GUIDELINES FOR TESTING SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

Improving the Position of Women in the Labour Markets of the Danube Region

2025

DELIVERABLE INFORMATION	
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Partners in charge (authors):	**National Management School (NMS), Bulgaria: dr. Lachezar Afrikanov**
Partners involved:	**PiNA, VESTE, MASS, CTRIA, MGK10, ZZUP HBZ, ABW, NMS**
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Contents

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Introduction

Social innovations offer a powerful approach to addressing the challenges women face in securing fulfilling employment. The WIN project embarked on a large-scale process of developing ideas for social innovations enhancing employment opportunities for women in the Danube Region. We have launched development activities in seven pilot regions: Styrian Iron Route Region (Austria), Herzeg-Bosnian Canton 10 (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Radomir Municipality (Bulgaria), City of Loznica (Serbia), Sokolov District (Czech Republic), Tatabánya-Oroszlány-Dorog Region (Hungary), and Trbovlje Municipality (Slovenia).

The social innovations ideas took into consideration women's needs and barriers identified that prevent them from realizing their professional potential. In this way, they hold great potential to contribute to women's empowerment and well-being.

The hallmark of the WIN project lies in its dedication to fostering meaningful interaction with the target groups within pilot regions. Our unique approach prioritizes the active involvement of these groups in every stage, from the initial design phase to the shaping and real-world testing of social innovations. This ensures that our solutions are not just theoretical constructs but are finely tuned to meet the actual needs and realities of the communities we serve.

In the development phase from October 2024 to January-mid February 2025, pilot partners utilized common methodology based on a set of clear development of social innovations guidelines (D.2.1.1.) to implement the following phases:

1. Setting WIN innovation group in each region, representing diverse stakeholders, dedicated to women's empowerment.

2. Mapping challenges of the pilot region. More concretely, going on a very micro level through interaction with local communities to check the validity of findings in WIN project's preliminary observations and follow-up extensive research reports (D1.1.2: Comparative study on the position of women in the labour market of pilot regions and D1.3.1: Analysis of local/regional/national employment policies addressing women). The results were creating a clearer picture of the immediate challenges faced by women in each region and understanding the root causes that trigger them.

3. Shaping ideas for social innovations based on challenges faced and employing the diverse perspective members of the WIN Innovation groups brought to the brainstorming processes.

At the end of the development process, from the ideas formulated we selected ones that seem most needed, but also viable to be tested (implemented) on the ground and bring impact to issues targeted.

The current guidelines stepping on the already established protocol of action in the development phases provide guidelines for partners and WIN Innovation groups to conduct successful testing activities within the envisaged timeframe from February 2025 to December 2025.

Guidelines contain the following three key chapters, dedicated to three key phases. Each chapter contains concise phase description, work plan in terms of main activities and timing to be followed and provides templates for some activities, if needed. For example, a template for describing the process of testing and the results achieved in homogenous format. The three chapters outlined in these guidelines focus on key phases of the testing process:

1. Setting the ground (Preparation phase): Establishing a solid foundation for testing, including finalizing plans, securing resources, and re-engaging target groups and stakeholders.

2. Bringing change to the field (Implementation phase): Executing the selected social innovations on the ground, gathering data, and fostering meaningful engagement with the target groups.

3. Learning for better change (Evaluation and reflection phase): Analyzing the results of testing activities, collecting feedback, and refining innovations for potential scaling and sustainability.

In addition, guidelines provide a final chapter on Reporting and communicating success. This section outlines the requirements for final documentation of the testing phase, ensuring that progress, outcomes, and lessons learned are captured systematically and communicated effectively to stakeholders and target groups.

Chapter 1 – Setting the ground

Overview

The main objective of this 2-month phase is to prepare for testing of selected ideas for social innovation. The presented work methodology offers an indicative description of activities for preparation. Partners can choose feasible elements or combine activities to ensure the engagement and participation of WIN innovation group members and all relevant target groups and stakeholders.

Week 1-2

Meeting: Working meeting. Duration: half day.

