and businesses, to expand the reach and impact of the program. While challenges remain in terms of awareness-raising and business engagement, the initiative has already demonstrated tangible results in terms of social reintegration and environmental outcomes.

Its model is highly scalable and replicable, offering a framework that can be adapted to different local and national contexts. The organization emphasizes transparent communication and process clarity to foster trust and participation among stakeholders, ensuring long-term sustainability.

Sources: <https://aceitesolidario.org/index.html>

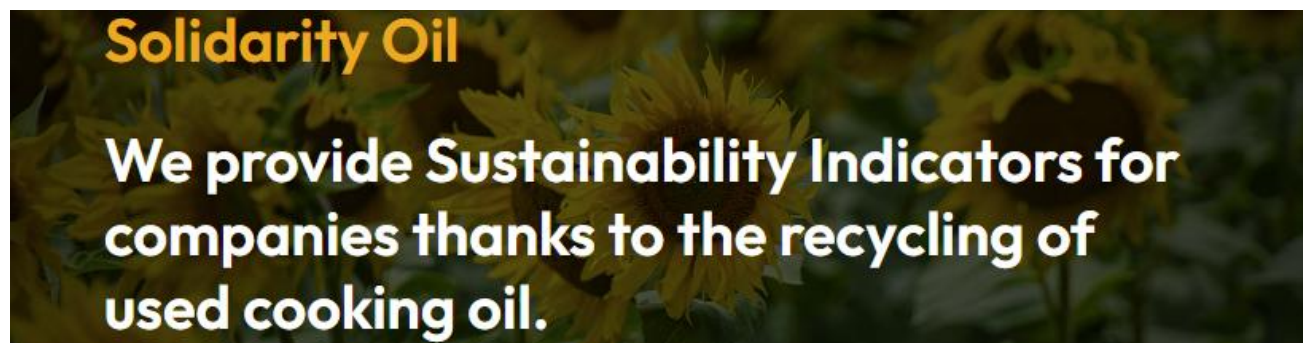


Figure 22 Best practice from Spain "Turning Oil into Social Value"



Co-funded by
the European Union



Scaling Social Enterprise Participation through Reserved Lots

Organisation: EOPYY (National Organization for the Provision of Health Services, Greece)

Website: eopyy.gov.gr

Country: Greece

Type: Public Authority

Sector: Health Sector

Representative: Nikoleta Gouveli

Remarkable Aspect: Cost-Effectiveness

Best Practice Description:

EOPYY, Greece's national health procurement authority, launched an innovative reserved procurement procedure for cleaning services across its headquarters and regional offices. The contract was divided into eight geographic lots, each corresponding to a different region in Greece. This design allowed Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) - specifically the Greek KoiSPEs - to bid on individual lots or multiple lots, according to their capacity.

The procurement aimed not only to achieve cost efficiency, but also to advance social objectives by fostering employment among vulnerable groups and enhancing the organizational capacity of social enterprises. Although no KoiSPE bid for the entire contract, regional consortia of social enterprises successfully submitted proposals and were awarded seven out of the eight lots.

The tender process required WISEs to meet high standards in terms of quality and performance, prompting many to strengthen their internal processes and engage in inter-organizational collaboration. The initiative demonstrated the viability of applying Article 20 of Law No. 4412/2016, which allows for reserved contracts, even in large-scale procurement settings.

By providing an opportunity for social enterprises to operate within more complex and geographically dispersed contracts, EOPYY's tender significantly increased the visibility and capabilities of the WISE sector in Greece. The process highlighted the importance of targeted tendering and cross-sector collaboration as enablers of inclusive and socially impactful public procurement.

Sources: <https://eopyy.gov.gr/article/80d2d7d1-1e72-4ca4-b6dd-7cebfaf4bbb9>



Figure 23 Best practice from Greece "Scaling SE participation through reserved lots"



Co-funded by
the European Union



Social Inclusion through Localized Procurement

Organisation: Wroclawskie Mieszkania (City of Wrocław)

Website: wroclaw.pl

Country: Poland

Type: Other

Sector: Cleaning Services

Representative: Anna Kieler

Remarkable Aspect: Tangible Social Impact

Best Practice Description:

The City of Wrocław implemented a socially responsible procurement initiative by reserving a cleaning services contract for social cooperatives under Article 15a of Poland's Act on Social Cooperatives. The contract, though modest in value (under €30,000), was tendered through a restricted procedure and ultimately awarded to the Wroclawska Social Cooperative.

