

# DEVELOPING, TESTING AND REFLECTING ON SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

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



**METHODOLOGICAL  
TOOLKIT**

# Methodological toolkit for developing, testing and reflecting on social innovations

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

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# FOREWORD

Social innovation rarely begins with ideas. It begins with paying attention and the willingness to look closely at how people live, work and navigate daily realities. Before any new solution takes shape, there is a long period of listening, learning and making sense of complex systems. This toolkit reflects the full methodological journey of the WIN project, a two-and-a-half-year collaboration dedicated to improving the position of women in peripheral industrial regions of the Danube. It brings together the knowledge, tools and practices that helped us understand local challenges and transform this understanding into concrete innovations.

**A central lesson from this project is that meaningful innovation does not emerge from guidelines alone. It requires a foundation: a shared conceptual perspective, evidence-based insights, direct experiences from the field, and institutional awareness.**

For this reason, the first year of the WIN project was devoted to building this foundation. The Input Paper on the Position of Women in Peripheral Industrial Regions (D1.1.1) helped partners develop a common understanding of structural inequalities and historical patterns shaping labour markets. It reminded us that gender disparities have deep roots and that successful interventions must acknowledge cultural and institutional dynamics as much as economic ones.



In addition, we expanded our understanding through a comparative study (D1.1.2). Engaging in contextual, statistical and SWOT analysis, partners gained a clear picture of how gendered labour market inequalities take different shapes across places. These insights prevented oversimplification and ensured that our later actions would respond to grounded, local realities rather than assumptions.

However, understanding a certain context and place cannot rely solely on documents or data. Through transnational workshops and study visits in the Danube region, we met women, employers, regional actors, community organisations and innovators and observed how institutions operate, how workplaces manage change, and how communities respond to social and economic shifts. These encounters created empathy within the partnership and reminded us that data points are always connected to people's lived stories. Utilizing the power of World Café format of leading conversations, we managed to gather deep insights from our observations, both from our national realities and from our exchange with partners.



Institutional and policy structures form another essential layer of any social innovation process. The **policy analysis** (D1.3.1) and subsequent **peer-review** (D1.3.2) mapped initiatives across governance levels and examined cultural and institutional barriers to women's labour market participation. By using an eDelphi method with external experts, we strengthened the reliability and diversity of perspectives. This helped us understand both the limitations and the opportunities within existing policy environments.



The Catalogue of Good Practices (D1.3.3) then expanded our horizon by showcasing concrete examples of successful approaches from across the Danube region. These practices served as inspiration for what might be adapted, scaled or translated into different cultural contexts. They demonstrated that even in regions with similar challenges, creativity, cooperation and strategic thinking can generate diverse solutions.

Stepping on this solid foundation we launched pilot actions, encompassing social innovations ideas design, testing and reflecting on the results. We agreed to follow common approach defined by two key guidelines for developing (D2.1.1) and testing (D2.2.1) social innovations, but the real process emerged through practice: forming regional teams, listening to communities, shaping ideas, piloting actions and reflecting on results. This toolkit captures these practices and translates them into a flexible pathway that others can adopt in their own regions.

**The pages that follow do not present a fixed recipe. Instead, they offer a set of guiding steps that empower practitioners, municipalities, organisations and community groups to create their own processes of change. The methods were tested across seven regions with different histories, capacities and socio-economic challenges. That diversity helped refine the steps so that they remain accessible while allowing room for adaptation.**

As project coordinator, I am deeply grateful to all partners and local actors who engaged with this journey with openness and commitment. Their insights, creativity and perseverance shaped not only the innovations implemented on the ground but also the learning process reflected here. It is my hope that this toolkit will support others who wish to start or strengthen their own social innovation processes, rooted in evidence, guided by empathy and carried forward through collaboration.

**Dr. Jani Kozina**

**Project coordinator, WIN Project**



## THE MISSION

Social innovation starts with the belief that people and communities can create change together. When we begin to listen, connect, and imagine better possibilities, new paths open. Change becomes real when people share the same purpose and work together to make it happen.

**This toolkit is for everyone who wants to make a positive difference in their community. It is written for people who see challenges around them and choose to act, who believe that cooperation, empathy, and creativity can move things forward. It offers simple, structured steps that can help you turn ideas into action and learn from the process along the way.**

The toolkit is based on the experiences and lessons learned from the WIN project, a transnational collaboration across the Danube region. For two and a half years, partners from seven regions worked with local communities to design, test, and reflect on social innovations supporting women's participation in the labour market. Through their work, they developed practical ways to bring people together, understand local needs, and create new opportunities for inclusion and growth.