Objectives: to review selected ideas for testing and take decision on the implementation methodology to be applied (for example, implement all ideas simultaneously or in a cascading manner); to draft initial plan for the first steps to be taken and map potential key barriers for successful testing; to brainstorm on which supporters to be engaged in the testing process and how target groups will be embedded, as well.

During the meeting the coordinators are invited to check in a very open and direct manner what WIN Innovation group members' current level of engagement and availability is to contribute to the testing phase and if needed open the topic of inviting other potential members to join the work.

Assignment: Coordinator consolidates all ideas from the meeting and presents a draft plan for discussion and agreement by the group.

Week 3-6

Interaction with stakeholders: WIN Innovation group members engage in active dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders that can act as supporters of the testing and in long term perspective ensure sustainability of the proposed solutions.

Objectives: to check with interested parties, mapped in the previous preparation step whether the ideas selected for testing and the initial plans for testing are still

valid, feasible and needed by the community, and most importantly there are resources in place to support them.

Coordinators of the WIN Innovation groups are encouraged to accompany members in their individual or group interactions with different individuals that were identified as potential supporters and provide additional information and guidance, if needed.

Assignment: Members provide short reporting notes on the outcomes of their activities to the coordinator, who consolidated all findings and prepares them for discussion in the next meeting.

Week 7-8

Meeting: Working meeting. Duration: 90 mins.

Objectives: to agree on the final plan of action and distribute tasks among members.

Coordinators of the WIN Innovation groups can propose to split the work activities in small teams of 2-3 members to create prerequisite for a more focused approach to implementation and at the same time avoid the risk of planning time consuming tasks that might conflict with members own professional and personal schedule.

Outputs expected

- Members of the WIN Innovation group reach an agreement on the plan for implementation of solutions to be tested.
- The opinion of target groups and stakeholders is well taken on board throughout the whole process and there is positive support for the forthcoming testing.

Chapter 2 – Bringing change to the field

Overview

Following the preparation phase and with a clear planning of steps and resources on introducing the solutions to be tested, the WIN Innovation groups can engage in actual implementation.

This is the core phase of the testing, which involves taking concrete actions to introduce positive change in the context addressed in support of women employment and overall empowerment. This is the longest phase involving 8 months during which depending on the strategy adopted WIN Innovation groups will implement ideas for social innovations simultaneously or in a cascading style. In other words, the period can be split in smaller periods for each solution tested.

At the end of this stage, the WIN Innovation group will have tested minimum one or two ideas.

Work methodology

The work methodology outlined here provides a flexible and adaptive framework for implementing social innovation ideas. It is designed to encourage creativity, inclusivity, and the active participation of all members of the WIN Innovation groups, as well as relevant stakeholders and target groups. While the methodology offers indicative steps and activities, it is deliberately adaptable, allowing partners to tailor the process to their specific contexts and resources.

The cornerstone of this methodology is the foundation established in the preparation phase. Specifically, the solution frames of selected ideas and the agreed-upon action plans serve as the primary reference points for implementation. Coordinators are encouraged to leverage these tools to ensure alignment with the original goals while allowing for adjustments as the testing unfolds.

To guide this process effectively, coordinators are encouraged to employ **design thinking** as a central methodology. This approach emphasizes two equally important dimensions of implementation:

1. Process of implementation

The implementation process is dynamic, iterative, and non-linear. It is characterized by a circular flow, where ongoing feedback from target groups continuously informs the direction of the project. This approach ensures that any necessary adjustments can be made promptly, reflecting the realities of testing in complex and evolving contexts. Since this is a testing phase, questioning the direction and outcomes of implementation is not only expected but encouraged. It allows WIN Innovation groups to experiment, learn, and refine their methods to better address the needs of women's empowerment and employment.

2. Results of implementation

The results of implementation represent the tangible and measurable outcomes of the testing process. These results are not limited to final outputs but include insights gained, challenges encountered, and progress made toward achieving the overarching goals. Emphasizing the importance of both qualitative and quantitative results helps create a comprehensive picture of the implementation's impact and ensures that every aspect of the effort is documented and evaluated.

