Interreg Danube Region

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WIN

Deliverable 2.3.3/2

REFLECTION REPORT ON IMPLEMENTED SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

Interviews with key stakeholders involved in the pilots

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WIN

Improving the position of Women in the labour markets of peripheral INdustrial regions

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Introduction and aims

This report (D2.3.3/2) is one of the final items relating to Specific Objective 2 (SO2) of the WIN project: Implementing social innovations to improve the labour market for women in peripheral industrial regions. The social innovations aimed to develop region-specific pilot actions to better integrate women into local labour markets.

Within SO2, the regional PPs, supported by the academic PPs, developed (A2.1), tested (A2.2), and reflected on (A2.3) the overarching concept of social innovation while enabling regional diversification. Each pilot area established a WIN Innovation Group (WIG), which represents the project's target groups, including women, employers, business support organisations, and public authorities. The WIGs have focused on their respective pilot areas and co-developed 26 social innovations (D2.1.2), 13 of which have been tested (D2.2.2).

The aim of A2.3 is to provide a thorough reflection on and evaluation of the social innovations tested in seven peripheral industrial regions. This process closes the loop by gathering feedback from 1) target groups and 2) key stakeholders on the pilot actions. A2.3 consists of two evaluation components. In connection with PP10 NMS as the overall SO2 leader, LP ZRC SAZU and PP3 UniGRAZ have provided methodologies and guidelines to ensure balanced evaluation by the PPs.

- In D2.3.1, LP ZRC SAZU provided a structured online evaluation questionnaire designed to capture valuable feedback from the various target groups that **participated** in the pilot actions, such as women, employers, and business support organisations. The questionnaire explored participants' experiences, perceptions and opinions of the pilot actions that had been implemented. Regional PPs then conducted the online survey. The outcomes of the survey are gathered in a separate report (D2.3.3/1)

- In D2.3.2, PP3 UniGRAZ provided guidelines for conducting interviews with key stakeholders involved in **creating** the pilot actions of the seven pilot regions. These guidelines constitute a framework for gathering qualitative insights, perspectives, and recommendations from influential individuals and organisations. These interviews enabled the partners to obtain qualitative insights, recommendations, and critiques from stakeholders, providing a comprehensive understanding of the outcomes and impacts of the social innovations tested. This is what this report (D2.3.3/2) will focus on.

The SO2 leader will integrate all three reports from SO2 (D2.1.2, D2.2.2, and D2.3.3/1+2) in the development of the WIN Social Innovation Booklet (D2.3.4). The booklet will summarise the knowledge and lessons learned throughout the piloting process, including the stages of development, testing, and reflection. It presents successful strategies, experiences, and recommendations aimed at improving women's position in the labour markets of peripheral industrial regions.

Methods

To fulfil the task of D2.3.2, PP3 created a unified but flexible framework for the field survey and presented and discussed it with the partnership in the project meeting in Livno (Bosnia & Herzegovina, October 2025). The final instructions to the regional partners, as provided by PP3, can be found in ANNEX 1. Responsible for conducting the field survey were the regional partners.

Overall, the partners were free to choose their preferred interview methods; both single interviews and focus group sessions could be conducted. It was recommended to involve members of the WIN Innovation Groups (WIG) in this task, but it was not made compulsory. Additionally, it was recommended to carry out additional interviews with stakeholders outside of the WIG, if the circle of WIG members is too small or does not cover all important sectors in the project focus. The ultimate choice of the interview type and the stakeholder selection was left to each PP individually. Overall, a minimum of 5 stakeholders were supposed to be involved in the field survey.

Content-wise, it was strongly suggested to structure the interview along two thematic blocks, along the following guiding questions, conducted in an open, conversation-style framework:

1. Reflection of WIN results

- How did you like the process of selecting the pilot actions? Was it goal-oriented? Did you like participating? What could be improved?
- Are you happy with the way the pilot actions were implemented? What worked well, what could be improved?
- Overall, are you satisfied with the process and the results? Would you participate again in such a setting? What could be improved?

2. Future perspectives

- Against the measures in WIN, but also personal perspectives, what do you think about the future perspectives of women in the local labour market? How will this impact the development of your region?
- Which measures are needed to improve the situation, and which policies might be needed? How were the pilot actions of WIN useful in this regard?

In case the interviews are conducted with stakeholders outside the closer WIN context, it was suggested to focus more on the second part, and the following questions were suggested:

- Short intro into the WIN context, outline local pilot actions
    - Do interview partners know about the actions?
    - Did they participate? Did they like them?
    - What kind of actions are needed additionally? What pilots would the stakeholders suggest?

- How do you perceive the role of women in the region in the past? What are your observations?
- What role do you think women play in regional labour markets these days? How does this influence the region's development?
- What do you think about the future perspectives of women in the local labour market? How will this impact the development of your region?
- Which measures are needed to improve the situation, and which policies might be needed? How were the pilot actions of WIN useful in this regard?

The deadline for the delivery of results was set to the 15th of January 2026.

Results

The results of the individual 7-country field surveys can be found in ANNEX 2 of this report; the results section here will focus on the overall cross-country findings.

Overview Methods

Overall, the evaluation round reached (or exceeded) the target figure of a minimum of 5 interviewees per country. Across the partnership, the evaluation was conducted in a mix of focus groups (usually in connection with a WIG meeting) and separate interviews, sometimes even in a mix of both formats. In total, 33 WIG members participated in the process, as well as 15 external stakeholders. The interview period lasted from November 2025 until February 2026.

The partners applied the prepared joint evaluation framework, sometimes adding additional questions, as deemed useful in their specific context. Overall feedback on the evaluation structure and procedure saw no major problems encountered by the partners.

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Overview Pilots

Feedback on pilot selection process

Overall, respondents to the interviews and focus groups highlighted the transparency of the pilot selection process, the clear goal-orientation, and the opportunity for open discussion within the working groups.

Interviewees emphasised that the process allowed for genuine co-creation, bringing together a wide range of stakeholders across the regions, ranging from civil society actors, municipal representatives, communication experts, social scientists, and members of the public. This interdisciplinary approach was considered essential for identifying less visible, culturally embedded barriers affecting women's labour market participation. Respondents specifically highlighted that the pilot ideas and implementations were concrete and directly linked to the needs of women in the local community.

For example, in *Serbia*, the participants assessed the process of selecting the pilot activities as inclusive and well aligned with the needs of women in the local context. They specifically highlighted that the activities were concrete and directly linked to the needs of women in the local community, successfully combining traditional knowledge and practices with modern tools and digital approaches. It was emphasised that the

pilot activities were clearly goal-oriented from the very beginning, with economic empowerment and digital skills development defined as key objectives, and that each activity contributed step by step towards strengthening women's position on the local labour market (Field Survey Report Serbia, Loznica / Mačva District, 2025).

In Hungary, the stakeholders involved in the WIN Innovation Group consistently described the pilot selection process as goal-oriented, inclusive, and strategically well-founded. Interviewees emphasised that the process allowed for genuine co-creation, bringing together civil society actors, municipal representatives, communication experts, and social scientists. This interdisciplinary approach was considered essential for identifying less visible, culturally embedded barriers affecting women's labour market participation (Field Survey Report Hungary, 2026).

The selection process was, in some cases, seen as somewhat challenging, as several proposed topics were considered equally important but could not be implemented simultaneously due to capacity and project constraints. Furthermore, limited timeframes, financial constraints, and the complexity of administrative and legislative environments (concerning specific pilots, e.g., in Bosnia & Herzegovina) were additionally flagged up by participants. Overall, demand for social innovations clearly outstripped the project's capacities.

Feedback on the pilot implementation process

The overall perception of the interviewees was that the pilot activities were well-designed and effectively translated into practice. Participants emphasised that the activities were carried out in accordance with the set objectives and were oriented towards the creation of social innovations with tangible outcomes. The implementation process was described as being grounded in data, previous experience, and feedback gathered during earlier phases within the WIG. In some cases, the pilot activities exceeded their initial expectations (e.g., in the scope and reach of the pilot outputs, as well as their practical relevance to the target groups). Positively reviewed was the fact that the activities were implemented following a "learning by doing" approach, which resulted in higher engagement and interest among participants. Additionally, many pilots focused on low-threshold communication tools, which were capable of reaching audiences who rarely participate in formal employment-related programmes.

Among the pilot activities implemented in *Slovenia*, the Career Fair «Šiht Happens» (15 October 2025, Trbovlje) has made a significant contribution to refreshing and upgrading the content of existing career fairs in the local environment by implementing an innovative pedagogical and experiential approach to learning about professions. This pilot action has become a result of the synergy of the WIN group and local stakeholders: ZMŠT (Youth Center Trbovlje), the Trbovlje Employment Service (ZRSZ), and the PiNA - Association for Culture and Education (Field Survey Report Slovenia, 2026).

The innovative approach, variety, and use of low-threshold communication tools, capable of reaching audiences who rarely participate in formal employment-related programmes has shown their efficiency in *Austria*. The pilot actions combined the role-model campaign, the public bus campaign, and the poster exhibition at the Montan University. The implementation of the Austrian pilot actions was evaluated very positively, which was emphasised by the participants, as ***"I believe that good initiatives from the entire project have actually been implemented in a relatively short time."*** (Field Survey Report Austria, 2026).