The WIN project was funded by the **Interreg Danube Programme** and connects partners from the **Styrian Iron Route in Austria, Herzeg-Bosnian Canton 10 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Radomir Municipality in Bulgaria, the City of Loznica in Serbia, the Sokolov District in the Czech Republic, the Tatabánya–Oroszlány–Dorog Region in Hungary, and Trbovlje Municipality in Slovenia.** Although each region faced different realities, all shared the same aim: to improve opportunities for women in peripheral areas and strengthen local economies through social innovation.

This toolkit brings together the most useful methods and reflections from that process. It guides you through five connected phases: setting the team, feeling the change, shaping the solutions, piloting innovations, and reflecting on results. Each phase includes practical activities, easy-to-follow tools, and short examples from the pilot regions. Together, they form a learning process that supports collaboration, creativity, and continuous improvement.



The methods are not strict instructions. They are invitations to experiment, adapt, and learn. You can combine them in your own way and adjust them to the context you are working in. What matters most is to stay curious, to listen carefully, and to reflect on what you learn together with others.

We hope this publication encourages you to take your own steps towards meaningful change, to share your experiences with others who are walking a similar path, and to connect with the WIN community to continue learning and co-creating new ideas together.



**Jasna**



**Mirna**

“ At PiNA we believe that people and local stakeholders already carry many of the solutions their communities need – our role is to design participatory, inclusive processes that bring those solutions to the surface. Working closely with local stakeholders keeps us motivated, because we see how their ideas and involvement lead to concrete social innovations in the region.

**PiNA, for Trbovlje Municipality, Slovenia**

“ I did not intentionally pursue the path of developing and implementing social innovations – the path found me. When the offer to join the WIN project came, I accepted without hesitation... I knew so many women experiencing the same challenges as me.



**Janja, Herzeg-Bosnian Canton 10,  
Bosnia and Herzegovina**

“ I joined this process because I believe in the power of creating opportunities for women in our region, especially in industries like mining and production, where they are often underrepresented. I see the enthusiasm and creativity of our group and the hopefully tangible impact of our work in changing perceptions in our community.



**Kerstin, Styrian Iron Route, Austria**



*Social innovation inspires me because it transforms empathy and cooperation into tangible, lasting improvements in people's everyday lives.*

**István, Tatabánya–Oroszlány–Dorog, Hungary**



*I joined this project because it connects people, not structures. The stories of the women in Radomir showed that women are allies, not competitors and that real change begins with us supporting one another.*

**Iana, Radomir, Bulgaria**



*Working with such a dynamic group of women has been a constant source of inspiration and motivation. Their stories and commitment remind me every day why this work truly matters.*

**Eva, Sokolov District, Czech Republic**



*It made me truly happy to see how quickly women connect, learn, and support each other once they're given space and tools to do so. The feeling that what we started together might continue to grow beyond the pilot itself is deeply rewarding. I believe the Women's Ethno Hub could remain a place that keeps them connected and evolving in the future.*

**Dragana for Loznica, Serbia**



# LISTENING TO THE FIELD

**Listening to the field is the moment before everything begins. It is the phase when you step into a community not to offer solutions, but to understand the world that people live in. Before forming a team or imagining new ideas, there is value in slowing down and observing the landscape. This phase describes how the WIN regions approached this beginning and how you can create a similar foundation for your own social innovation journey.**

The partners' exploration of the field began by turning their attention to the bigger picture around them. Each place carries its own histories, labour traditions, cultural expectations and patterns of opportunity. Partners explored what shaped women's working lives long before the project started. They read about the evolution of local industries, the expectations placed on women in their communities, the impact of demographic change, and how previous economic transitions had influenced families.

With this broader understanding, partners looked closer at their own regions. They explored data as a way to see how the local picture differed from the national one, or how it mirrored patterns found elsewhere. Numbers on employment, wages, education or entrepreneurship became starting points for questions:

## HOW TO COMPARE YOUR REGION WITH OTHERS

Sometimes your local picture becomes clearer when you place it next to another context. Invite colleagues from nearby municipalities, partner organisations, or neighbouring regions to share what they see in their own environments.

Compare patterns, barriers, and opportunities informally.

You do not need identical data. Even a short conversation can reveal whether your challenges are unique, shared, or part of a larger trend. Comparative reflection helps you avoid local blind spots and highlights ideas worth exploring further.

- Why are women missing from certain sectors?
- What explains the differences between municipalities?
- What strengths might be hidden behind the statistics?

Some partners created simple portraits of their regions, comparing themselves to neighbouring areas and noticing how historical industries or new economic developments shaped opportunities. Through this comparative perspective, they came to understand the specific conditions under which women navigated their working lives.