A critical component of Bringing change to the field phase is the systematic collection of data and evidence throughout the implementation process. This documentation serves multiple purposes:

- It provides a detailed account of the implementation journey, highlighting the story behind the tested solutions.

- It identifies key challenges, lessons learned, and areas for improvement, contributing to the refinement of future initiatives.

- It builds credibility by offering concrete evidence of the work undertaken, which can be used to showcase results to stakeholders and target groups.

Coordinators are invited to prioritize the collection of artifacts and data from various stages of implementation. These may include records of activities, stakeholder feedback, photos, videos, or any other materials that capture the essence of the work being done. This evidence will not only enhance the final

evaluation but also help communicate the impact of the initiative to a broader audience.

Outputs expected

- Actual implementation took place with visible results that can be evaluated and reflected upon.
- Target groups were engaged as beneficiaries of the activities planned, but also as feedback givers for the direction of the process.
- Stakeholders that can ensure sustainability of practices and products tested were on board.

Chapter 3 – Learning for better change

Overview

This is the final phase of the testing, which involves taking time to report and reflect on achievements made in implementing ideas for social innovations, formulate areas of improvement on both dimensions of implementation: process and results, if needed and plan sustainability of the innovations in support of women employment and overall empowerment. This is a shorter phase of 2 months, but crucial for the long-term impact of our efforts.

Work methodology

The methodology for this phase builds on the foundations laid in earlier stages of the testing process, focusing on structured reflection and future planning. It is designed to be flexible, allowing partners to adapt to their specific contexts while maintaining a focus on achieving meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

Coordinators of WIN Innovation groups are invited to use tools and methods that foster collective learning and stakeholder engagement, ensuring that all insights and contributions are considered. The methodology is centered around three key objectives: evaluating outcomes, identifying improvements, and planning for sustainability.

1. Evaluation of process and results

Reflection begins with a systematic review of the process and results of implementation. This evaluation helps identify what worked well, what challenges arose, and how those challenges were addressed. The process dimension focuses on understanding the steps taken, assessing their efficiency, and reviewing how feedback was integrated. The results dimension examines tangible outcomes, including both qualitative and quantitative impacts, as well as unintended consequences, whether positive or negative.

2. Engagement of stakeholders and target groups

Active participation of stakeholders and target groups is crucial during this phase. Coordinators are encouraged to facilitate discussions to gather diverse perspectives, ensuring that all voices are heard. Stakeholders who played a role in implementation, as well as those who can support sustainability, should be engaged in structured feedback sessions to reflect on their experiences and contributions. Target groups, as direct beneficiaries, provide valuable insights into the relevance and effectiveness of the innovations introduced.

3. Sustainability planning

The final objective is to develop strategies for sustaining the tested solutions beyond the scope of the project. This involves identifying key stakeholders, resources, and partnerships that can support ongoing efforts. Sustainability planning should address both financial and operational aspects, ensuring that innovations remain impactful over time.

The following activities provide a practical roadmap for implementing this phase. Each activity is designed to help WIN Innovation groups consolidate their efforts, reflect on their work, and create a foundation for long-term success. Each coordinator is invited to choose activities that are relevant for their context:

● Evaluation workshops - organize workshops with WIN Innovation groups, stakeholders, and target groups to reflect on the process and results of implementation. These workshops can be structured around key questions:
    o What were the key achievements of the implementation phase?
    o What challenges arose, and how were they addressed?
    o How effectively were the target groups engaged?
    o What lessons were learned for future initiatives?
● Stakeholder roundtables - convene roundtable discussions with stakeholders to gather their input on sustainability strategies. Focus on identifying:
    o Opportunities for integrating innovations into existing systems or practices.
    o Potential partnerships to support long-term impact.
    o Resources needed to scale successful solutions.

- Development of sustainability plans - create sustainability plans for tested solution (s). These plans should address:
  - o The roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders.
  - o Strategies for securing financial and operational support.
  - o Metrics for monitoring ongoing impact.