This cooperative employed 12 individuals facing social exclusion - many of whom came from homeless shelters - thereby advancing both social and professional reintegration. The contract formed part of Wrocław's broader social economy strategy, which emphasizes the use of public procurement to support vulnerable populations and promote inclusive labor markets.

Despite the success of this pilot, structural challenges persist. Many social cooperatives in Poland remain too small to compete for larger contracts. To address this, the City of Wrocław is increasingly incorporating social clauses into smaller tenders and developing incentives to stimulate greater participation by social enterprises.

The Wrocław case illustrates how municipalities can leverage below-threshold procurement mechanisms to operationalize social inclusion goals. It also highlights the importance of aligning procurement policies with broader urban social strategies, and how small-scale interventions can catalyze significant long-term change.

Sources: <https://www.wroclaw.pl/rozmawia/ngo-ekonomia-spoeczna>

Social economy of the City of Wrocław

16.08.2021 19:59 | Department of Social Participation



Figure 24 Best practice from Poland "Social inclusion through localized procurement"



Co-funded by
the European Union



Mainstreaming Social Clauses in Public Works

Organisation: Region of Wallonia

Website: marchespublics.wallonie.be

Country: Belgium

Type: Public Authority

Sector: Building Sector

Representative: Alexandra Barbier

Remarkable Aspect: Policy Integration

Best Practice Description:

The Region of Wallonia has institutionalized the use of social clauses in public procurement, particularly in the building sector, to promote employment among youth, the unemployed, and other vulnerable groups. Since 2013, the region has piloted and, from 2016, mandated social clauses in all regional public works contracts. A 2019 decree further required local authorities to integrate these clauses in order to qualify for regional subsidies.

To implement this framework effectively, Wallonia developed a flexible clause mechanism that allows bidders to either offer placements directly or subcontract to social enterprises. The region also set up a network of social clause facilitators embedded within public administrations and industry associations. These facilitators support public buyers and contractors and promote shared learning through regular meetings and the development of guidance tools, including templates and checklists.

Between 2014 and 2018, 442 contracts included social clauses totaling nearly €400 million. This resulted in 410 training placements and €3.5 million in revenue for social enterprises. Wallonia's approach demonstrates how strong political will, stakeholder collaboration, and institutional infrastructure can embed social value into mainstream public procurement. The model is replicable by other regional governments aiming to align procurement with inclusive growth objectives.

Sources: <https://marchespublics.wallonie.be/pouvoirs-adjudicateurs.html>, https://green-forum.ec.europa.eu/green-public-procurement/good-practice-library/measuring-impact-social-clauses-public-works-contracts_en

Measuring the impact of social clauses in public works contracts in Wallonia

Case study of Wallonia, Belgium

Figure 25 Best practice from Belgium "Mainstreaming social clauses"



Co-funded by
the European Union



Inclusive Employment through IT Circularity

Organisation: AfB gGmbH

Website: afb-group.de

Country: Germany

Type: Social Enterprise

Sector: IT Services / Circular Economy

Representative: Thomas Richter

Remarkable Aspect: Tangible Social Impact

Best Practice Description:

AfB gGmbH is a pioneering social enterprise in Germany that merges environmental and social impact through the refurbishment of IT hardware. Specializing in the reuse of equipment from public and private institutions, AfB operates with a workforce in which approximately 45% are people with disabilities. The company processes over 600,000 devices per year, significantly reducing electronic waste while generating inclusive employment.

The organization works through procurement agreements in which decommissioned IT assets are transferred for secure data wiping, certified refurbishment, and resale. AfB maintains compliance with high data security standards, which builds trust with institutional partners. It also aligns with key EU strategies, including the Green Deal and Social Economy Action Plan, making it an ideal procurement partner for municipalities and government agencies.

AfB's model is financially sustainable, generating revenue through the sale of refurbished devices while maintaining minimal dependence on public funding. It is now active in four countries across Europe. The initiative is a strong example of how procurement can simultaneously support the circular economy and inclusive labor markets.