Challenges identified during implementation related mainly to coordination and institutional anchoring. Stakeholders suggested that stronger links between awareness-raising actions and existing labour market or municipal initiatives could enhance sustainability. While seen as meaningful, a long-term perspective, beyond the simple project context, was seen as necessary to create better sustainability of the actions. Also, in some cases (e.g., in Austria), a better, more focused project communication was seen as beneficial, especially for people less aware of the wider project context, as the overarching project context was not always explicitly visible to persons from outside the WIG context.

General feedback on Win Innovation Group

The WIN Innovation Group's role was highlighted as particularly important and a central role in identifying real-life challenges faced by women, converting these challenges into feasible pilot actions within the project framework. The participation in the regional WIGs was perceived as highly beneficial across all pilot regions. Members described their involvement as inspiring and professionally enriching, emphasising the relevance of the topic addressed and the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to its development at the regional level. Respondents especially valued the opportunity to exchange experiences with representatives from different sectors and highlighted the benefits of interdisciplinary cooperation. Participation in the working group was also seen as useful for respondents' own professional practice.

Overall, the experience of working within the group was thus perceived not only as instrumental for the implementation of the WIN project but also as a positive example of participatory and cross-sectoral collaboration. WIG members indicated that they would participate again in similar settings and viewed the project as a rare example of meaningful stakeholder involvement. They appreciated that the project allowed for experimentation and reflection beyond rigid output-driven frameworks.

The participants of the regional working group in *the Czech Republic* described their involvement as inspiring and professionally enriching, emphasising the relevance of the topic addressed and the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to its development at the regional level. They valued the opportunity of the inter-sectoral knowledge

production, cross-sectoral collaboration, and participatory approach (Field Survey Report Czech Republic, 2026).

In *Slovenia*, six workshops of the WIN innovation group (held between 21 September 2024 and 27 January 2025) have been recognised as a space for strengthening inter-institutional cooperation. ***"I have not had any such project so far, where all stakeholders, or at least their representatives, would somehow come together. As far as this is concerned, there will certainly be some workshops, or something will continue, or perhaps they will be replicated and applied to something else."*** (Regional Field Survey Report Slovenia, 2026).

Aiming at supporting women who had been unemployed for extended periods or were re-entering the labour market after time abroad or caregiving responsibilities and empowering their inclusion into the labour market, the WIG group in *Bosnia & Herzegovina* has conducted the business literacy training. The training contributed to increased self-confidence, improved understanding of business processes, and renewed motivation to consider entrepreneurship or employment opportunities. Its empowering effect was followed and supported with a WhatsApp group, so that participants can stay in touch and collectively advocate for their needs, demonstrating early networking and peer support (Field Survey Report Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2026).

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Overview Future Development in the Pilot Regions

Future perspectives for women in the pilot regions

Across all interviews, future perspectives for women's labour market participation were characterised by cautious optimism. Stakeholders stated that continued awareness-raising and cultural change could gradually improve women's labour market position. The involvement of younger generations was seen as a potential driver of change, as attitudes towards gender roles appear more flexible. Additionally, women are increasingly visible in the labour market and present in a wider range of sectors, 'normalising' their wider labour market presence.

However, persistent barriers remain, particularly in terms of career progression, leadership opportunities, networking, and access to flexible working arrangements. Childbearing remains a major factor for labour market drop-out: Interviewees highlighted a lack of kindergarten places and inflexible work arrangements as factors of labour market drop-out. Additionally, traditional gender stereotypes are widespread across many sectors in pilot regions, esp. in systems where one 'bread-earner' labour market systems (like in *Austria*) were widespread. Despite a strong willingness and effort to develop their own small entrepreneurships (for example, in creative and craft-based activities), women (like in *Bulgaria*) face the lack of visibility,

which limits their access to markets. These challenges are strengthened by the deeply rooted traditions and gender stereotypes, which lead to struggles in communication with the local municipality and in receiving institutional support.

Nevertheless, interviewees also highlighted that with key trends, such as digitalisation, the rise of IT-related jobs, artificial intelligence, new opportunities and risks arise for women. As regional disparities widen and skilled labour migrates to more developed regions, labour shortages are intensifying locally, creating high demand for local labour pools, opening new opportunities. Interviewees pointed towards the combination of digital skills with local specificities as a way for more women to engage in business. This is mainly through digital sales, rural tourism, and social enterprises, resulting in women no longer being dependent exclusively on employment opportunities in local factories.

Local measures needed

Participants indicated that the pilot activities helped to open up the topic of women's position in the labour market at the local and regional level, to identify specific barriers, and to propose practical solutions. The establishment of a functional platform and the regular articulation of gender equality issues within the region - via

the WIGs - was evaluated positively, particularly in terms of their potential to stimulate further discussion at the regional policy level.

The interviewees highlighted a range of structural, 'hard' issues necessary for improving female labour market participation in the pilot regions. Across the regions, flexible working arrangements, employer sensitisation, supportive family policies, and continued awareness-raising are named. Interviewees also agreed that while awareness-raising alone cannot resolve structural inequalities, the WIN pilot actions created essential foundations for broader policy and organisational change by influencing attitudes, conversations, and everyday practices.

Priority areas for future 'soft' actions vary only slightly across the regions: expanded mentoring and post-training support; practical, hands-on learning formats and job-shadowing opportunities; improved networking between women, institutions, and employers; and targeted policies supporting re-skilling, up-skilling, and career transitions were named across the evaluation. Continuous learning opportunities and flexible support mechanisms were seen by many interviewees as essential for enabling women to adapt to changing labour market demands, maintaining and strengthening collaboration among women, institutions, and employers to ensure sustainability of these efforts. Also, the improvement of communication with municipal representatives was seen as essential (how to frame messages, present results, and demonstrate the value of such initiatives for regional development).

Additionally, the role of schools and education was highlighted across the evaluation. Here, raising awareness of (in)equality of women in a historical context, better school counselling services (regarding professional opportunities), bridging technical content and professions closer to schools, and promoting the inclusion of women in STEM were seen as important.

Conclusion/Takeaways

The evaluation confirmed that by combining participatory governance, co-created inputs, and multi-format communication tools, the WIN pilot actions have reached both institutional stakeholders and broader audiences. The feedback gathered underlines the importance of practical, confidence-building interventions, sustained mentoring beyond formal training, and institutional cooperation across sectors. Overall, the interviews confirmed strong potential to scale up and further develop similar initiatives, particularly if combined with targeted policy measures to support women in continuing education, entrepreneurship, and work–life balance.

Maybe one of the greatest values of the pilot action process did not lie only in specific skills or activities, but in the creation of trust, community, and self-driven collaboration, which form a strong foundation for long term change in all regions. In this sense, the WIN social innovations are an example of focused and goal-oriented cooperation; this model could serve as a starting point for more systematic and coordinated approaches to addressing development challenges in the local environment in the future.

Overall, the challenges for women and their labour market participation in industrial regions remain plentiful and have been clearly identified during implementation and by the evaluation. Interviewees were often very frank about the challenges and the

importance of anchoring the topic institutionally in the region's long-term. The pilots, valuable as they were, were seen as a starting point, rather than an endpoint of the regional process. Here, some interviewees clearly pointed towards a better and systematic coordination of different initiatives on different policy levels, resulting in a more structured policy that needs to involve various institutions and stakeholders. The aim is to enable synergies between existing programmes and improve female labour market participation long-term.

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ANNEXES

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ANNEX 1 – Instructions to PPs

Provided by University of Graz (PP3)

Authors: Harfst, Sandriester, Kocher

WIN – Project - Deliverable 2.3.2

Field survey framework (interviews with key stakeholders involved in the pilots)

Task description:

The field survey framework provides guidelines for conducting interviews with key stakeholders involved in the pilot actions of the 7 pilot regions. It constitutes a framework for gathering qualitative insights, perspectives, and recommendations from influential individuals and organisations.

Task leader: Uni Graz

Responsible: Regional PPs

Outcome:

One overall report with a summary chapter by Uni Graz, which is based on 7 country reports by each regional PP, summarising their field survey results.

Deadline for completion of country reports: 15 January 2026.

Methodology:

To fulfil the task as stated in the application form, single interviews or a focus group session can be conducted. It is recommended to involve members of the WIN Innovation Groups (WIG) in this task, as these stakeholders are familiar with the overall project development and local pilot actions. Thereby, a focus group session, reflecting on the project process and results, could be held along with one of the WIG meetings.

We also recommend carrying out additional interviews with stakeholders outside of the WIG, if the circle of WIG members is too small or does not cover all important sectors in the project focus, such as employment agencies, companies, administration units, etc. The stakeholder selection is left to each PP individually, as they know their regions and pilots best. Overall, a minimum of 5 stakeholders should be involved in this field survey.

For those interviewees already familiar with the project actions (e.g., stakeholders being involved in the WIGs), we strongly suggest having 2 thematic blocks in the interview/focus group session, along with the following guiding questions, conducted in an open, conversation-style framework:

1. Reflection of WIN results

- How did you like the process of selecting the pilot actions? Was it goal-oriented? Did you like participating? What could be improved?
- Are you happy with the way the pilot actions were implemented? What worked well, what could be improved?
- Overall, are you satisfied with the process and the results? Would you participate again in such a setting? What could be improved?

2. Future perspectives

- Against the measures in WIN, but also personal perspectives, what do you think about the future perspectives of women in the local labour market? How will this impact the development of your region?
- Which measures are needed to improve the situation, and which policies might be needed? How were the pilot actions of WIN useful in this regard?