### HOW TO LISTEN TO INSTITUTIONS AND POLICIES

Understanding people's experiences also requires understanding the rules that shape them. Spend a bit of time mapping the policies, programmes, and institutional routines connected to your topic. Speak with one or two people inside these systems like employment offices, social services, employers' associations, or local government teams.

A short exchange can reveal how policies work in practice, where unintended barriers appear, and which measures have potential. If possible, invite a few experts to review your early impressions. Their feedback adds clarity and widens your perspective.

However, statistics alone could not show what life felt like. That is why partners stepped outside their offices and walked into the community. They visited workplaces, training centres and public services. They joined local events and met women in spaces where they naturally gathered. They listened as women spoke about the rhythms of their days, about balancing responsibilities, about the quiet barriers that shaped their choices. They spoke with employers trying to modernise recruitment, with social workers supporting women in transition, and with municipal staff who understood the administrative side of inclusion.

Some insights came from simple observations. In one region, partners noticed how transport limitations shaped access to training. In another, they realised that care responsibilities, not lack of motivation, prevented women from taking new jobs. In several regions, they felt the weight of tradition in workplaces that had changed little over time.

Alongside these experiences, partners explored the institutional landscape. They mapped which organisations played a role in employment, which policies were active locally, and how different institutions interacted. They spoke to public authorities about strategies, to employment centres about support programmes, and to NGOs about emerging needs. By doing so, they began to see not only the formal system but also the informal one disclosing the hidden practices, the overlaps, and the gaps that shaped women's opportunities.

Reflection with peers and experts added another layer to the listening process. Partners compared insights across regions, discussing what felt unique and what seemed to be shared across borders. Through moderated exchanges and online dialogues, they tested their assumptions and refined their understanding. The transnational conversation helped them see their local challenges in a broader context and reminded them that while every place has its own story, many underlying patterns repeat.

The listening phase also included a search for inspiration. During study visits and exchanges, partners were introduced to practices that had successfully supported women's

employment in other regions. Some were small initiatives led by local communities; others were formal programmes involving employers and public institutions. These encounters were not used as templates but as starting points for imagining what could be adapted locally. Seeing how others had approached similar challenges broadened the partners' sense of possibility.

### **HOW TO USE STUDY VISITS AND GOOD PRACTICES AS INSPIRATION**

Seeing another organisation in action often teaches more than reading about it. Visit a place where a challenge similar to yours is being addressed. For example, a community centre, training provider, employer, NGO, or municipal initiative. Pay attention to the small details: how people are welcomed, how meetings flow, how decisions are made.

You can also collect a few good practices from your region or abroad. Look for what makes them meaningful, not only for their results but for their human qualities. These examples are not templates to copy; they are sources of inspiration that help you imagine new possibilities in your own context.



Gradually, these different steps from understanding broader structures, exploring regional dynamics, listening to lived experiences, examining institutions, reflecting with peers to gathering inspiration began to form a coherent picture, developing a respectful understanding of the place where you want to create change.

Listening to the field prepares you to invite the right people, to ask the right questions, and to recognise what might genuinely matter in the next phases of your work. When this listening is done with care, the rest of the social innovation process becomes clearer and more connected to real life.



*“The group came together to brainstorm ideas, develop themes, and even discuss potential prizes. It was inspiring to see everyone so invested in creating something meaningful for the younger generation. This shared effort built a strong sense of trust and commitment among us.”*

**Kerstin, Austria**

## SETTING THE TEAM



Every social innovation begins with a small group of people who share a purpose. Before any project or idea can take shape, there must be a team ready to listen, act and learn together.

We invite you to set up an Innovation Group that will lead your social innovation process. In our experience, such groups are a key driver of lasting change. They bring together people from different backgrounds who can see the challenge from many sides and work towards a shared goal.

For example, in the WIN project, since the focus was on improving women's position in the labour market, the groups included professionals from women's associations, employers and business support organisations, local and regional public authorities, universities and research centres, and active citizens.

Whenever possible, choose members who live or work in the targeted region. Their connection to local life helps them understand the specific challenges people face. However, it can also be helpful to include individuals from outside the region who know it well or who can bring valuable knowledge about potential solutions.

**An effective Innovation Group usually consists of at least five members who represent the field and the region you are working in.**

Balance is key - the group should combine local insight with fresh perspectives.

*“We kept the group motivated by fostering a collaborative and inspiring environment. Each workshop was designed to be interactive and engaging, with activities like brainstorming sessions, world cafés, and creative discussions.*

*We also communicated after the workshop session, small wins, such as the launch of our pilot activities via e-mail, and ensured that everyone felt their contributions were valued. The diversity of our group, with representatives from industry, education, research, culture, and regional institutions (like the chamber of Labour), and the community, brought fresh perspectives and kept the energy high.”*

**Kerstin, Austria**

Previous experience in the topic is an advantage, but it should not be the main selection criterion. What matters most is that each member:

- **understands the needs of the target group**
- **has good communication and cooperation skills**
- **is motivated to contribute to positive change**

The members of your Innovation Group will take part in a long-term process of developing and testing social innovations. They will meet regularly, participate in joint workshops, and work individually between meetings. Depending on the stage of work, their activities may include talking with members of the target group, observing real-life situations, conducting interviews or short surveys, and sharing reflections within the group.