Sources: <https://www.afb-group.de/en/>, <https://vergabe.mehrwert-inklusive.de> and Online interview with Thomas Richter, Partner Manager Eastern Germany



INKLUSIONSUNTERNEHMEN

Schon gewusst? Fast 30.000 Menschen mit und ohne Behinderung arbeiten deutschlandweit in Inklusionsunternehmen:

- ✓ Tariflich oder ortsüblich entlohnt
- ✓ Auf dem allgemeinen Arbeitsmarkt
- ✓ Sozialversichert

Figure 26 Best practice from Germany "Inclusive employment through IT circularity"



Co-funded by
the European Union



Digitizing Public Procurement for Inclusive Access

Organisation: GeBIZ

Website: gebiz.gov.sg

Country: Singapore

Type: Public Authority

Sector: Public Procurement / E-Governance

Representative: Ministry of Finance

Remarkable Aspect: Innovation

Best Practice Description:

GeBIZ is Singapore's national electronic procurement platform that streamlines the entire public procurement cycle - from tender publication to contract management - through a fully digital interface. Designed for inclusivity, GeBIZ levels the playing field for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and social enterprises, making it easier for them to participate in government tenders.

The platform enforces transparency by publicly posting all procurement opportunities and award decisions. It also incorporates business intelligence tools such as spend tracking and supplier scorecards to improve procurement performance. Additionally, onboarding processes were designed with user feedback to ensure ease of use for resource-constrained organizations.

GeBIZ supports equal access through simplified registration, access to historical pricing data, and demand aggregation features. The system reduces administrative burden, promotes fair competition, and has served as a model for other governments exploring digital procurement transformation. Its structure offers significant scalability potential in both developed and emerging markets.

Sources: <https://www.gebiz.gov.sg>

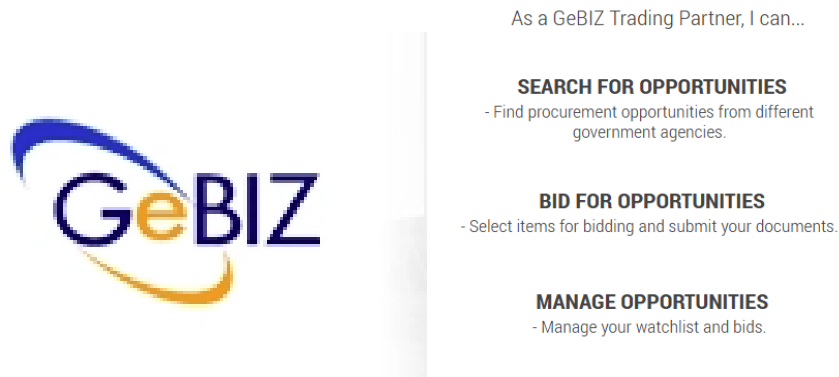


Figure 27 Best Practice from Singapore "Digitalizing public procurements"



Co-funded by
the European Union



Ethical Procurement with Global Supply Chain Oversight

Organisation: City of Oslo

Website: oslo.kommune.no

Country: Norway

Type: Public Authority

Sector: Public Administration and Procurement

Representative: City of Oslo

Remarkable Aspect: Tangible Social Impact

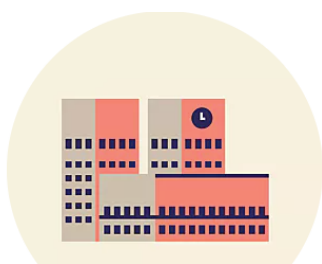
Best Practice Description:

The City of Oslo has implemented a socially responsible procurement strategy focused on high-risk global supply chains, particularly in the food and beverage sector. Under its 2017 Procurement Strategy and the Oslo Model, the city prioritizes fair trade and organic certifications while embedding strong labor and human rights clauses in contracts.

Framework agreements for products such as coffee, bananas, and dairy include mandatory social certification requirements and traceability criteria. Oslo also conducts thorough verification through supplier self-assessments and coordinated audits with Ethical Trade Norway. The results are tangible: in just four months in 2019, the share of fair trade bananas rose from 3% to 50%, and fair trade coffee from 9% to 13%.

The initiative's success lies in its alignment with international frameworks (e.g., UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights) and in its collaborative approach to compliance monitoring. Oslo's model is scalable to other sectors and cities and offers a blueprint for integrating ethical trade into municipal procurement.