In case the interviews are conducted with stakeholders outside the WIG context, we suggest focusing more on the second part and suggest the following questions:

- Short intro into the WIN context, outline local pilot actions
  - Do interview partners know about the actions?
  - Did they participate? Did they like them?
  - What kind of actions are needed additionally? What pilots would the stakeholders suggest?
- How do you perceive the role of women in the region in the past? What are your observations?
- What role do you think women play in regional labour markets these days? How does this influence the region's development?
- What do you think about the future perspectives of women in the local labour market? How will this impact the development of your region?
- Which measures are needed to improve the situation, and which policies might be needed? How were the pilot actions of WIN useful in this regard?

Suggested structure of the regional field survey reports

Each regional PP will provide a short report about the results of the field survey. We suggest the following structure for all those reports, so that a comparative analysis/summary is made easier.

1. Aim of the survey, short intro to project context
2. Applied field survey method (When? Who? How?)
3. Results (structured by guiding questions)
4. Short conclusion
5. Annexes (pics, etc. – as deemed necessary)

ANNEX 2 – Individual Regional Field Survey Reports

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Regional Field Survey Report – Slovenia

1. Aim of the survey and project context

The purpose of the research is to evaluate the employment and integration of women into the labour market in the Zasavje region. The report focuses on the perspectives and views of various stakeholders from Trbovlje and the wider Zasavje region, primarily representatives of institutions that participated in six workshops of the WIN innovation group, which were held between 21 September 2024 and 27 January 2025. The research framework was designed on the basis of four thematic areas that structured the interviews and include an analysis of past developments, an assessment of the present situation, reflection on future prospects, and consideration of the role of the WIN project, including the pilot action (see Table 1).

This report evaluates the role of the WIN project at the local and regional level, and the implementation of the pilot action *Šiht Happens* (Job Happens). In addition, the report addresses perceptions of women's roles in the region (past and present) as well as future perspectives of women in the local labour market. Based on the findings, it also outlines the policy measures considered necessary and examines the role of the WIN project in contributing to these developments.

2. Applied field survey method

Between 13 and 21 January 2026, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten interviewees (eight women and two men) who were identified as important stakeholders in Trbovlje and the wider Zasavje region. Most of the interviews were conducted in Trbovlje (eight interviewees), while two were conducted remotely via the ZOOM online platform. The average duration of each interview was approximately 45 minutes. The interviewees come from different institutions and fields of activity, with some of the selected institutions also actively involved in the workshops of the WIN project innovation group. The sample structure includes representatives from the following sectors:

Companies – established and dominant in the region (one person – CE[1]),

companies – newer, including sole proprietorships or start-ups (one person – CN),

public educational institutions – universities, vocational and secondary schools (two persons – PE1 and PE2),

supporting public institutions – development agencies, business support organisations (three persons – SP1, SP2, and SP3),

public non-governmental organisations (two persons – PN1 and PN2),

private non-governmental organisations (one person – PR).

[1] These abbreviations are used as anonymisation codes for individual interviewees.

The interviews were based on a semi-structured questionnaire designed in accordance with the methodological guidelines of the partner institution, the University of Graz (PP3). The questionnaire was partially adapted with additional content sections that were identified as relevant to the specific socio-economic context of Trbovlje and Zasavje. The thematic sections and questions in the individual interviews followed the structure presented in the table below. For two interviewees who did not participate in the WIN project innovation group, the set of questions related to the role and perception of the WIN project was omitted.

SET 1: Past development
1. How do you perceive the role of women in Zasavje in the past? What are your views?
SET 2: Present situation
2. In your opinion, what role do women play in the labour market in Zasavje today? How does this affect regional development? 3. What reasons do you see for young women in particular leaving Zasavje? 4. How would you assess the willingness of local companies and institutions to actively implement measures to promote women in technical or industrial professions? 5. How important do you think "soft factors" such as awareness raising, role models, or corporate culture are when it comes to encouraging women in technical or industrial professions?
SECTION 3: The role of the WIN project
6. How did you like the pilot action selection process? Was it goal-oriented? Did you like the collaboration? What could be improved? 7. Are you satisfied with the implementation of the pilot actions? What worked well? What could be improved? 8. Are you generally satisfied with the results of the WIN project? Would you participate in such a project again? What could be improved?
SECTION 4: Prospects
9. Based on the measures taken within the WIN project, as well as your personal views, what do you think about the prospects for women in the labour market in Zasavje? How will this affect the development of Zasavje? 10. What measures are needed to improve the situation? What policies would be necessary? How were the pilot actions of the WIN project useful in this regard?

Table 1: Questionnaire on employment and the role of women in the socio-economic development of Zasavje

3. Results

3.1 Reflection on WIN results and implementation of the social innovation *Šiht Happens*

An analysis of the experiences of WIN workshop participants shows that the workshops were generally perceived as a positive, innovative, and encouraging form of collaborative work. Participants particularly emphasised the value of group thinking, the exchange of perspectives, and the co-creation of content, which they recognised as a rare practice in the local environment. The methodological approach, which enabled the active involvement of all participants, was assessed as one of the key advantages of the workshops.

An important finding of the evaluation is that the project activities in the local environment have stimulated a broader debate on employment and gender equality issues: "*When the WIN workshops started, and we began talking about this burning issue, it became clear that people were also starting to think about these matters. They got a realistic picture of the employment situation for both genders in Trbovlje and Zasavje. I think these activities are very good, precisely because they address*

issues that have been a burning topic for a long time but have never been brought to the fore. Other issues always come up, such as what we will do with infrastructure, how we will develop tourism, and so on" (PN1). The workshops were recognised as a space for strengthening inter-institutional cooperation. One of the interviewees emphasises: "*I have not had any such project so far, where all stakeholders, or at least their representatives, would somehow come together. As far as this is concerned, there will certainly be some workshops, or something will continue, or perhaps they will be replicated and applied to* something *else*" (PE1). Some interviewees emphasise that, to increase the impact of the workshops, it would be useful to ensure greater involvement of management and decision-making structures, particularly from educational institutions, municipalities, and the business sector. According to the participants, broader representation of decision-makers and policy-makers would enable more effective transfer of findings into practice and contribute to greater institutional commitment to change.

One interviewee (PR) pointed out as a limitation the characteristic of a smaller local environment, in which the same individuals are often involved in initiatives or desires for change, which can lead to a circulation of already known ideas and limit the introduction of new perspectives. At the same time, it became apparent that participation in the workshops was not always continuous, which meant that some participants lost sight of the overall process. The timing of the workshops was also highlighted as a practical limitation. Several participants pointed out that the afternoon workshops, which lasted several hours after the end of the working day, represented an additional burden, which could affect motivation and the quality of participation. As a possible improvement, it was suggested that the workshops be organised during working hours, subject to prior agreement with employers.

In Trbovlje, a pilot action or social innovation entitled *Šiht Happens* was implemented as part of the project, in cooperation with ZMŠT (Youth Center Trbovlje), the Trbovlje Employment Service (ZRSZ), and the PiNA - Association for Culture and Education as a partner organisation of the WIN project. Career Fair *Šiht Happens* was held on 15 October 2025 at the Worker's Home Trbovlje. It was aimed at young people, who had the opportunity to learn about various professions and establish contact with potential employers in the region. The target groups were primary school pupils (last three grades), secondary school pupils (last two years), and local employers. The event included a range of interactive activities, including skills development workshops, a career escape room, a treasure hunt, and a so-called living library. It was attended by more than 400 young people and 33 employers.

An evaluation of the social innovation *Šiht Happens*, carried out as part of the career and employment fair in Trbovlje, shows that the event made a significant contribution to refreshing and upgrading the content of existing career fairs in the local environment. One interviewee points out that traditional career fairs often reproduce a limited range of employers and job profiles, mainly from manufacturing and trade, which can reinforce participants' perception of low prospects and lower-paid jobs in the region (CN). Another interviewee (PE1) believes that young people often do not have a comprehensive overview of existing professions, educational pathways, and the content of individual study programmes, while at the same time being exposed to an overload of information events that no longer capture their attention. In this context, social innovation has been recognised as an attempt to go beyond established practices, particularly in terms of how professions are presented and how young people are involved.

The key added value of the *Šiht Happens* innovation lies in its pedagogical and experiential approach to learning about professions. Stakeholders emphasise the importance of early, repeated and direct contact between young people and various career options, which goes beyond simply providing information: *"Because I basically think that if we want to reach children and young people, we have to get them excited. Because if it's something they've already had in the past, they'll say, 'Oh, it's the*

same thing again'. Unfortunately, that's how it is with children" (PE1). Interactive, fun activities and direct contact with employers enabled a better understanding of the content of the work and reduced reservations and fears about establishing contact with employers. The active participation of secondary school students was particularly positively assessed, as they did not just passively attend the fair, but actually engaged in activities and dialogue (PN1).

3.2 Perceptions of women's role in the region (past and present)

The traditional division of gender roles in Zasavje was closely linked to the region's mining and industrial structure, where men predominantly worked in mines and industry, while women were largely confined to the private sphere, carrying responsibility for household management, childcare, and education. Limited employment opportunities and insufficient childcare provision reinforced this arrangement, making women's participation in the labour market more difficult.