**Building such a team takes time and trust. It is important to create a working atmosphere that values everyone's experience and perspective. Clear roles, open dialogue and small visible results at each step help the group stay motivated.**

Once the group is formed, the next important question is how to keep its members motivated and engaged over time. Innovation Group members are often volunteers or busy professionals who dedicate their time because they believe in the mission. Every Innovation Team benefits from someone who holds the process together, e.g. a facilitator. Their task is not to decide for the group but to guide discussions, ensure everyone is heard, and help the team stay on track. Good facilitation combines listening, planning, and flexibility.

*“The participants in the innovation group are highly self-motivated and already established advocates for their rights and work opportunities.*

*Still, what helped us sustain motivation over time was consistently connecting individual effort to a shared long-term vision, creating space for reflection and peer support, and translating discussions into small, concrete actions that reinforced progress and collective ownership. “*

**Iana, Bulgaria**



From the WIN experience, a few simple practices proved to make a real difference:

1

## CELEBRATE SMALL WINS

Recognise every step forward — a successful interview, a new idea, a positive meeting. Progress becomes visible when it is acknowledged.

2

## ROTATE ROLES

Let different members lead parts of the process, for example, chairing a meeting or presenting results. Shared responsibility increases ownership and confidence.

### TIPS AND TRICKS TO MOTIVATE THE TEAM

3

## KEEP LEARNING

Start or close each meeting with a short reflection question such as “What did I learn today?” or “What inspired me since the last meeting?” Regular reflection keeps motivation high and connects daily work with the bigger purpose.

4

## CONNECT TO THE REAL IMPACT

Whenever possible, bring the group closer to the people who benefit from their work. Visiting communities, listening to stories or inviting guest speakers keeps the sense of meaning alive.

*“In our group, trust grew slowly, but once it was there, the ideas started to flow naturally. Building trust was crucial.”*

Snezhana, Radomir, Bulgaria

# FEELING THE CHANGE

Before trying to change the system, we need to understand it. Feeling the Change is the moment when your team pauses to listen, observe, and sense what is really happening in the lives of the people you want to support.

Many innovative processes rush into solutions. This phase invites you to slow down and look deeper. It helps your group move from assumptions to understanding, from “what we think” to “what people live.” The more time you spend here, the more relevant and human your next steps will be.

During this phase, your Innovation Group explores one big question: **What is truly happening in our community, and where does change need to begin?**

## START WITH WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW

To answer it, the group gathers information, experiences, and emotions from three directions:



- **From within the team.** Members share what they already know, see, and feel about the issue. Often, hidden knowledge appears when people start speaking openly.
- **From existing knowledge.** Reports, studies, statistics, and previous initiatives provide a broader picture. They are not just numbers but stories of what has already been tried.

- **From the people themselves.** Conversations, observations, and short interviews with the target group and stakeholders bring the human perspective that data alone cannot show.

The outcome is not a report full of numbers but a shared picture, an understanding of why things are the way they are and what kind of positive change could make a difference. This picture becomes the foundation for the next phase, where ideas will take shape.

*“During the first meeting, we used a simple but powerful exercise with a piece of string: each stakeholder, when speaking, held one side of the string and then passed the ball of string on to someone they had already collaborated with, gradually creating a visible web between them. In that moment, the group could literally see how connected and interdependent they already were. It helped them feel that they were not just individuals at a meeting, but part of a shared process and responsibility built on existing relationships.”*

*This exercise broke the ice, built trust quickly, and gave the group a strong initial momentum that carried into the later stages of the work.”*

**Jasna & Mirna, Slovenia**

## LISTENING BEYOND THE TEAM

After you have collected internal perspectives, go outside and listen. Talk with the people whose lives are most connected to the issue and with those who can influence it: employers, public officials, families, or community groups. You can do this through short conversations, small group meetings, or simple observations. The goal is not to prove your ideas, but to learn what you did not know before.

*“Participants of the pilot training expressed their wish for more practical, outdoor learning and opportunities to socialise while gaining new knowledge”*

**Dragana, Serbia**

## TOOLS THAT HELP YOU SEE THROUGH OTHERS' EYES

Several tools can make these conversations more focused and creative:

- **Focus group** – a guided discussion with a small group (5–8 people) to hear diverse opinions and experiences on the same topic.
- **Empathy or persona map** – a simple visual tool to imagine what a person in your target group sees, hears, feels, and needs.
- **Stakeholder matrix** – a map of who influences the issue and who is affected by it.
- **Short interviews or observations** – direct moments of listening in the real context where people live and work.