Sources: City of Oslo website: <https://www.oslo.kommune.no>, Global Lead City Network of Sustainable Procurements, Ethical Trade Norway: <https://www.etiskhandel.no>, UN Global Compact: <https://unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/participants/43431>, European Commission, Making Socially Responsible Public Procurement Work: 71 Good Practice Cases, May 2020: <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/42743>



Finn fram i kommunen

- ◇ Bydeler
- ◇ Etater, foretak og ombud
- ◇ Rådhuset

Politikk og medvirkning

- ◇ Politikk
- ◇ Medvirkning og åpenhet
- ◇ Statistikk

Figure 28 Best practice from Norway, "Ethical Procurement with Global Supply chain oversight"



Co-funded by
the European Union



Combating Labor Exploitation in Fashion Supply Chains

Organisation: Prefecture of Milan

Website: -

Country: Italy

Type: Public Authority

Sector: Public Administration / Governance

Representative: Claudio Sgaraglia

Remarkable Aspect: Tangible Social Impact

Best Practice Description:

The Prefecture of Milan developed a voluntary protocol to address unethical labor practices in the fashion supply chain. Launched in June 2025, the "Memorandum of Understanding for Legal Procurement Practices in the Fashion Supply Chain" seeks to promote transparency, reduce exploitation, and create a registry of compliant suppliers through a centralized database and a "green list."

The protocol is supported by industry associations and public authorities and is part of a wider initiative to reinforce ethical standards in subcontracting practices. Key features include a voluntary monitoring system and collaboration between public authorities and fashion brands.

The initiative has led to increased supplier accountability and greater engagement from major fashion companies in ethical sourcing. It serves as a replicable model for addressing labor risks in other sectors through voluntary, multi-stakeholder governance frameworks.

Sources: <https://www.sercoinstitute.com/news/2023/italy-public-procurement-a-public-good-beyond-the-public-purse>, <https://www.voguebusiness.com/story/sustainability/can-italian-fashion-end-exploitation-with-a-voluntary-agreement>

Italy & Public Procurement: A public good beyond the public purse?



Figure 29 Best practice from Italy "Combating labor exploitation in fashion supply chains"



Co-funded by
the European Union



Embedding Social Criteria in Healthcare Procurement

Organisation: Estar Toscana

Website: estar.toscana.it

Country: Italy (Tuscany)

Type: Public Authority

Sector: Public Health / Healthcare Procurement

Representative: Giuseppe Maria Mugnai

Remarkable Aspect: Innovation

Best Practice Description:

Estar Toscana, Tuscany's regional health service procurement agency, has pioneered the integration of social criteria into healthcare procurement. In 2024, it gained national recognition for its approach that aims to improve working conditions throughout the healthcare supply chain, particularly in sectors lacking formal environmental and social benchmarks.

The agency includes social criteria both in award evaluations and contract execution requirements, ensuring contractors adhere to decent labor standards. It also established a dialogue mechanism for ongoing monitoring between contracting authorities and service providers. This proactive, compliance-focused strategy earned Estar Toscana the Compraverde Buygreen 2024 Award for Social Procurement.

Estar's initiative is notable for applying social responsibility standards even in procurement categories where such requirements are not yet standardized. It serves as a scalable model for public authorities seeking to promote ethical labor conditions within complex procurement environments.

Sources: <https://www.forumcompraverde.it/en/excellence-in-gpp-compraverde-buygreen-2024-awards-italian-green-public-procurement-leaders/>, <https://www.estar.toscana.it/>



Figure 30 Best practice from Italy "Embedding social criteria in health procurement"





Regional Action Plan for Sustainable and Inclusive Procurement

Organisation: Veneto Region

Website: regione.veneto.it

Country: Italy

Type: Public Authority

Sector: Public Administration / Regional Governance

Representative: Luca Zaia

Remarkable Aspect: Policy Integration

Best Practice Description:

In March 2024, the Veneto Region adopted a three-year Green Public Procurement (GPP) Action Plan (2024-2026), reaffirming its commitment to integrating environmental, economic, and social criteria into public spending. The plan goes beyond environmental goals by emphasizing gender equality, generational equity, and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups.