At the same time, women were not absent from economic and public life. They worked in factories and quarries, played important roles in labour movements, and were active in community life, although often less visibly than men. Interviewees also highlight a gradual improvement in women's educational attainment after the Second World War and point to a historically rooted respect for women's social role in the region. Overall, while formal public authority was largely male-dominated, women exercised significant informal power within households and contributed substantially to social and economic life, revealing a complex interplay between structural constraints and female agency.

Although women increasingly entered paid work during and after World War II—particularly in so-called "women's factories" in the textile and electrical industries—they were largely excluded from managerial positions. Employment opportunities remained limited, especially beyond traditionally gendered sectors, while mining was explicitly male-dominated and associated with significant health risks and reduced life expectancy for men. An important employer of women was (and still is) the hospital, where medical staff was needed (CE).

The transition to independence and subsequent deindustrialisation marked a major turning point, leading to factory closures, job losses, and a period of economic stagnation, particularly from the early 1990s onward. This restructuring affected both men and women, but had more pronounced consequences for women due to their narrower employment options.

In recent decades, however, interviewees have observed notable changes. Women's overall labour market participation has increased, and entrepreneurship is increasingly recognised as an important pathway. While female entrepreneurs and managers were previously rare, new patterns are emerging, with growing—though still limited—female presence in business leadership roles. In recent years, a positive trend has been observed in the role of women in STEM professions, along with an increase in female enrolment in technical secondary schools. Today, women assume a central role primarily in the public sector, where they also predominate in leadership positions.

3.3 Future perspectives of women in the local labour market

Regarding future perspectives for women, two main dimensions emerge from the interviewees' views: expectations concerning women's independent entrepreneurial paths and expectations regarding women's career trajectories in high-tech companies.

The interviews reveal a dual perception of women's entrepreneurship in Zasavje. On the one hand, limited local employment opportunities and a lack of well-paid jobs indirectly push women toward self-employment if they wish to remain in the region. On the other hand, entrepreneurship is perceived as a space of autonomy, creativity, and professional fulfilment. While support programmes

such as PONI and initiatives linked to the company Dewesoft have encouraged greater female participation, challenges remain in terms of self-confidence, visibility, and balancing family responsibilities. Interviewees note a growing number of women entering entrepreneurship—particularly in service-oriented sectors such as tourism—yet emphasise the need for persistence, networking, and stronger systemic support.

High expectations are associated with the development of high-tech industries in Zasavje, particularly in Trbovlje, and their potential to increase women's participation in STEM fields. Interviewees observe a gradual rise in girls enrolling in technical education programmes and continuing into related higher education pathways, often remaining in the region. Companies such as Dewesoft are seen as key drivers of technological transformation and regional regeneration, symbolising a desired shift toward more knowledge-intensive industries.

However, alongside optimism, interviewees also express concern about the lack of long-term strategic planning, insufficient coordination, and the structural gap between the region's industrial past and the demands of high-tech sectors. While technological development is viewed as an opportunity for greater gender inclusion, persistent labour market limitations and narrow sectoral structures continue to constrain broader diversification and the full integration of women across professional fields.

3.4 Needed measures, policies, and usefulness of WIN pilot actions

About future measures at the local and regional levels, there are expressed needs and aspirations to strengthen, in particular, the following areas:

- Raising awareness of (in)equality of women in a historical context
- Workplace shadowing projects and the role of school counselling services
- Bringing technical content and professions closer to schools
- The role of role models in promoting the inclusion of women in STEM
- Creating a supportive environment for female entrepreneurship

Participants of the WIN innovation group discussed all of the above-mentioned aspects, thereby contributing to a more in-depth understanding of these issues, as well as to reflections on possible measures and the feasibility of specific initiatives. The experience of participants in the WIN innovation group workshops and the implementation of the *Šiht Happens* social innovation represent an important step towards changing perceptions and offer potential for the further development and upgrading of similar initiatives.

4. Conclusion

One of the key findings of the analysis is that individual initiatives at the local and regional level are often insufficiently coordinated and systematically linked. The interviewees, therefore, highlight the need for a more structured coordination policy that would involve various institutions and stakeholders and enable synergies between existing programmes. The experience of participating in the WIN innovation group, which operated with a clearly defined goal of developing social innovation, is an example of focused and goal-oriented cooperation. Such a model could serve as a starting point for more systematic and coordinated approaches to addressing development challenges in the local environment in the future.

Regional Field Survey Report – Austria

1. Aim of the survey and project context

The Austrian regional field survey aimed to collect in-depth qualitative insights into the design, implementation, perceived relevance, and future potential of the Austrian WIN pilot actions. The survey focused on understanding how different stakeholder groups, including company representatives, institutional actors, and civil society representatives, perceived the pilot actions and their contribution to improving women's labour market participation in industrial regions.

The Austrian pilot actions were implemented in the Steirische Eisenstrasse/District of Leoben and were explicitly designed to address cultural barriers affecting women's labour market opportunities, and to raise awareness about female perspectives on the labour market. Unlike conventional labour market interventions that focus primarily on skills development or employment services, the Austrian pilots targeted social norms, gender stereotypes, and networking opportunities for women. This strategic focus was based on the recognition that women's labour market position is strongly shaped by workplace cultures and societal expectations, particularly in male-dominated industrial regions.

The Austrian pilot actions consisted of small-scale, community-based marketing and awareness-raising campaigns (school bus campaign, female city walk, pub quiz, exhibition, role model campaign), as well as support for female networking in the region ('Iron Women'). All pilots were co-developed by the region's WIN Innovation Group (WIG) of stakeholders. These formats aimed to create accessible, low-threshold spaces for awareness-raising and dialogue, reaching both women and the wider public. The field survey sought to assess whether this innovative approach was perceived as meaningful and effective by those involved and reached. Not all the actions were finalised at the time of the interviews; therefore, interviewees referenced especially those actions already finalised.

2. Applied field survey method

The field survey was conducted in November 2025, using qualitative, semi-structured interviews, in line with the WIN Field Survey Framework provided by the University of Graz (PP3). A total of seven interviews were carried out, meeting the minimum requirement for stakeholder involvement and ensuring a balanced representation of perspectives. The interviewees were all female and held professional backgrounds relevant to the WIN project.

The interview sample consisted of:

- Five stakeholders closely involved in the WIN project and members of the WIN Innovation Group (WIG):

- A municipal representative,
- two company representatives,
- a representative of a workers' organisation
- a university representative

- Two participants outside the WIG context:
  - A labour market specialist,
  - a job centre representative.

For WIG members, interviews focused on structured reflection of WIN results and future perspectives. For non-WIG participants, interviews emphasised awareness of the project, personal experiences, perceptions of women's labour market roles, and views on future needs and measures. All interviews were conducted in person, in a conversational format, allowing respondents to articulate personal observations while addressing the guiding questions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in an anonymous form.

3. Results

3.1 Reflection on WIN results

Process of selecting the pilot action

Stakeholders involved in the WIN Innovation Group consistently described the pilot selection process as goal-oriented, inclusive, and strategically well-founded. Interviewees emphasised that the process enabled genuine co-creation, openness, and engagement with the relevant target groups.

Stakeholders highlighted that stereotypes related to gender roles, leadership, and caregiving often function as invisible constraints, particularly in industrial regions. The pilot selection process explicitly acknowledged these constraints and aimed to raise awareness via different communication channels (print, events, poster campaign, etc.), also enabling better networking opportunities.

Participation in the selection process was described as motivating and professionally meaningful, allowing room to network and exchange opinions. Stakeholders felt that their contributions influenced the final pilot design, reinforcing a sense of ownership over the results. Participants highlighted the good atmosphere during the idea-creation phase and the success of implementing meaningful projects in a short timeframe. The meeting of like-minded persons from across the region was seen as especially inspiring. Retrospectively, a broadening of the stakeholder group (e.g., to apprentices) was seen as a possible improvement.

Interview statement (IP4):

„Ich glaube, aus dem ganzen Gesamtprojekt sind gute Initiativen auch wirklich umgesetzt worden, in einer relativ angenehmen kurzen Zeit." ("I believe that good initiatives from the entire project have actually been implemented in a relatively short time. ")

Implementation of the pilot action

Across interviews, the implementation of the Austrian pilot actions was evaluated very positively. Stakeholders emphasised that the role-model campaign and the public bus campaign proved to be good, low-threshold communication tools, capable of reaching audiences who rarely participate in formal employment-related programmes. Additionally, the poster exhibition at the Montan University was highlighted for receiving very good feedback within the University.

Interview statement (IP5):

„Die Implementierung der Piloten und Role Models habe ich als extrem gelungen empfunden.“ ***(“I found the implementation of the pilots and role models to be extremely successful.”)***

The two external participants mainly confirmed these observations. The pilot action was visible and considered meaningful. Nevertheless, activities were not always recognized as a comprehensive, joint action in the WIN context. Here, better and more focused project communication might have been more beneficial, especially for people less aware of the wider project context.

Challenges identified during implementation related mainly to coordination and institutional anchoring. Stakeholders suggested that stronger links between awareness-raising actions and existing labour market or municipal initiatives could enhance sustainability. While seen as meaningful, a long-term perspective, beyond the simple project context, was seen as necessary to create better sustainability of the actions.

Interview statement (IP1):

„Einmalige Aktionen haben geringe Wirkung; Kontinuität und politische Unterstützung sind zentral.“ (*“One-off actions have little effect; continuity and political support are crucial.”*)

Overall satisfaction and willingness to participate again

All interviewees expressed high overall satisfaction with the Austrian WIN pilot. WIG members indicated that they would participate again in similar settings and viewed the project as a good example of meaningful stakeholder involvement. They appreciated that the project allowed for experimentation and reflection beyond rigid output-driven frameworks.