Each method opens a different window to reality. You can combine several of them, depending on what feels natural in your context.

*“During one of our early co-creation sessions, we used a storytelling exercise where members shared personal experiences about women’s challenges in the labour market. This moment created a strong emotional connection and mutual trust, helping us move from individual opinions to shared commitment.”*

**István, Hungary**

*“A key turning point came with our first creative assignment, which was the development of Personas representing our different target groups, including women in various life situations and youth, both boys and girls, on the verge of choosing their educational paths and future careers.*

*This exercise helped participants to empathise more deeply with these groups’ perspectives, identify their motivations and barriers, and create a genuinely collaborative atmosphere built on mutual trust and respect.”*

**Eva, Czech Republic**

*“We used a mix of structured visual tools and playful methods to help the group generate and refine ideas. Working with different canvases and templates helped stakeholders move from vague thoughts to more concrete and shared plans. The persona canvas was especially useful in understanding whose needs they were designing solutions for.”*

**Jasna & Mirna, Slovenia**

*“We used different interactive formats, like brainstorming, World Café as well as open discussions and inputs from our scientific partners and the members of the group themselves, as key techniques for generating ideas.”*

**Kerstin, Austria**

## GATHERING INSIGHTS THROUGH FIELDWORK

Between meetings, group members can go out individually or in pairs to talk with more people. Ten conversations are usually enough to notice patterns. Write short notes after each one, focusing on what surprised you or felt emotionally charged.



When you conduct interviews or meetings, always explain who you are, why you are asking, and how the information will be used. Keep conversations short and respectful and thank everyone for sharing. Ask permission to stay in touch for the next stage. Most people appreciate being part of the journey.

*“We worked with stakeholders from different fields, and each of them brought in information from their own “terrain”, daily work with women, institutions and communities, offered local services, and actively contributed to shaping the solutions.”*

**Jasna & Mirna, Slovenia**

*“In order to gain a more current and comprehensive understanding of women in our region, we conducted a survey of unemployed women in collaboration with colleagues at the Employment Office. The survey explored work-life balance, professional interests, willingness to pursue further training, relevant topics, and experiences with employers, among other areas.”*

**Janja, Bosnia and Herzegovina**

## MAKING SENSE TOGETHER

After listening to many voices and seeing the issue from different sides, it is time to gather the pieces into one shared picture. Invite your team to return to the table with all notes, impressions, and small discoveries collected so far. so that everyone can see them. Read each note aloud.

Ask the group to look for patterns like words or feelings that repeat, stories that appear in different places, or contrasts that reveal something new. The goal is not to reach agreement immediately but to find what resonates most strongly with the team.

When the main themes become clear, it's time to turn your shared understanding into a single guiding question like a Challenge Statement. This statement becomes the foundation for the next phase, where ideas and solutions will grow. A good challenge is concrete, human and possible to influence. It names both the people and the change you wish to support. One simple way to frame it is with the phrase "How might we...?"

*"Deep understanding does not always require formal research tools, especially when diverse stakeholders come for knowledge exchange within the Innovation Group. Our team members already had substantial experience working with different groups, and together contributed their expertise to understand the situation."*

**Dragana, Serbia**

For example:

- How might we support women returning to work after long breaks?
- How might we create local networks that help young mothers find training opportunities?
- How might we make employers more aware of flexible working options?

Before closing the phase, check your challenge statement with a few people from the target group or local community. Ask if it feels real, relevant, and worth solving. If they recognise themselves in it, you are on the right path. If not, adjust the wording together until it feels true.

*"We did not use methods just to "study" stakeholders or the target group from a distance. From the very beginning, the whole process was designed to encourage collaboration, connection and meaningful work for the local community, not only to collect data. Every tool we used was set up so that people were co-creating understanding together, instead of us extracting information from them."*

**Jasna & Mirna, Slovenia**

# SHAPING SOLUTIONS

After the period of listening, observing and feeling the change, your Innovation Team is ready to move from understanding to imagination. This is the creative stage of the process, when you begin to ask “What if?” and explore possible ways to make life in your community better. Now, the team can transform what it has learned into practical ideas for change. The aim is not to design perfect projects but to create small, meaningful and realistic solutions that can later be tested and improved.



## FROM INSIGHT TO IDEAS

Begin by revisiting everything your team has learned so far in the form of the stories, notes and impressions gathered during the previous phase. Read them aloud and remind each other what moments felt most important. Often, new insights appear when you look back together.