The action plan includes annual monitoring and evaluation and promotes capacity-building in areas such as sustainable purchasing, training, pilot initiatives, networking, and communication. It also supports circular economy principles and the use of innovative green technologies in public contracts.

This comprehensive, forward-looking strategy provides a structured and replicable governance model for embedding social and environmental objectives into procurement policy. It is particularly relevant for other regions seeking to align public spending with the UN 2030 Agenda.

Sources: <https://www.fondazioneecosistemi.org/appalti-pubblici-sostenibili-approvato-il-piano-di-azione-triennale-2024-2026-delle-regione-veneto/>

**Appalti pubblici sostenibili:
approvato il Piano di azione
triennale 2024-2026 delle
Regione Veneto**



Figure 31 Best practice from Italy, “Regional Action Plan for sustainable and inclusive procurement”





Dual Focus on Social and Environmental Standards in Cleaning Procurement

Organisation: The Cyprus Institute (Cleaning Services)

Website: cyi.ac.cy

Country: Cyprus

Type: Public Authority

Sector: Cleaning Services

Representative: Not specified

Remarkable Aspect: Tangible Social Impact

Best Practice Description:

The Cyprus Institute awarded a three-year cleaning services contract covering 11 buildings (approximately 10,000 m²), embedding social and environmental criteria throughout the procurement process. The award criteria prioritized sustainability (60%) over cost (40%).

Social requirements included fair labor practices, equal opportunities, and compliance with employment laws, verified through declarations and audits. Contractors were also encouraged to employ asylum seekers. Environmental expectations involved the use of eco-labeled products, energy-efficient equipment, and ISO 14001 or EMAS-certified environmental management systems.

A dedicated oversight committee monitored contract compliance, including payroll, training, and environmental certification. This integrated model not only improved working conditions for service staff but also reduced the environmental impact of institutional cleaning, offering a replicable approach to sustainable facilities management.

Sources: <https://publicprocurement.gov.cy/monades/strathgikes-dhmosies-symbaseis/koinwnika-ypey8ynes-dhmosies-symbaseis/>

Ο απώτερος σκοπός είναι να συμβάλουν οι δημόσιες συμβάσεις στην μείωση των ανισοτήτων και την συνολικά αποδοτικότερη διαχείριση των δημόσιων πόρων.

Τι προνοεί η Νομοθεσία περί Δημοσίων Συμβάσεων;

Οι βασικοί μηχανισμοί που περιλαμβάνονται στον Ν.73(Ι)/2016 σε σχέση με τις Κοινωνικά Υπεύθυνες Δημόσιες Συμβάσεις είναι οι ακόλουθοι:

Figure 32 Best practice from Cyprus "Dual focus on social environmental standards in cleaning procurement"



Co-funded by
the European Union



Inclusive and Sustainable Furniture Procurement for Innovation Spaces

Organisation: The Cyprus Institute (Furniture Procurement)

Website: cyi.ac.cy

Country: Cyprus

Type: Public Authority

Sector: Furniture Procurement / Sustainable Infrastructure

Representative: Not specified

Remarkable Aspect: Policy Integration

Best Practice Description:

As part of its “NOUS Knowledge Hub” under the U-SOLVE project, the Cyprus Institute conducted a socially and environmentally responsible furniture procurement process. The contract awarded gave equal weight to social/environmental criteria and price (60% and 40%, respectively).

Social specifications focused on “Design for All” principles to ensure full accessibility for people with disabilities. Environmental criteria included the use of sustainably sourced timber, low-emission finishes, modular and repairable construction, and long-term availability of spare parts.

Compliance was verified through supplier documentation, including design plans and certifications. This procurement sets a precedent for institutions seeking to promote inclusive infrastructure and circular economy principles through their purchasing decisions.

Sources: <https://publicprocurement.gov.cy/monades/strathgikes-dhmosies-symbaseis/koinwnika-ypey8ynes-dhmosies-symbaseis/>

Γενικό Λογιστήριο της Δημοκρατίας



Figure 33 Best practice from Cyprus " Inclusive and Sustainable Furniture Procurement for Innovation Spaces"



Co-funded by
the European Union



5. Conclusions

This chapter brings together the **key findings of the comparative analysis** and **blocking point assessment** carried out across the partner countries and finally identified **best practices**. It aims to summarize the current state of SPP, highlight critical challenges faced by both social enterprises and contracting authorities, and outline potential pathways for improvement.