Outputs expected

- WIN Innovation groups agree on the level of achievement reached through testing.
- Ample evidence is collected to support sustainability of solutions tested.
- Clear plans for follow-up steps to ensure sustainability are formulated.
- Process and results of implementation are described in a comprehensive report by the coordinator of the WIN Innovation group (Annex 1 – Instructions and template for the report).

Annex 1 – Instruction and template for coordinator's final report

The final report is an opportunity to reflect on your group's activities, describe the solutions you implemented, and share lessons learned from testing your social innovation ideas. It is also a chance to showcase the positive changes your work has brought and to think about how these ideas can continue to make an impact in the future.

The report doesn't need to be overly formal or technical but should provide enough detail to capture the journey of your project and share it with stakeholders, target groups, and project partners. By organizing your insights into the following sections, you will create a meaningful record of your work and contribute to the overall goals of the WIN project.

Structure and instructions for the final report

1. About this report

Start by explaining the purpose of your report in your own words. Briefly introduce your group, the context of your work, and the aim of your testing phase. You can use this section to set the tone and provide an overview of what readers will find in the report.

2. Summary of the tested solutions

This section is the heart of the report. It focuses on describing the solutions your group tested during the implementation phase. Use the **WIN Innovation Solution Frame** structure to guide your descriptions. For each solution tested, include the following details:

- **Title of the social innovation:** Provide the name of the solution (it should be inspiring and clear).

- **Aim:** What positive change did this solution aim to bring?

- **Target group:** Who did you serve with this solution?

- **Target region:** Where did the implementation take place?

14

- **Short summary:** Write a 1–2 sentence description that captures the essence of the solution.

- **Main activities:** List and briefly describe the key activities carried out. Include who was responsible, the duration of each activity, and any notable resources or tools used.

- **Adjustments made during testing:** If you made changes to the original plan (e.g., added new activities, adjusted your approach), explain what was changed and why.

- **Expected results and achievements:** What specific outcomes did you aim for, and what was achieved? Include both numbers (e.g., people trained, services introduced) and stories (e.g., feedback from participants, personal impact).

- **Impact:** Reflect on the short-term and long-term effects of your solution. How did it make a difference in people's lives? What has been the broader impact on the community or region?

- **Sustainability and scalability:** What potential does this solution have to continue making an impact? Could it work in other regions or be scaled to a national or European level?

3. Outputs and achievements

Describe the main accomplishments of your group during the testing phase. Be specific about what was done, who participated, and what the results were. Examples of outputs could include:

- Workshops, training sessions, or events held.

- Materials created (e.g., guides, toolkits, videos).

- Engagement levels (e.g., number of participants, feedback collected).

- Positive changes observed during the implementation (e.g., improved skills, increased awareness).

Focus on capturing both the numbers and the experiences of those involved. Include testimonials, quotes, or success stories to make the results feel more real and relatable.

4. Challenges and lessons learned

No project is without its challenges. Use this section to honestly reflect on the obstacles your group faced during the testing phase. These could include:

- Logistical difficulties (e.g., time or resource constraints).
- Challenges in engaging the target group or stakeholders.
- Activities that didn't go as planned.

For each challenge, briefly explain how your group addressed it and what you learned in the process. These lessons are valuable not just for your group but for others who might work on similar projects in the future.

5. Recommendations and next steps

Based on your experience, share ideas for how the tested solutions could be improved, scaled, or sustained in the future. Think about:

- What changes could make the solution work better?
- How could the solution continue beyond this project?
- Are there opportunities to transfer it to other regions or contexts?

Ground your recommendations in what you observed and learned during the testing phase. Keep them practical and actionable.

6. Supporting materials

Attach any additional materials that help tell the story of your work. Examples include:

- Photos, videos, or posters created during activities.
- Attendance lists, survey results, or feedback forms.

- Any other materials that showcase the activities and outcomes of your work.

These materials add context and credibility to your report, making it more engaging and informative for readers.

Annex 2 – Timeline

Testing phases/Month	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Sep-25	Oct-25	Nov-25	Dec-25
Setting the ground (Preparation)											
Bringing change to the field (Implementation)											
Learning for better change											