Now invite everyone to imagine possible ways forward. Create a welcoming space where all ideas are heard, even those that seem unrealistic at first. At this moment, it is more important to generate many ideas than to evaluate them. The more voices and perspectives are present, the stronger the creative flow becomes.

## 5

## TRY THIS

**Ask each team member to write up to ten quick ideas for possible solutions. Then share them in pairs and cluster similar ones together. Place all ideas on a wall or digital board and give everyone three stickers or dots to vote for their favorites. You will quickly see where collective energy gathers.**

*“The group worked with metaphorical cards to step out of the logical mind and into the heart and subconscious. Once overthinking loosened its grip, intuition took the lead, ideas started flowing, and it became clear that sometimes the best insights arrive when we stop trying so hard.”*

**Iana, Bulgaria**

## CREATING TOGETHER

Good brainstorming is built on listening and curiosity. Some people express their thoughts better through words, others through drawings or examples. Encourage both. Allow the team to use cards, post-it notes, or sketches so that everyone can take part in the process.

After all ideas are collected, group them by themes and notice where energy gathers. You can vote for your favourites, mix similar ideas or combine several small ones into something larger. By the end, the team should have a few ideas that feel inspiring and possible to try.

*“Our team primarily used brainstorming and storytelling as key creative techniques to generate and refine ideas throughout the project. We adapted these methods to our local context by integrating personal stories gathered from interviews and group discussions into the brainstorming process, which grounded the ideas in real-life experiences and made solutions more relevant and authentic.”*

**István, Hungary**

## MAKING IDEAS VISIBLE

Ideas become clearer when people can see them. This is where prototyping begins. A prototype can be a quick drawing, a story, a map or even a small 3D model made from recycled materials. It helps the team and others imagine how the idea would work in real life. The goal is not to make something perfect, but to make it visible and understandable.

**6**

### TRY THIS

**Set aside one meeting just to make ideas visible. Bring paper, pens and any simple materials you can find like boxes, paper cups, tape. Divide into small groups, giving each pair or trio one idea to visualise. Then invite them to present it in two minutes, explaining how it would work and who would benefit.**

Storytelling can serve the same purpose. Invite team members to explain the idea as if they were introducing it at a community event. Each story should say who the idea supports, how it works and what difference it can make. When everyone can tell the story in their own words, the idea becomes part of the group's shared vision.

*“The Innovation Group used clay, paper, and markers to make their ideas. By shaping and drawing how training, mentoring, and childcare could happen in one place, the concept became playful yet clear, helping others quickly understand what was meant.”*

Iana, Bulgaria

## TESTING WITH PEOPLE

When the first version of your ideas is ready, return to the people who inspired them. Present your prototypes or stories and listen to their reactions. Do they see themselves in these ideas? Do they find them useful, realistic or exciting? Their feedback will help your team adjust and improve each idea.

7

### TRY THIS

**Organise an informal meeting or open café event where residents can walk around and see your prototypes. Give them coloured stickers or small cards to leave comments or mark what they find most relevant. Treat this not as a presentation but as a conversation.**

Listening again to the community keeps the process honest. It reminds the team that good ideas grow through dialogue, not isolation.

## CHOOSING THE PATH FORWARD

After collecting feedback, the team meets again to decide which ideas are ready for testing. A few guiding questions can help this conversation:



- Is the idea meaningful for the people we serve?
- Can we implement it with our current time and resources?
- Does it show courage and creativity?
- Will it last beyond the first try-out?
- Can it be transferred or scaled to other places?
- Criteria for decision: usefulness, lasting impact, courage, feasibility, and potential to grow.

## SOLUTION FRAME

To help structure your team's thinking, you can use a short Solution Frame - a simple one-page outline for each idea. This tool is not a form to be filled mechanically but a way to bring clarity to your concept. Your Innovation Team can use this frame to describe each idea before moving into the next phase of testing.

ELEMENT	GUIDING QUESTION
<b>Title of the idea</b>	What name captures its spirit?
<b>Purpose</b>	What positive change do we want to create?
<b>Who it serves</b>	Who are the people or groups that will benefit?
<b>Key activities</b>	What will we actually do?
<b>Expected results</b>	What difference will it make in people's lives?
<b>Future potential</b>	How might this idea grow or inspire others?

# PILOTING INNOVATIONS

After shaping your ideas and listening to feedback, your Innovation Team is ready to take the next step, which is about testing these solutions in real conditions. Piloting is where ideas meet practice. It is a stage of action and discovery, helping you see how your concept works in the real world and what can be improved before scaling it further.

This phase is both practical and reflective. You bring your plan to life but also keep learning from everything that happens along the way. Each pilot becomes a small, real-world experiment, showing how social innovation can grow from understanding into action.