3.2 Perceptions of women’s role in the region (past and present)

The interviews provided consistent insights into how women’s roles in the regional labour market have evolved. Stakeholders and participants agreed that, historically, women in the region were often expected to prioritise family responsibilities and supportive roles. In industrial towns, male

employment was traditionally perceived as the economic backbone, while women's work was considered secondary, and often confined to social and family work.

Regarding the present situation, interviewees observed a gradual but imbalanced change. Women are increasingly visible in the labour market and present in a wider range of sectors. However, persistent barriers remain, particularly in terms of career progression, leadership opportunities, networking, and access to flexible working arrangements. Childbearing remains a major factor for labour market drop-out: Interviewees highlighted a lack of kindergarten places, inflexible work arrangements, and a wide wage gap between industrial and service sector jobs, making re-entry into the labour market for women after pregnancy often unattractive. Additionally, traditional gender stereotypes are widespread across all sectors. Nevertheless, stakeholders emphasised that women's participation already contributes significantly to regional development, addressing labour shortages and diversifying the workforce, breaking existing gender stereotypes.

Interview statement (IP3):

„Wir hatten erst kürzlich eine Frau, die ihren Job aufgeben musste, weil sie keinen Betreuungsplatz gefunden hat." ("*We recently had a woman who had to give up her job because she couldn't find childcare*.")

3.3 Future perspectives of women in the local labour market

Across all interviews, future perspectives were characterised by cautious optimism. Stakeholders believed that continued awareness-raising and cultural change could gradually improve women's labour market position. The involvement of younger generations was seen as a potential driver of change, as attitudes towards gender roles appear more flexible, especially in some companies, bringing more awareness to the topic. Nevertheless, despite high labour market demand, women's role often seem instable, as the fall-back into traditional gender roles during COVID has confirmed. While demand and interest in industrial jobs are high, also among females, inflexible company organisation, gender stereotypes, and weak social infrastructures remain constant challenges. This is one of the biggest regional development challenges of the region, as inclusive labour markets support economic resilience, innovation, and social cohesion.

Interview statement (IP6):

„Es gibt Kolleginnen von mir, die auch jetzt noch Rückmeldungen von Projektpartnern bekommen, dass Technik nichts für Frauen ist." ("*Some of my female colleagues still receive feedback from project partners that technology is not for women.* ")

Interview statement (IP1):

„Wenn ich das Potenzial der Frauen nicht nutze, besteht die Gefahr, dass der Bezirk langfristig ausstirbt." ("*If I don't utilize the potential of women, there is a risk that the district will die out in the long term.")*

3.4 Needed measures, policies, and usefulness of WIN pilot actions

Interviewees that integrated and multi-level measures are required to improve women's labour market participation. These include flexible working arrangements, employer sensitisation, supportive family policies, and continued awareness-raising. All interviewees agreed that while awareness-raising alone cannot resolve structural inequalities, the WIN pilot actions created essential foundations for broader policy and organisational change by influencing attitudes, conversations, and everyday practices. Continuity and sustainability of the pilots were seen as crucial to make a long-lasting impact in the region and to create more sensitivity among decision-makers about the topic. The establishment of a sub-section of 'work and industry' within the 'Iron Women' network, as one of the WIN actions, is one such step towards more sustainability.

Interview statement (IP6):

Ich finde, dass durch das Projekt schon etwas passiert ist und die Frage ist eher, wie man die Menschen dazu bringt, dass sie das annehmen und mitzutun, bevor man etwas Neues startet. *(„I think that something has already happened through the project, and the question is rather how to get people to accept it and participate before starting something new."*)

4. Conclusion

The regional field survey demonstrates that the Austria WIN pilot action effectively addressed attitudinal and cultural dimensions of women's labour market participation that are often overlooked in traditional employment and daily policies. By combining participatory governance, co-created inputs, and multi-format communication tools, the pilot reached both institutional stakeholders and broader audiences.

Importantly, the perspectives of the two interviewees outside the WIG confirm that the pilot actions resonated beyond the WIN Innovation Group and successfully engaged target groups central to long-term change. Overall, the Austrian pilot provides a strong and transferable example of how soft, attitude-shaping interventions can meaningfully contribute to sustainable regional labour market development.

Field Survey Report – Czech Republic

1. Aim of the survey and project context

This report presents the findings of a field survey conducted within the WIN project – *Improving the position of Women in labour markets of peripheral Industrial regions* – in the pilot region of the Karlovy Vary Region, Czech Republic. The survey builds on the experiences of members of the regional working group (WIN Innovation Group), which was established to support the participatory design, testing, and evaluation of social innovations developed within the project.

The regional working group brought together representatives from key areas related to women's position in the labour market and regional development. Through their collaboration, the group identified the main challenges of the local labour market and contributed to the formulation of potential responses tailored to the specific needs of the region. As a result of this process, five social innovations were proposed.

Two of the proposed social innovations focused directly on women, particularly on supporting entrepreneurship and the development of entrepreneurial skills. The remaining three initiatives targeted young people, namely primary and secondary school students, intending to support informed career choices and reduce gender stereotypes in education and career pathways. Within the framework of the project, two social innovations were pilot tested, while the remaining proposals remained at the conceptual stage, with potential for future implementation.

The field survey aimed to collect qualitative feedback on the process of designing and implementing the regional pilot activities of the WIN project. In particular, it sought to capture the experiences of working group members with their involvement in the project and to assess the perceived benefits and limitations of the tested social innovations. The survey also included a reflection on future perspectives for women in the local labour market and their potential implications for the further development of the region.

2. Methodology

A qualitative field survey was conducted to obtain feedback on the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of the WIN project's pilot activities at the regional level. The

survey also aimed to explore perceptions of future perspectives for women in the local labour market. The research focused on members of the regional working group (WIN Innovation Group) who were actively involved in the design and implementation of social innovations within the project.

Data collection method

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed among members of the regional working group. The questionnaire was developed in line with the methodological framework of the WIN project and structured into two main thematic sections. The first section focused on reflections regarding the process and outcomes of the pilot activities, while the second addressed future perspectives for women in the local labour market.

To deepen and contextualise the questionnaire findings, the survey was complemented by a roundtable discussion involving members of the working group. The discussion followed the key thematic areas covered in the questionnaire and enabled joint reflection on experiences related to the implementation of the pilot activities, as well as clarification of selected topics. This mixed approach contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the regional context in which the activities were implemented.

Research sample

Seven out of nine members of the regional working group participated in the survey. All respondents were involved in the preparation of the pilot activities, and some also took part directly in their implementation.

The working group consisted of representatives from key sectors relevant to women's position in the labour market, including regional development and business support, public administration and labour market institutions, primary and secondary education, the non-profit sector, and innovation infrastructure. Most participants were either based in the region or had strong professional or personal ties to it. This composition corresponds to the methodological requirements of the project, which emphasise the involvement of informed and relevant actors in the field survey.

Given the qualitative nature of the research, the size and structure of the sample are considered adequate for capturing regional feedback. The aim of the survey was not statistical representativeness, but rather a reflection of the experiences and perspectives of actors directly engaged in the project activities.

In addition to the members of the working group, selected external stakeholders were also approached. However, responses were obtained from only two individuals, which did not allow for a separate analytical interpretation. These responses are therefore not analysed independently and are only mentioned as an indication of the limited involvement of external stakeholders in the survey.

3. Survey results

3.1 Reflection on the results of the WIN project

This section presents the reflections of members of the WIN Innovation Group on the selection, implementation, and overall course of the WIN project's pilot activities. The analysis is based on qualitative data obtained through an online questionnaire and subsequently elaborated during a roundtable discussion with the members of the working group.

The process of selecting pilot activities

The process of selecting pilot activities was evaluated positively by the participants. The proposed topics were perceived as relevant and closely aligned with the actual needs of women in the region. Respondents highlighted the transparency of the selection process, the clear formulation of objectives, and the opportunity for open discussion within the working group.

At the same time, some participants pointed out that the selection was challenging, as several proposed topics were considered important but could not be implemented simultaneously due to capacity and project constraints. The inclusion of interactive elements and feedback from target groups was assessed as a valuable component of the decision-making process, as it helped to prioritise pilot activities with the greatest perceived relevance and potential impact.

Overall, the selection process was viewed as participatory and well-structured, contributing to a shared sense of ownership over the chosen pilot actions.

Implementation of pilot activities

The implementation of the pilot activities was assessed very positively. Participants emphasised that the activities were carried out in accordance with the defined objectives and

were oriented towards the creation of social innovations with tangible outcomes. The implementation process was described as being grounded in data, previous experience, and feedback gathered during earlier phases of cooperation within the working group.

Several respondents characterised the implementation as highly successful, noting that in some cases the pilot activities exceeded their initial expectations. Particular appreciation was expressed for the scope and reach of the pilot outputs, as well as for their practical relevance to the target groups. The overall perception was that the pilot activities were well-designed and effectively translated into practice.

Experience with participation in the working group

Participation in the regional working group was perceived as highly beneficial. Members described their involvement as inspiring and professionally enriching, emphasising the relevance of the topic addressed and the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to its development at the regional level.

