



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

Module 8 – Advocacy and Policy Influence

Influencing policies, supporting social enterprises,
engaging with public authorities

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Social Public Procurement does not evolve by itself. It changes when actors understand how to influence policies and decisions.

- Public procurement reflects political and institutional priorities
- Social objectives require active promotion and engagement
- Advocacy helps turn social needs into policy choices
- Social enterprises and stakeholders can play an active role

This module builds the capacity to influence Social Public Procurement policies and practices.

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- understand how SPP policies are shaped
- use advocacy strategies to support social objectives
- engage with public consultations and local authorities
- apply advocacy skills in their professional context

SPP Beyond Procedures

Social Public Procurement should not be understood merely as a technical process governed by compliance rules. It represents a strategic policy instrument through which public authorities allocate resources in alignment with broader societal priorities. Decisions concerning what to procure, under which conditions, and with which evaluation criteria reflect political choices about inclusion, equality, sustainability, and long-term public value.

Procurement shapes markets and determines which actors gain access to public opportunities. When social criteria are integrated into procurement, this integration is the result of deliberate policy orientation rather than administrative coincidence.

Source: OECD (2019); European Commission (2021)

Procurement in the Policy Environment

Public procurement operates within a wider policy ecosystem that includes social policy, labour market regulation, sustainability strategies, and regional development agendas. These policy domains influence procurement priorities both explicitly, through strategic documents and guidance, and implicitly, through political narratives and budgetary orientations.

The promotion of Social Public Procurement depends not only on legal frameworks, but also on political will, institutional capacity, and stakeholder engagement within this broader governance environment.

Source: European Commission - SRPP Framework (2021); European Parliament Study (2023)

The Policy Cycle

Public policies are not born fully formed, but evolve through stages commonly referred to as the policy cycle. These stages include:

1. Agenda setting: identifying issues and priorities
2. Policy formulation: designing options and approaches
3. Adoption: making decisions or approving guidelines
4. Implementation: putting decisions into practice
5. Evaluation: reviewing results and learning for the future

Understanding these stages helps stakeholders recognise where opportunities to influence decisions exist. For example, contributing to discussions during formulation or participating in evaluation processes can influence how social criteria are interpreted and applied.

Exercise 1: Group Discussion

Consider a public procurement example from your context. Reflect on the broader policy priorities that influenced its design.

At which stage of the policy cycle were these priorities introduced? Which institutional actors shaped the outcome? Identify potential moments where social objectives could have been strengthened.

The aim of this exercise is to recognise procurement as a dynamic policy space where priorities are negotiated and institutionalised.

Understanding Advocacy in Social Public Procurement

Advocacy in the field of Social Public Procurement refers to structured, evidence-based efforts aimed at influencing public policies and institutional practices in order to strengthen the integration of social objectives into procurement systems. It involves analysing decision-making processes, identifying leverage points, and engaging strategically with policymakers and administrative actors.

Rather than reacting to regulations after they are adopted, advocacy seeks to intervene earlier in the policy process. It aims to ensure that social value considerations are embedded in procurement design, implementation, and evaluation.

OECD (2021) - Lobbying and Influence in Public Decision-Making

European Commission - Better Regulation Guidelines



Strategic Advocacy Approaches

Advocacy strategies differ depending on context. Collaborative approaches engage institutions through dialogue, working groups, and structured consultations. More assertive approaches may involve coalition-building, public positioning, or collective pressure.

Strategic advocacy requires understanding power asymmetries, identifying decision-makers and gatekeepers, and recognising “policy windows” moments when political priorities shift and reform becomes possible. Effective advocates align their messages with institutional agendas and frame social objectives in ways that resonate with public policy goals.

AFTER WATCHING THE VIDEO, IDENTIFY WHICH INSTITUTIONAL STAGE APPEARS MOST OPEN TO INFLUENCE AND EXPLAIN WHY.



Advocacy for Supporting Social Enterprises

Social enterprises frequently encounter structural barriers in accessing public procurement opportunities. Advocacy allows them to articulate these challenges and propose policy adjustments that recognise social impact, mission-driven governance, and long-term value creation.

By contributing evidence from practice, coordinating with networks, and engaging in institutional dialogue, social enterprises can help shape procurement frameworks that are more inclusive and aligned with social economy principles.

European Commission - Social Economy Action Plan (2021)

European Economic and Social Committee - The Role of the Social Economy



Designing Effective Advocacy Interventions

Designing an advocacy intervention involves clarifying the policy objective, identifying decision-makers and influencers, defining evidence-based messages, and selecting appropriate engagement channels. Effective advocacy balances ambition with realism and considers institutional constraints and political feasibility.

In Social Public Procurement, advocacy interventions may include structured consultation submissions, position papers, participation in working groups, coalition statements, or targeted institutional dialogue.

Exercise 2 – Analysing an Advocacy Opportunity

Identify a procurement-related challenge in your context where social objectives could be strengthened.

Define:

- The policy stage where influence is possible
- The relevant decision-makers
- The advocacy objective
- The appropriate engagement strategy

Discuss how timing, alliances, and institutional priorities could affect the success of your advocacy action.