## SETTING THE GROUND

Before starting implementation revisit your ideas, confirm that they are still relevant, and make sure your plan is feasible with the people and resources available. Discuss within the team how each person can contribute, who will coordinate, who will keep in contact with stakeholders, who will monitor progress.

Preparation is also about listening. Reconnect with community members, partners, and stakeholders who can support the pilot. Share your plan openly and check whether the activities still make sense from their point of view. Conversations often bring new details or challenges that will make your plan stronger.

*“Listening is key. During the developmental phase, the feedback from female entrepreneurs proved to be the missing link in our understanding of women’s needs, obstacles they face in professional growth, and potential solutions that would accommodate both employers and job seekers.”*

**Janja, Bosnia and Herzegovina**

## 8

## TRY THIS

Hold one focused team meeting to review the selected solutions and agree on the approach for testing. Ask everyone to name one possible obstacle they foresee and one resource or person that could help overcome it.



By the end of this preparatory phase, your Innovation Team should have a clear, shared plan of action, a sense of ownership among members, and the support of the main stakeholders who will accompany the process.

*“The feedback directly influenced our piloting strategy: one innovation per target group was selected for implementation. An interesting outcome emerged from young respondents, who largely viewed gender equality as self-evident, in contrast to older generations, who showed more ambivalence or hesitation. This insight reaffirmed the importance of intergenerational dialogue and highlighted the need to engage not only with young people but also with adults, supporting them in articulating and maintaining their beliefs about equality with confidence.”*

**Eva, Czech Republic**



## BRINGING CHANGE TO THE FIELD

Once preparations are complete, implementation begins. This is the most dynamic and visible stage of the process. The activities you designed start to happen on the ground, e.g. workshops, meetings, trainings, campaigns, or pilot services.

Encourage the team to document what happens in simple ways: short notes after activities, feedback from participants, or photos that capture key moments. Collecting this information continuously will help you reflect later and communicate your results clearly.

**9**

### TRY THIS

**Assign one or two members as observers during implementation. Their role is to notice small but important things, for example how participants react, what atmosphere is created, what helps or hinders the process. These observations will enrich your later reflection.**

*“By observing the “living library” format (professionals acting as “living books” sharing their career paths and experiences), we saw clearly that many young women and young people in general still do not know what different professions look like in practice, because they do not receive enough information in a way that speaks to them.”*

**Jasna & Mirna, Slovenia**

Implementation is rarely linear. Some activities will run smoothly, others will need adjustments. Take these moments not as problems but as learning opportunities. The key is to keep communication open within your team, with the participants, and with local partners.

**10**

### **TRY THIS**

**Every few weeks, organise a short internal review with three guiding questions:**

- 1. What is working well?**
- 2. What is not working and why?**
- 3. What will we try differently next time?**

By the end of this phase, at least one or two of your solutions will have been tested in real conditions, with feedback gathered from women and communities directly involved.

*“A powerful moment was during the creative competition when we saw the submissions from students. Their artwork and ideas about women in industry and mining were not only creative but also showed a shift in how they viewed gender roles in these fields.”*

**Kerstin, Austria**



## LEARNING FOR BETTER CHANGE

After implementation comes the moment of reflection. This is when your team pauses to look back, analyse what happened, and understand what was achieved. Reflection is not only about numbers or formal evaluation; it is about making sense of the experience the changes observed, the challenges faced, and the insights gained.

Gather your Innovation Team and the key people who were involved. Invite them to share perspectives on both the process and the results. Focus on three questions: What worked? What could be improved? What should continue after the project?

# 11

## TRY THIS

**You can make reflection more engaging by using visual aids like photos, key words on cards, or a simple timeline of the process. Invite participants to mark moments of learning or change and tell short stories around them.**

*“After the development phase of our podcast pilot, there was a clear example of how feedback from women and stakeholders improved our ideas. Initially, the concept focused largely on raising general awareness of the challenges women face in the labour market. However, direct feedback revealed that men might react defensively to this approach or feel excluded.”*

**István, Hungary**

The final step is to look ahead. Discuss how the results of the pilot can continue, who could take the lead, what partnerships might support sustainability, and what small steps are realistic in the coming months. Even if the project ends, the relationships and knowledge built during testing can continue to grow.

**12**

### **TRY THIS**

**As a closing activity, invite the team to write one shared sentence that captures the main lesson from your pilot. This can later be used as your team’s message to other innovators.**

By reflecting together, your team turns experience into collective knowledge. This is how social innovation matures not only through success, but through learning and dialogue.