The working atmosphere was repeatedly characterised as open, creative, and supportive. Respondents valued the opportunity to exchange experiences with representatives from different sectors and highlighted the benefits of interdisciplinary cooperation. Participation in the working group was also seen as useful for respondents' own professional practice.

Overall satisfaction with the course of cooperation was high, and several participants expressed their willingness to engage in similar collaborative initiatives in the future. The experience of working within the group was thus perceived not only as instrumental for the implementation of the WIN project, but also as a positive example of participatory and cross-sectoral collaboration.

3.2 Future perspectives

This section focuses on perceptions of future perspectives for women in the local labour market as expressed by members of the regional working group. It also reflects on the potential implications of these perspectives for the further development of the region. The analysis draws on responses collected through the online questionnaire and their subsequent discussion during a roundtable meeting.

Future perspectives for women in the local labour market and impacts on the region

The future perspectives for women in the local labour market are perceived as generally positive, although respondents emphasise that progress is expected to be gradual rather than rapid. According to the participants, the position of women in the regional labour market has been slowly improving, particularly as a result of increasing female participation in business activities and the growing availability of targeted support initiatives.

Education is identified as a key factor influencing future developments. This applies both to girls and young women making initial career choices and to adult women considering career changes or requalification. Respondents highlight the importance of educational guidance and skills development in enabling women to respond more effectively to labour market demands.

Considerable emphasis is placed on the role of platforms and community-based forms of support. Such initiatives are perceived as important tools for connecting women, strengthening their self-confidence, and creating new professional opportunities within the region. Respondents view these activities as contributing to the gradual reduction of gender stereotypes and structural barriers in the labour market, while also facilitating stronger links between women and the local work environment.

At the same time, respondents caution that rapid or fundamental changes should not be expected, mainly due to the persistence of social stereotypes and deeply rooted cultural patterns. Nevertheless, the attitudes of the younger generation are viewed as more open and progressive with regard to gender equality in the labour market, which is seen as a positive signal for long-term change.

In addition to individual benefits, respondents also point to broader regional impacts associated with the increased participation of women in the labour market. These include contributions to a stronger local economy, more effective use of available talent, and the creation of a more balanced and inclusive working environment.

Measures and policies needed to improve the situation of women in the local labour market, and the contribution of the WIN project's pilot activities

Respondents agree that improving the position of women in the local labour market requires a long-term and systematic approach. Rather than relying on isolated projects, such an approach should focus on the development of sustainable measures and the continuity of activities initiated through the WIN project.

Among the most frequently mentioned measures are the promotion of flexible forms of employment, particularly part-time work, and improvements in the availability of childcare services. This includes the expansion of nurseries and children's groups, as well as the extension of their operating hours. Respondents also stress the importance of education and retraining opportunities for women, especially in areas characterised by labour shortages, such as technical fields, digitalisation, and the development of managerial and leadership skills.

Further attention is drawn to the need to support women's return to the labour market after parental leave and to encourage employers to create inclusive and supportive working environments. In this context, some respondents also mention the relevance of legislative frameworks and the active engagement of women themselves as important preconditions for long-term change.

The pilot measures implemented within the WIN project are perceived as beneficial in this regard. Participants indicate that the pilot activities helped to open up the topic of women's position in the labour market at the regional level, to identify specific barriers, and to propose practical solutions. The establishment of a functional platform and the regular articulation of gender equality issues within the region are evaluated positively, particularly in terms of their potential to stimulate further discussion at the regional policy level.

The outcomes of the pilot measures are also seen as relevant beyond the group of direct participants, serving as an example for other women in the region and demonstrating the potential of targeted, participatory approaches to addressing labour market inequalities.

4. Conclusion

The field survey conducted within the WIN project in the pilot region of the Karlovy Vary Region provided a comprehensive overview of the experiences of members of the regional working group related to the design, implementation, and evaluation of the project's pilot activities. At the same time, it captured their perceptions of future perspectives for women in the local labour market and the potential implications for regional development.

The findings indicate that the process of selecting pilot activities was perceived positively, particularly in terms of the relevance of the selected topics and the opportunity for active involvement in their design. Participation in the regional working group was assessed as inspiring and professionally beneficial, with respondents emphasising cooperation, the exchange of experiences, and a constructive working atmosphere. The implementation of the pilot activities was considered successful and aligned with the defined objectives, while the

pilot actions themselves were perceived as meaningful and capable of generating tangible outcomes.

With regard to future perspectives, respondents point to a gradual improvement in the position of women in the local labour market, especially in connection with the increasing involvement of women in entrepreneurial activities and the development of support initiatives. At the same time, they stress the need for a long-term and systematic approach to ensure the continuity and further development of the activities initiated through the WIN project. Key areas identified include support for flexible forms of work, improved accessibility of childcare services, opportunities for education and retraining, and the creation of inclusive working environments.

The pilot measures implemented within the WIN project are perceived as an important step towards opening up the topic of women's position in the labour market at the regional level, identifying specific barriers, and proposing practical solutions. Respondents particularly appreciate the establishment of a functional platform for cooperation and the sharing of experiences, and they highlight the potential transferability of this approach to other regions.

Overall, the results of the field survey confirm the value of a participatory approach and pilot activities as effective tools for supporting the position of women in the labour market and contributing to broader regional development.

Regional Field Survey Report – Hungary

1. Aim of the survey and project context

The Hungarian regional field survey aimed to collect in-depth qualitative insights into the design, implementation, perceived relevance, and future potential of the Hungarian WIN pilot action. The survey focused on understanding how different stakeholder groups, including project implementers, institutional actors, civil society representatives, and event participants, perceived the pilot actions and their contribution to improving women's labour market participation in industrial regions.

The Hungarian pilot action was implemented in the Dorog–Oroszlány–Tatabánya region and was explicitly designed to address **attitudinal and cultural barriers** affecting women's labour market opportunities. Unlike conventional labour market interventions that focus primarily on skills development or employment services, the Hungarian pilot targeted **social norms, gender stereotypes, and men's perceptions of women's professional roles**. This strategic focus was based on the recognition that women's labour market position is strongly shaped by workplace cultures and societal expectations, particularly in male-dominated industrial regions.

The central pilot action consisted of a **podcast series**, developed with the involvement of sociologists and psychologists, complemented by **live awareness-raising events and audience meetings**. These formats aimed to create accessible, low-threshold spaces for reflection and dialogue, reaching both women and men and fostering mutual understanding. The field survey sought to assess whether this innovative approach was perceived as meaningful and effective by those involved and reached.

2. Applied field survey method

The field survey was conducted in **December 2025** using qualitative, semi-structured interviews, in line with the WIN Field Survey Framework. A total of **five interviews** were carried out, meeting the minimum requirement for stakeholder involvement and ensuring a balanced representation of perspectives.

The interview sample consisted of:

- **Three stakeholders closely involved in the WIN project and members of the WIN Innovation Group (WIG)**:
    - the host of the WIN podcast,
    - a woman's association leader,
    - a municipal representative.

- **Two participants outside the WIG context**:
    - one anonymous female participant,
    - one anonymous male participant, both of whom attended an awareness-raising event in Tatabánya linked to the podcast.

For WIG members, interviews focused on structured reflection of WIN results and future perspectives. For non-WIG participants, interviews emphasised awareness of the project, personal experiences, perceptions of women's labour market roles, and views on future needs and measures. All interviews were conducted in a conversational format, allowing respondents to articulate personal observations while addressing the guiding questions.

3. Results (structured by guiding questions)

3.1 Reflection on WIN results

Process of selecting the pilot action

Stakeholders involved in the WIN Innovation Group consistently described the pilot selection process as **goal-oriented, inclusive, and strategically well-founded**. Interviewees emphasised that the process allowed for genuine co-creation, bringing together civil society actors, municipal representatives, communication experts, and social scientists. This interdisciplinary approach was considered essential for identifying less visible, culturally embedded barriers affecting women's labour market participation.

A key shared assessment was that the decision to prioritise **attitude shaping** represented a conscious shift away from purely instrumental labour market interventions. Stakeholders highlighted that stereotypes related to gender roles, leadership, and caregiving often function as invisible constraints, particularly in industrial regions. The pilot selection process explicitly acknowledged these constraints and aimed to address root causes rather than symptoms.

Participation in the selection process was described as motivating and professionally meaningful. Stakeholders felt that their contributions influenced the final pilot design, reinforcing a sense of ownership. At the same time, interviewees noted that the diversity of ideas required careful prioritisation. Suggested improvements included longer preparatory phases and clearer decision-making criteria to balance inclusiveness with efficiency.

Implementation of the pilot action

Across interviews, the implementation of the Hungarian pilot actions was evaluated very positively. Stakeholders emphasised that the **podcast format** proved to be a flexible and accessible communication tool, capable of reaching audiences who rarely participate in formal employment-related programmes. The integration of expert perspectives with personal narratives enabled sensitive topics—such as unconscious bias, gender expectations, and workplace dynamics—to be discussed in a balanced and non-confrontational way.

The **live audience meetings** emerged as a particularly impactful element of implementation. Stakeholders observed that these events transformed passive listening into active dialogue, allowing participants to ask questions, share experiences, and reflect collectively. This interactive dimension was seen as critical for deepening engagement and fostering mutual understanding.