The comparative analysis reveals a generally **low level of engagement with SPP** among both social enterprises and contracting authorities. Participation in SPP tenders remains limited, with many actors lacking familiarity with relevant processes, criteria, and strategic frameworks. While some entities have moderate experience in public procurement, the transition toward socially and environmentally responsible practices is still underdeveloped. Social enterprises in particular show minimal awareness of national or regional SPP strategies, highlighting the need for clearer communication, targeted training, and greater policy visibility. Contracting authorities face parallel **challenges**. Although some possess the internal capacity to manage SPP tenders, many struggle with technical, legal, or managerial readiness. Inconsistent awareness of SPP strategies and limited stakeholder engagement further inhibit progress. Overall, the findings underscore the urgent need for structured support, capacity-building, and clearer strategic direction.

The analysis of **barriers to SPP adoption** points to a range of interconnected issues, from fragmented procurement platforms and lack of resources to excessive documentation and underdeveloped policy frameworks. To address these, practical measures such as centralized digital platforms, tailored training, consulting services, and B2B networking events are essential. Promoting partnerships and consortia can strengthen the participation of smaller actors, while policy reforms and inclusive procurement criteria will help shift systems toward sustainability and social value.

Furthermore, **best practices** from the desk research highlight key trends that can guide future efforts. These include a strong focus on social inclusion, policy innovation, and sustainability, with examples demonstrating how SPP can integrate vulnerable groups and foster regulatory support. These insights underscore the transformative potential of SPP when applied strategically and adapted to local contexts.

In conclusion, findings offer a **comprehensive overview of the SPP landscape** across partner countries. By addressing these insights, stakeholders can foster greater collaboration, enhance capacity, and accelerate the adoption of Social Public Procurement practices throughout Europe.





6. Annex I – Questionnaire for SEs

SURVEY - INTERVIEW for Social Enterprises

PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR CONTACT DETAILS:

Name of the SE:

Sector and core activities of the Enterprise:

Number of employees:

Name & Surname of the representative:

Position:

Phone number:

Email:

- 1. Which is your level of knowledge / familiarity with the Public Procurement procedures and the corresponding policy framework in your country?**

Very Poor

Poor

Average

Good

Very good

- 2. If your reply is poor or very poor on the above question, please give the prevailing reason.**

Financial reasons

Lack of interest

Lack of trust in public procurement process

Other, please specify



Co-funded by
the European Union



3. Which is your level of knowledge / familiarity with the Social Public Procurement (SPP) procedures and the corresponding policy framework in your country?

Very Poor

Poor

Average

Good

Very good

4. If your reply is poor or very poor on the above question, please give the prevailing reason.

Financial reasons

Lack of interest

Lack of trust in public procurement process

Other, please specify

5. Do you know if there is an Action Plan/Strategy to implement SPP and/or Social Economy in your country?

YES

NO

I am not sure

6. Do you know if there is an Action Plan/Strategy to implement SPP and/or Social Economy in your region/city?

YES

NO

I am not sure





7. Do you know if there are set SPP Criteria/Clauses used in your country?

YES

NO

I am not sure

8. If yes, please make a reference to the corresponding SPP Criteria/Clauses.

.....

9. Have you ever participated in a public procurement tender and/or SPP tender submitting an offer?

a) Yes, in Public Procurement tender (not SPP)

b) Yes, in SPP tender

c) I tried, but finally not submitted the offer

d) No, never

If the answer above is a:

10. How often do you participate in public tenders (not SPP)?

I have participated only once

Once per year

2-5 times per year

More than 5 times per year

11. And in which sector(s)?

Please specify.....

If the answer is b:

12. If the answer is b: How often do you participate in SPP tenders?

I have participated only once

Once per year

2-5 times per year





More than 5 times per year

13. And in which sector(s)?

Please specify.....

14. Were you awarded the contract(s)?

Please specify.....

15. Do you remember the social criteria/clauses included in the awarding procedure?

Please specify.....

16. Did you use an electronic system to submit your offer?

Please specify.....

17. Please describe your experience, highlighting positive and negative aspects, lessons learnt.

.....

If the answer is c:

18. Please describe your experience mentioning the main problems encountered and the final reason for not submitting your offer?

.....