Stakeholders in Social Public Procurement

Social Public Procurement involves a complex network of actors operating at different institutional levels. These include political decision-makers, contracting authorities, procurement officers, advisory bodies, social enterprises, private suppliers, civil society organisations, and oversight institutions. Each of these actors may influence procurement policies directly or indirectly.

Understanding who holds formal authority, who shapes technical implementation, and who influences public debate is essential for effective advocacy. Stakeholders do not exert equal influence, and their interests may align or conflict depending on policy priorities and institutional incentives.

OECD - Stakeholder Engagement in Public Policy

European Commission - Better Regulation Toolbox

Power, Influence and Decision-Making Dynamics

Stakeholder analysis requires more than listing actors; it requires understanding power dynamics. Power may derive from formal authority, technical expertise, control over resources, political legitimacy, or the ability to mobilise public opinion.

In Social Public Procurement, influence can be exercised through formal regulatory mechanisms or informal networks. Identifying gatekeepers, veto players, and agenda-setters allows advocates to prioritise engagement efforts and allocate resources strategically.

Stakeholder Mapping as a Strategic Tool

Stakeholder mapping is a structured method used to assess actors according to their level of influence and their interest in a given policy issue. A commonly used framework categorises stakeholders based on two dimensions: power (ability to influence outcomes) and interest (degree of concern with the issue).

This mapping helps distinguish between key decision-makers, potential allies, neutral actors, and those who may resist change. In the context of Social Public Procurement, such analysis informs advocacy strategies by clarifying where dialogue, coalition-building, or persuasion efforts should be prioritised.

UNDP - Stakeholder Engagement and Analysis Toolkit

Building Alliances and Coalitions

Advocacy in policy environments is rarely effective when conducted in isolation. Coalition-building increases legitimacy, broadens expertise, and strengthens negotiating power. In Social Public Procurement, alliances between social enterprises, civil society networks, research institutions, and supportive public actors can amplify collective voice.

Coalitions are particularly important when addressing systemic barriers in procurement systems, as institutional change often requires coordinated and sustained engagement rather than isolated interventions.

From Mapping to Strategy

Stakeholder mapping becomes meaningful only when translated into action. After identifying actors and power dynamics, advocates must determine appropriate engagement strategies: structured dialogue, joint policy proposals, participation in consultations, or strategic public communication.

In Social Public Procurement, translating analysis into strategy may involve prioritising relationships with contracting authorities, engaging policymakers during drafting phases, or collaborating with networks to submit coordinated inputs during consultation processes.

BASED ON THE VIDEO,
WHICH ACTORS APPEAR
TO HOLD FORMAL
AUTHORITY AND WHICH
HOLD INFORMAL
INFLUENCE?



Better Regulation principles: at the heart of the EU's decision-making process

European Commission

Exercise 3: Stakeholder Mapping in Practice

Select a procurement-related policy issue from your context. I

dentify key stakeholders and classify them according to:

- Level of influence
- Level of interest
- Potential alignment with social objectives

Discuss which actors represent strategic allies, which require targeted engagement, and which may resist change. Reflect on how your advocacy strategy would adapt to these dynamics.

Public Consultations as Structured Policy Mechanisms

Public consultations are formal mechanisms through which public authorities gather input from stakeholders during policy design, revision, or evaluation. They are not symbolic exercises, but structured components of evidence-based policymaking frameworks.

In the context of Social Public Procurement, consultations may concern procurement directives, strategic guidelines, funding programmes, or implementation frameworks. Participation at this stage allows stakeholders to influence policy before it becomes binding or operational.

Where Consultations Sit in the Policy Cycle

Public consultations typically occur during the policy formulation and evaluation phases of the policy cycle. At these stages, draft proposals are open for input, and impact assessments are often being prepared.

Understanding where a consultation sits in the broader policy timeline is crucial. Early-stage consultations allow broader agenda influence, while later-stage consultations may focus on technical refinement. Effective advocacy requires aligning submissions with the specific phase of policy development.

Structuring an Effective Consultation Submission

Effective participation in consultations requires more than expressing opinions. A strong submission typically includes:

- A clear identification of the policy issue
- Evidence-based arguments
- Concrete proposals or amendments
- Alignment with public policy objectives
- Consideration of feasibility and impact

In Social Public Procurement, this may involve demonstrating how social enterprises contribute to measurable public value, identifying barriers in procurement procedures, and proposing realistic adjustments grounded in operational experience.

OECD – Policy Consultation and Evidence-Based Policymaking

Transparency International – Participation in Public Decision-Making



Institutional Dialogue Beyond Formal Consultations

Not all policy influence occurs through formal consultations. Institutional dialogue includes ongoing engagement with local authorities, procurement departments, advisory committees, and policy units. These interactions may take the form of working groups, bilateral meetings, public hearings, or informal exchanges.

In Social Public Procurement, local authorities often have significant discretion in implementation. Continuous dialogue builds trust, increases mutual understanding, and allows gradual integration of social objectives into procurement practices.

Strategic Positioning in Institutional Contexts

Engaging effectively with public institutions requires institutional literacy. This includes understanding administrative hierarchies, identifying who drafts documents, recognising political leadership roles, and distinguishing between technical and political decision-making arenas.