External participants strongly confirmed these observations. The anonymous female participant highlighted that the event created a supportive and emotionally safe space, where women could recognise shared challenges and feel less isolated. The anonymous male participant emphasised that the non-accusatory tone of the discussions made it possible for men to engage openly without feeling blamed, which he considered essential for meaningful attitude change.

Challenges identified during implementation related mainly to coordination and institutional anchoring. Stakeholders suggested that stronger links between awareness-raising actions and existing labour market or municipal initiatives could enhance sustainability.

Overall satisfaction and willingness to participate again

All interviewees expressed **high overall satisfaction** with the Hungarian WIN pilot. WIG members indicated that they would participate again in similar settings and viewed the project as a rare example of meaningful stakeholder involvement. They appreciated that the project allowed for experimentation and reflection beyond rigid output-driven frameworks.

Both anonymous participants also indicated willingness to attend similar events in the future. The female participant valued the sense of community and empowerment, while the male participant appreciated the opportunity for self-reflection and dialogue. Their responses suggest that the pilot successfully engaged audiences beyond the project's institutional core.

3.2 Perceptions of women's role in the region (past and present)

The interviews provided consistent insights into how women's roles in the regional labour market have evolved. Stakeholders and participants agreed that, historically, women in the region were often expected to prioritise family responsibilities and supportive roles. In industrial towns, male employment was traditionally perceived as the economic backbone, while women's work was considered secondary.

Both anonymous participants confirmed that these expectations were deeply ingrained and often internalised. The female participant noted that limited career opportunities were frequently accepted as "normal," while the male participant acknowledged that even well-intentioned men often unconsciously reproduce traditional assumptions.

Regarding the present situation, interviewees observed a gradual but uneven change. Women are increasingly visible in the labour market and present in a wider range of sectors. However, persistent barriers remain, particularly in terms of career progression, leadership opportunities, and access to flexible working arrangements. Stakeholders emphasised that women's participation already contributes significantly to regional development, addressing labour shortages and diversifying the workforce.

3.3 Future perspectives of women in the local labour market

Across all interviews, future perspectives were characterised by **cautious optimism**. Stakeholders believed that continued awareness-raising and cultural change could gradually improve women's labour market position. The involvement of younger generations was seen as a potential driver of change, as attitudes towards gender roles appear more flexible.

The male participant explicitly highlighted that sustainable progress depends on men's willingness to reflect on their own assumptions. He argued that engaging men as allies rather than opponents is essential for regional development. Stakeholders echoed this view, noting that inclusive labour markets support economic resilience, innovation, and social cohesion.

3.4 Needed measures, policies, and usefulness of WIN pilot actions

Interviewees across all groups agreed that **integrated and multi-level measures** are required to improve women's labour market participation. These include flexible working arrangements, employer sensitisation, supportive family policies, and continued awareness-raising.

The two anonymous participants provided particularly valuable insights into the perceived usefulness of WIN pilot actions. The female participant viewed the podcast and event as empowering first steps that helped her articulate her own experiences and expectations. The male participant emphasised that the pilot created rare opportunities for men to engage with gender equality topics in an open and non-threatening way.

All interviewees agreed that while awareness-raising alone cannot resolve structural inequalities, the WIN pilot actions created essential foundations for broader policy and organisational change by influencing attitudes, conversations, and everyday practices.

4. Short conclusion

The regional field survey demonstrates that the Hungarian WIN pilot action effectively addressed attitudinal and cultural dimensions of women's labour market participation that are often overlooked in traditional employment policies. By combining participatory governance, interdisciplinary input, and innovative communication formats, the pilot reached both institutional stakeholders and broader audiences.

Importantly, the inclusion of anonymous female and male participant perspectives confirms that the pilot actions resonated beyond the WIN Innovation Group and successfully engaged target groups central to long-term change. The findings underline the added value of dialogue-based, inclusive approaches that actively involve both women and men. Overall, the Hungarian pilot provides a strong and transferable example of how soft, attitude-shaping interventions can meaningfully contribute to sustainable regional labour market development.

Interreg Danube Region

Co-funded by the European Union

WIN

Field Survey Report - Bosnia and Herzegovina

PP7 MGK10 / PP8 – ZZUP HBZ

1. Aim of the Survey and Project Context

1.1. Aim of the Field Survey

The field survey was conducted as part of the WIN project in order to assess the relevance, implementation quality, and perceived effects of the local pilot actions, with a particular focus on the position of women in the local labour market. The primary aim of the survey was to collect qualitative insights from key stakeholders regarding their experiences with the WIN process, the outcomes of the implemented pilot activities, and future perspectives for improving the participation of women in the labour market.

The field survey aimed to link stakeholder experiences directly to the WIN pilot actions implemented in the region. It focused on collecting the participants' reflections on what worked well, what challenges emerged during implementation, and which lessons can inform future interventions and policy development.

1.2. Short introduction to the WIN Project and Local Pilot Actions

The WIN project aims to improve the integration of women into the labour market by developing and testing innovative, locally adapted solutions across the Danube Region. The project places strong emphasis on participatory approaches, cross-sectoral cooperation, and the active involvement of stakeholders in identifying challenges and co-creating responses tailored to local contexts.

Within the project framework, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, local pilot actions were designed and implemented to address key barriers faced by women in accessing employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. In the pilot region of the Herceg-Bosnian County, the pilot actions included a business literacy training programme for women and the development of institutional support measures aimed at encouraging women's entrepreneurial activity and labour market participation. At present, the business literacy training programme for women has been completed.

The primary target groups of the local pilot actions were unemployed women and women seeking to enter self-employment or entrepreneurship.
The WIN Innovation Group (WIG) played a central role in the design and implementation of the pilot actions. The group brought together representatives of public institutions, employment services, project partners, and other stakeholders to identify key challenges, prioritise intervention areas, and ensure that pilot actions were grounded in real needs identified at the local level.

2. Applied Field Survey Methodology

The field survey used a qualitative, participatory approach, combining a focus group discussion with written contributions provided by selected participants. The focus group discussion took place in December 2025 in a physical setting. The discussion lasted over 90 minutes and was conducted in the local language, facilitated by representatives of the project partnership.
In addition to the live discussion, written responses to selected focus group questions were collected from stakeholders unable to attend the focus group. The discussion was recorded for analytical purposes and later transcribed using different transcription tools.

The focus group brought together a diverse group of stakeholders involved in or affected by the WIN pilot actions. Participants included:

- women participating in the business literacy training,
- representatives of public institutions,
- members of the WIN Innovation Group,
- institutions and individuals responsible for implementing project activities
- project partners

The focus group followed a semi-structured discussion guide covering the WIN project, pilot actions, training experiences, position of women in the local labour market, and future perspectives and policy recommendations.

3. Results of the Field Survey

3.1. Reflection on the WIN Process and Pilot Implementation

Participants generally perceived the WIN process as participatory, inclusive, and responsive to local needs. The role of the WIN Innovation Group was highlighted as particularly important in identifying real-life challenges faced by women and converting these challenges into feasible pilot actions within the project framework.

Strengths of the process included effective communication among stakeholders, openness to dialogue, and a shared understanding of the importance of women's labour market participation for regional development. At the same time, participants noted challenges related to limited timeframes, financial constraints, and the complexity of administrative and legislative environments.

Cooperation between institutions, project partners, and participants was assessed as constructive and solution-oriented. Despite constraints beyond the project's control, the WIN process was seen as successful in initiating dialogue, testing solutions, and setting the groundwork for future actions.

3.2. Experiences with the Business Literacy Training (Pilot Action)

The business literacy training was widely perceived as a valuable and empowering experience, particularly for women who had been unemployed for extended periods or were re-entering the labour market after time abroad or caregiving responsibilities.

Participants highlighted the high level of expertise and engagement of trainers, as well as the open and supportive learning environment. The training contributed to increased self-confidence, improved understanding of business processes, and renewed motivation to consider entrepreneurship or employment opportunities.

Several participants reported that the training influenced their thinking about career paths and business ideas, even though immediate practical application was still in progress at the time of the focus group. Participants of the training programme had already created a WhatsApp group to stay in touch and collectively advocate for their needs, demonstrating early networking and peer support.

3.3. Relevance of the WIN Pilot Activities for Women's Needs

Stakeholders agreed that the WIN pilot activities were well aligned with the real needs of women in the region. Through the WIN Innovation Group, women from different backgrounds actively articulated challenges and proposed ideas addressing employment barriers.

Key barriers identified included administrative complexity, high social contributions, limited access to childcare, and fear of formalisation and inspections. While the WIN project addresses several of these challenges through awareness-raising and capacity-building, some structural issues remain beyond the scope of local pilot actions.

The project was nevertheless recognised for successfully addressing confidence gaps, knowledge deficits, and a lack of institutional visibility for women's needs. Representatives of employers expressed readiness to support women who completed the training, particularly as mentors, introducing the possibility of post-training support.

3.4. Women's Position in the Regional Labour Market

Participants noted that the position of women in the labour market has shown gradual improvement, supported in part by alignment with EU standards and exposure to practices from neighbouring countries. However, persistent structural and cultural barriers continue to affect women's employment opportunities.

Key trends expected to shape women's labour market participation in the coming years include digitalisation, the rise of IT-related jobs, artificial intelligence, and the transition toward green and renewable energy sectors. These developments were seen as creating both opportunities and risks, particularly for regions with limited access to upskilling and reskilling opportunities.

Participants expressed concern that without targeted support, regional disparities could widen, with skilled labour migrating to more developed regions and labour shortages intensifying locally.