Back to the main part of the survey

19. Which are the means of seeking tenders (multiple answers possible)?

I am not used to seeking for tenders

Tender alert services

Public procurement platforms

SMEs associations



Co-funded by
the European Union



I have a dedicated employee for that
Other

20. Which are the main reasons for participating in public tenders (multiple answers possible) ?

New market opportunities
Opportunity to launch a product/service
Opportunities of new collaborations
Other, please specify....

21. Are there policy schemes, support measures or incentives for Social Enterprises' operation in your country (multiple answers possible)?

Funding mechanisms/schemes
Tax incentives
Targeted labelling for products/services
Training programmes
Other, please specify...
.....

22. Are there networks, advisory organizations, incubators for Social Enterprises in your country?

If yes, please mention the most important and what they offer.

23. Do you have the ability to participate in SPP procedures by preparing and submitting an offer?

Yes, without problem
Yes, but with difficulties
No





24. If no, select the skills that are missing (multiple answers possible) and please elaborate:

Project management skills

Technical skills

Legal skills

Other, please specify

25. Please identify at least 4 main difficulties (blocking points) to participate in SPP? (categorize identified blocking points into at least three distinct types)

Finding interesting tenders

Using public procurement platforms

Communicating with the public sector

Institutionalized discrimination

Lack of guidance, advice or support

Cost of compiling a tender

The timescale for preparing appropriate documentation / tender

Organizational capability / lack of internal resources

Meeting financial capacity request

Requirements of financial guarantees

Requirements of previous experience

Obstacles hampering collaboration with other / set up of consortia

Difficulty of being competent

Other, please specify

26. Suggest some solutions to overcome these blocking points?

Participating in training on tender preparation

Centralised website collecting opportunities in public tenders

B2B events with companies to form consortia

Interacting with procurers at the start of the process

Consulting services

Cooperating with well-established companies

Discovery visits

More quality oriented public procurement (versus price only criterion)

Other, please specify

For each solution, please provide details e.g. which stakeholders/organisations should be involved, whose responsibility, etc.





7. Annex II – Questionnaire for CAs

SURVEY - INTERVIEW for Contracting Authorities

PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR CONTACT DETAILS:

Name & Surname:

Organisation:

Position:

Phone number:

Email:

1. Which is your level of knowledge / familiarity with the Social Public Procurement (SPP)?

Very Poor

Poor

Average

Good

Very good

2. If your reply is poor or very poor on the above question, please give the prevailing reason.

My organization is not engaged in Social Public Procurement (SPP).

My role involves limited public procurement responsibilities.

Due to organisation's financial reasons.



Co-funded by
the European Union



Other, please specify

3. How familiar are you with the policy framework for SPP and/or Social Economy in your country?

Very Poor

Poor

Average

Good

Very good

4. If your familiarity level is good or very good, please make a reference to the corresponding law, policy document, etc and specify if it concerns SPP or Social Economy or both.

.....

5. Do you know if there is an Action Plan/Strategy to implement SPP and/or Social Economy in your country?

Yes

No

I am not sure

6. If yes, please make a reference to the corresponding Action Plan/Strategy and specify if it concerns SPP or Social Economy or both.

.....

7. Do you know if there is an Action Plan/Strategy to implement SPP and/or Social Economy in your region/city?



Co-funded by
the European Union



Yes

No

I am not sure

- 8. If yes, please make a reference to the corresponding Action Plan/Strategy and specify if it concerns SPP or Social Economy or both.**

.....

- 9. Do you know if there are set SPP Criteria/Clauses used in your country?**

Yes

No

I am not sure

- 10. If yes, please make a reference to the corresponding SPP Criteria/Clauses.**

.....

- 11. Which is the most commonly used award procedures in your legal system:**

.....

Lowest price

Most-economically advantageous tender (MEAT) [the encouragement to shift from a price only approach towards MEAT in the Directive 2014/24/EU has widened the space for social considerations in the awarding of contracts (art. 67)]

Life Cycle Cost or Life Cycle Assessment

I am not sure

Other, please specify....