*“I feel the need to say something more. As an experienced and mature woman, I have realised that one of the most important feelings is the sense of belonging, the one I felt among you during the trainings within the pilot. That experience is priceless and essential for every person in today’s fast and somewhat alienated world. Work is not only about money, it can and should also be passion, love, art and empathy.”*

**A woman, pilot participant, Serbia**

# REFLECTING ON RESULTS

Every social innovation process deserves a moment of pause. Reflection is the space where experience turns into understanding. It allows your Innovation Team to recognise what truly worked, what could be improved, and how the ideas tested can continue to grow in a sustainable way. This stage closes the circle of developing, testing, and reflecting, but it also opens a new one. The insights generated here guide future action and make your learning available to others who wish to create change in their own communities.

Reflection is not only about assessing results; it is about making sense of what happened. It connects evidence and experience, linking the visible outcomes with the deeper changes in people, attitudes, and relationships. Open and structured reflection also strengthens collaboration. It gives voice to different perspectives from the target group directly involved to the stakeholders who supported the process, helping everyone see the bigger picture of what was achieved together.

## HOW TO REFLECT

A balanced reflection combines direct feedback from participants with insights from facilitators and stakeholders. Two simple tools can support this process:

- Feedback questionnaires for target groups - short online or printed forms with a few key questions about satisfaction, relevance, and suggestions for improvement. Keep them brief and easy to complete right after participation.
- Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders - about five short conversations (20–30 minutes each) with partners, facilitators, or external supporters of the process. These interviews capture what they observed, what they think worked best, and what they would recommend for the future.

This approach was applied in the WIN project, where Innovation Teams used online questionnaires to reach participants and conducted short interviews with facilitators and partners. The goal was to learn from different viewpoints while keeping the process light and practical.

**13****TRY THIS**

**When interviewing stakeholders, focus on three guiding questions:**

- 1. What worked particularly well in the implementation?**
- 2. What could be done differently next time?**
- 3. What potential do you see for continuing or scaling this innovation?**

The goal is not to produce lengthy reports, but to listen carefully and capture meaningful insights from those involved. Each perspective adds depth to your understanding of the innovation's effect.

**TURNING LEARNING INTO ACTION**

Once the feedback is collected, bring your Innovation Team together for one final meeting dedicated to reflection. Summarise the main findings and agree on what they mean for your next steps. Some teams may refine their activities; others may plan how to sustain or transfer their tested ideas.

You can record your conclusions in a short "Reflection Note." It may include key achievements and challenges, lessons learned from the pilot process, practical ideas for sustaining or scaling the innovation.

14

**TRY THIS**

**End your reflection meeting by inviting each team member to share one insight they will personally carry forward into their own work. This helps transform shared learning into ongoing commitment.**

**CLOSING THE CIRCLE**

Reflecting on results is both an ending and a new beginning. It ensures that innovations are not isolated actions, but part of a continuous journey of learning and improvement. By pausing to analyse, listen, and share, your team prepares the ground for future cycles of innovation that are wiser, more responsive, and more sustainable.



# FROM METHOD TO MOVEMENT

Every innovation begins with a small act of courage. A group of people who decide to look at a problem differently and imagine that change is possible. This toolkit was created to support those moments. It offers methods, steps, and tools, but behind each of them stands something deeper: the belief that local action can create lasting transformation.

By developing, testing, and reflecting on social innovations, your team joins a wider movement of changemakers working for more inclusive, fair, and resilient communities. The processes described here are not fixed recipes but living practices. They invite experimentation, dialogue, and learning from both success and failure.

**Remember: meaningful change is rarely fast, but it becomes real when it is shared.**

As this toolkit closes, the process continues in your region, your organization, your community. Each reflection, each prototype, each conversation contributes to a larger story of change across Europe and beyond.

If you build upon this work, we invite you to share your experiences, results, and insights with others. Together we can expand this community of practice and help social innovations grow where they are needed most.

**The WIN consortium thanks every local innovator, partner, and community member who contributed their energy and imagination to this journey. May this toolkit be a source of guidance and encouragement for many more.**



# Social innovation begins where people dare to rethink how communities work.

This methodological toolkit offers a practical pathway for changemakers who want to develop, test, and reflect on social innovations that improve the lives of people in disadvantaged positions.

Built on the experience of the WIN project and its seven pilot regions across the Danube, the toolkit provides clear steps, tools, and reflective exercises for every stage of the innovation journey from setting a team and understanding community needs to piloting ideas and learning from results.

Designed for professionals, educators, public authorities, and civic entrepreneurs, this book combines methodological steps with human stories of change. It invites you to act, learn, and grow through reflection.

We thank all WIN Innovation Group coordinators and local partners who tested these methods in practice. Their openness and creativity shaped this publication and continue to inspire its readers.



***Because lasting innovation is not only about what we create, but how we create it together.***

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