In Social Public Procurement, influence may depend on engaging procurement officers, legal advisors, programme managers, or elected officials at different stages. Strategic positioning requires adapting communication style, argumentation, and timing to the institutional context.

IDENTIFY WHAT MAKES A CONTRIBUTION CREDIBLE IN THE CONTEXT SHOWN IN THE VIDEO.

WHAT ELEMENTS WOULD YOU INCLUDE IN YOUR OWN SUBMISSION?



Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy

Exercise 4 – Drafting a Consultation Contribution

Imagine a public authority launches a consultation on improving

Social Public Procurement practices. Draft a short outline including:

- The policy problem you want to address
- Evidence supporting your position
- A concrete and realistic proposal
- An explanation of how your proposal aligns with public interest objectives

Discuss how your submission would differ if addressed to a local authority versus a national policymaker.

From Analysis to Action

Advocacy becomes effective when it moves from analysis to structured action. After understanding the policy environment, stakeholder dynamics, and institutional processes, the next step is designing a coherent intervention strategy.

In the context of Social Public Procurement, this means defining a clear policy objective, identifying leverage points within procurement governance structures, and selecting appropriate tools of engagement. Without strategic design, advocacy risks remaining reactive or fragmented.

Core Elements of an Advocacy Strategy

An effective advocacy strategy in policy contexts typically includes five interconnected components:

- A clearly defined policy objective
- Identification of decision-makers and influencers
- Evidence-based and institutionally aligned messaging
- Selection of engagement channels (formal and informal)
- Anticipation of institutional constraints and political feasibility

In Social Public Procurement, advocacy strategies should align social value arguments with public efficiency, accountability, and sustainability objectives to increase institutional receptiveness.

Framing and Institutional Alignment

Policy influence is not only about what is proposed, but how it is framed. Effective advocacy translates social objectives into language that resonates with institutional priorities such as cost-effectiveness, compliance, innovation, and long-term public value.

Framing strategies can significantly affect whether proposals are perceived as ideological demands or practical solutions. In Social Public Procurement, framing social clauses as mechanisms that enhance resilience, local economic development, or service quality may increase acceptance among procurement authorities.

Choosing Advocacy Instruments

Advocacy interventions can take different forms depending on context and timing.

These may include:

- Position papers and policy briefs
- Coordinated consultation submissions
- Participation in advisory committees
- Structured institutional meetings
- Coalition statements
- Strategic public communication

Selecting the appropriate instrument requires understanding institutional procedures, decision timelines, and the level of openness within governance structures.

Managing Risks and Constraints

Advocacy in public procurement contexts must consider institutional and political constraints. Procurement systems operate under legal frameworks, budgetary limitations, and administrative capacity restrictions. Overly ambitious or unrealistic proposals may reduce credibility.

Strategic advocacy therefore balances ambition with feasibility, identifying incremental reforms that can build momentum over time. Sustained engagement and credibility-building are often more effective than one-time pressure interventions.

Exercise 5 – Designing an Advocacy Action

Develop a concise advocacy outline addressing a Social Public Procurement issue in your context. Include:

- The policy objective
- Target decision-makers
- Key message and framing
- Chosen advocacy instrument
- Anticipated constraints and mitigation strategies

Discuss how your plan would adapt if political priorities shifted or institutional resistance emerged.

Advocacy as a Long-Term Capacity

Advocacy and policy influence are not one-off activities, but long-term capacities that develop through experience, reflection, and continuous engagement. In the context of Social Public Procurement, influencing policies often requires patience, persistence, and the ability to adapt strategies over time.

Seeing advocacy as an ongoing process helps organisations and professionals recognise that even small actions—when coordinated and consistent—can contribute to meaningful and lasting change in procurement practices.

From Learning to Action

The value of advocacy skills lies in their application to real professional and territorial contexts. Translating learning into practice means identifying concrete situations where policy influence is possible and adapting advocacy approaches to local institutional realities.

In Social Public Procurement, this may involve engaging with local authorities, participating in consultations, collaborating with other stakeholders, or contributing evidence from practice to policy discussions. The key is to connect knowledge with action in a realistic and context-sensitive way.

Exercise 6: Individual Reflection

Reflect on one advocacy or policy influence action that could realistically be applied in your professional context. Consider what resources, partnerships, and skills would be needed, and what challenges might arise. Think about the first small step that could be taken to move from intention to action.

This reflection aims to support personal ownership of the competences developed during the module.

Closing and Next Steps

Advocacy and policy influence play a crucial role in shaping inclusive and socially responsible procurement practices. By understanding policy processes, engaging with stakeholders, and designing structured advocacy actions, social enterprises and professionals can contribute to more effective and equitable use of public resources.

The competences developed in this module provide a foundation for continued engagement beyond the training context and encourage participants to remain active contributors to Social Public Procurement policy development.

Closing and Next Steps

Key message

Advocacy and policy influence are continuous processes.

Slide content

- Apply what you learned
- Stay engaged
- Build alliances
- Monitor and adapt strategies



Thank you!



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