12. Is there an electronic system for bidding preparation and submission at national/regional/local level?

Yes

No

I am not sure

and provide a short description mentioning strengths and problems (if any)

13. Is there a monitoring system to monitor and evaluate the process after the award?

Yes

No

I am not sure

14. Have you ever applied SPP procedure in your Organisation? If yes, in which sector?

I have never applied

Yes, in cleaning products and services

Yes, in computers, monitors, tablets and smartphones

Yes, in copying and graphic paper

Yes, in data centres, server rooms and cloud services

Yes, in electrical and electronic equipment used in the health care sector

Yes, in electricity

Yes, in food catering services and vending machines

Yes, in furniture





Yes, in imaging equipment, consumables, and print services

Yes, in office building design, construction and management

Yes, in paints, varnishes and road markings

Yes, in public space maintenance

Yes, in road design, construction and maintenance

Yes, in road lighting and traffic signals

Yes, in road transport

Yes, in sanitary tapware

Yes, in textiles

Yes, in toilets and urinals

Yes, in waste water infrastructure

Yes, in water-based heaters

Other, please specify...

15. Do you know the Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) principle?

Yes

No

I am not sure

16. If yes, what is according to your opinion the average level of DNSH application in the public tenders?

Inexistent

Low

Medium

High





Very High

17. Have you ever involved end-users and other stakeholders within the organisation in the preparation of a tendering process?

Yes

No

I am not sure

18. If yes, what type of stakeholders?

Social Enterprises

Cooperatives

Business Support Organisations

Non-profit associations

Mutual societies

Associations and foundations

External experts

Other, please specify

19. Do you have the appropriate project management, technical and legal skills in your organisation/department/team to develop and publish a SPP tender?

Yes

No

20. If no, select the skills that are missing (multiple answers possible) and please elaborate:





Project management skills

Technical skills

Legal skills

Other, please specify

21. Have you ever consider bringing in external expertise to fill any skills' gaps?

Yes

No

I am not sure

22. Please identify at least 4 main challenges and barriers (blocking points) to SPP implementation in your country? (categorize identified blocking points into at least three distinct types)

.....

23. Suggest some solutions to overcome these blocking points?

.....

For each solution, please provide details e.g. which stakeholders/organisations should be involved, whose responsibility, etc.

24. Are there training/capacity building programmes for public procurers in place?

Yes

No

I am not sure

and provide some details, e.g. who is responsible for the programmes, who are the trainees, how often...





8. Annex III – Best practices questionnaire

Deal4Good_WP2_T2.4 Best practices Google form questionnaire

Select your organisation: *

- ☐ CONVALORES
- ☐ ECSF
- ☐ EXEO
- ☐ UWA

BEST PRACTICE

2.

What is the name of the organisation that constitutes best practice? Please, also add the organisation's website: *

3.

In which country is best practice based? (For organisation based in multiple locations, please use the place where the best practices were implemented or, if unclear, the headquarters) *

4.

Type of the organisation: *

- ☐ social enterprise
- ☐ public authority
- ☐ other

5.

Sector of the organisation (*education, financial services, consultancy, etc.*): *

6.

Name and Surname of the representative: *

7.

What aspect makes the best practice remarkable? *





- Tangible Social Impact (Demonstrating clear and measurable benefits, such as improved employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups, enhanced social inclusion, or better working conditions)
- Innovation (Introducing new or creative approaches to solving social challenges through procurement, such as using new partnership models or evaluation criteria)
- Scalability and Replicability (Having the potential to be successfully adapted and implemented by other public authorities or in different regions or sectors)
- Policy Integration (Aligning with broader local, national, or EU-level strategies for social economy, sustainability, or inclusive growth)
- Sustainability (Ensuring long-term benefits and embedding social considerations into regular procurement processes, rather than treating them as one-off projects)
- Cost-Effectiveness (Achieving social goals without compromising on economic efficiency or quality)

8.

Outline the best practice implemented by the organisation and thoroughly describe their innovation, efficiency, or effectiveness. Describe aspects such as idea development, incurred costs, implementation processes (how the best practice was developed and integrated into procurement frameworks), challenges, involved individuals and stakeholders, success factors, scalability and replicability – how the model can be adapted to different contexts, regions, or sectors, any other relevant information. Add the sources (documents, web links) for reference for each of the aspects you described. *

Thank you for your contribution.





*Enhancing VET for social impact: putting
social public procurement into practice*



Deal4Good – PR1 Research Report

End of Research Report



Co-funded by
the European Union