3.5. Future Perspectives and Recommendations

Participants identified several priority areas for future action, including expanded mentoring and post-training support; practical, hands-on learning formats and job-shadowing opportunities; improved

networking between women, institutions, and employers; and targeted policies supporting re-skilling, up-skilling, and career transitions.

There was a strong consensus that continuous learning opportunities and flexible support mechanisms are essential for enabling women to adapt to changing labour market demands. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of maintaining and strengthening collaboration among women, institutions, and employers to ensure the sustainability of these efforts.

4. Conclusion

The field survey confirms that the WIN pilot actions are highly relevant and responsive to the needs of women in the local labour market. The participatory approach and the role of the WIN Innovation Group enabled the identification of real challenges and the development of locally appropriate solutions.

Key lessons learned include the importance of practical, confidence-building interventions, sustained mentoring beyond formal training, and institutional cooperation across sectors. While structural barriers remain, the WIN project made a meaningful contribution to improving women's labour market visibility, readiness, and agency.

The findings suggest strong potential for scaling up and further developing similar initiatives, particularly if combined with targeted policy measures supporting continuous education, entrepreneurship, and work–life balance. The demonstrated willingness of employers to act as mentors, the self-organized networking among women participants, and the shared commitment of all stakeholders to continue collaboration provide a strong foundation for sustaining and expanding these efforts.

The WIN pilot actions thus provide a solid foundation for future interventions aimed at strengthening women's labour market integration and supporting inclusive regional development.

Field Survey Report - Serbia, Loznica / Mačva District

1. Aim of the survey and project context

The field survey aimed to gather qualitative insights, reflections, and recommendations from key stakeholders involved in the development and testing of social innovation pilots within the WIN project in the Serbian pilot region (Loznica and the Mačva District). The survey focused on reflecting on the relevance of the selected pilot activities, the implementation process, and perceived results, as well as on identifying future perspectives for women in the local labour market.

The field survey was conducted within the framework of the WIN project, Improving the position of women in the labour markets of peripheral industrial regions, implemented under the Interreg Danube Region Programme. In Serbia, the pilot tested three interconnected social innovations, developed and implemented under the umbrella of the *Women's Ethno Hub* initiative, to address concrete labour market barriers faced by women in peripheral industrial and rural areas.

During the testing phase, three social innovations were implemented between September and December 2025. Although each innovation had a distinct focus, objectives, and target groups, they were intentionally designed and tested as complementary and interconnected solutions responding to shared challenges related to women's employment, entrepreneurship, digitalisation, and sustainability in the Loznica area.

The social innovations were developed by the national WIN Innovation Group, coordinated by PP9 – the Association of Business Women in Serbia (ABW Serbia). The group brought together representatives of key institutions, civil society organisations, and women-led enterprises at the local and national level, ensuring a multi-sectoral and locally grounded approach to social innovation development.

2. Applied field survey method

The field survey in the Serbian pilot region was conducted through an online focus group session held on 29 January 2026, organised within a meeting of the national WIN Innovation Group (WIG), also referred to as the national WIN group for social innovations.

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The focus group included five representatives of the national WIN Innovation Group and PP9 as coordinator. Participants represented employment services, civil society organisations, and women-led enterprises active in entrepreneurship, sustainability, and inclusive employment.

In addition to the focus group discussion, written evaluation inputs were provided by some of the WIN Innovation Group members in order to complement the discussion and ensure that all relevant perspectives were captured and reflected in the field survey results.

Separate interviews were conducted with other members of the national WIN Innovation Group who were not able to attend the focus group session (ASP representatives in the tourism sector, as well as participants in the research/innovation sector).

The focus group was conducted in an open, conversation-based format and structured around the two thematic blocks defined in the field survey framework:

- Reflection on the selection and implementation of WIN pilot activities
- Future perspectives for women in the local labour market

All participants had been actively involved in the co-creation and implementation of the pilot activities, which enabled an informed discussion based on direct experience with the project process and outcomes.

The discussion was guided by two thematic groups of questions. The first addressed the development phase of the WIN pilot activities, including the process of selecting pilot activities, the rationale behind their design, their relevance to local needs and target groups, the extent to which they addressed key labour market challenges faced by women, the role of the WIN Innovation Group in shaping the pilots, participants' experience of being involved in the development process and the perceived added value of the integrated Women's Ethno Hub approach. The second focused on the testing and implementation phase and covered the implementation process of the pilot activities, participants' assessment of how the pilots functioned in practice, achieved results, lessons learned during testing, identified strengths and challenges, the usefulness of the pilot activities for women in the local labour market, future perspectives for women's employment and entrepreneurship, necessary support measures and institutional involvement and the potential for continuation and further development of the pilot activities.

Participants provided responses to all these questions through their overall discussion. Issues related to selection, design, relevance, involvement, and added value, as well as implementation experience, results, lessons learned, strengths and challenges,

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usefulness for women, future perspectives, support needs, and continuation potential, were all addressed through participants' comments and reflections and are synthesised in the following sections of the report.

The focus group session and separate interviews were conducted in late January and early February 2026, taking into account the specific public holiday period and collective leave practices in Serbia during the first half of January.

3. Results of the field survey

3.1 Reflection on WIN pilot results

Participants assessed the process of selecting the pilot activities as inclusive and well-aligned with the needs of women in the local context. They specifically highlighted that the activities were concrete and directly linked to the needs of women in the local community, successfully combining traditional knowledge and practices with modern tools and digital approaches.

The work of the national WIN Innovation Group was highlighted as a key factor in ensuring that the selected social innovations addressed real and locally relevant labour market challenges. It was emphasised that the pilot activities were clearly goal-oriented from the very beginning, with economic empowerment and digital skills development defined as key objectives, and that each activity contributed step by step towards strengthening women's position on the local labour market.

The combination of digital skills development, circular economy practices, and social entrepreneurship was perceived as particularly relevant.

The implementation of the pilot activities was generally evaluated as well-organised and practice-oriented. Participants stated that the organisation of activities was professional and that the overall atmosphere encouraged creativity and open exchange of ideas. Activities were implemented following a "learning by doing" approach, which resulted in higher engagement and interest among participants.

The digital marketing and AI-related training attracted strong interest and participation, particularly among women entrepreneurs and unemployed women. These activities were seen as directly applicable and immediately useful for improving market access and visibility of women-led products and services. Direct work with women and interaction during training sessions represented one of the most valuable aspects of the pilot activities. The comprehensive approach combining digital skills development with tradition and local specificities was assessed as particularly positive, while logistical support during the activities was evaluated as very effective.

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The circular economy training, including the study visit to the Krivac household in Sremski Karlovci, was highlighted as a valuable practical example of how sustainability principles can be applied in rural tourism and small-scale production. Although participation was more limited compared to digital-related activities, stakeholders stressed the importance of introducing and gradually building awareness around circular economy concepts.

The social entrepreneurship training was recognised as a strategically important but still emerging topic. Participants noted lower initial interest, largely due to the complexity of the legal and institutional framework. Nevertheless, the pilot was considered successful in opening the discussion, raising awareness, and creating a foundation for future activities in this field.

When asked what could be improved, participants emphasised the need for stronger promotion and greater visibility of the activities, particularly at the local level and before their implementation, in order to reach a larger number of women from rural areas who were initially hesitant or sceptical. Nevertheless, participants noted that the number of women reached was satisfactory.

Overall, participants expressed high satisfaction with both the process and the results of the pilot actions. They stated that they would definitely participate again in similar initiatives, noting that such projects are crucial for the development of rural areas and for strengthening women's entrepreneurship, economic independence, and self-confidence.

As a key area for further improvement, participants highlighted the need for more one-to-one mentoring sessions after the completion of training activities, in order to ensure that newly acquired knowledge is translated into sustainable business plans and long-term economic results.

3.2 Future perspectives for women in the local labour market

When reflecting on the role of women in the region in the past, participants emphasised that women's work had traditionally been concentrated in unpaid or informal activities, often linked to household and agricultural labour, with limited recognition on the formal labour market. Women were economically invisible and often dependent on other family members, despite being a pillar of the community.

Today, women are increasingly visible as entrepreneurs and active labour market participants; they are more active, self-aware, and present as entrepreneurs and leaders, although they still face challenges related to balancing work and family

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responsibilities. Awareness of women's entrepreneurship has visibly increased in recent years.

Participants assessed the future perspectives for women in the local labour market as promising. They stressed that the experience gained through the WIN project and related workshops has enabled women to become more competitive and to transform their skills into sustainable sources of income. They also highlighted that the future lies in combining digital skills with local specificities. Through digital sales, rural tourism, and social enterprises, women will no longer depend exclusively on employment opportunities in local factories.

From a development perspective, participants emphasised that economic empowerment of women directly contributes to poverty reduction and regional development. Strengthening women-led small businesses was seen as having a positive impact on local tourism and the overall economic image of the region.

From a policy perspective, participants emphasised the need for targeted support measures. These include subsidies for women's entrepreneurship, easier access to financial resources, continuous digital education, improved childcare services in rural areas, and specific incentives for women-led start-ups.

As additional necessary activities, participants proposed organised support for product placement on the market, such as fairs and online sales platforms, long-term one-to-one mentoring programmes connecting experienced women entrepreneurs with beginners, as well as workshops on how to apply for national and EU funding opportunities.

4. Conclusions

The field survey confirmed that the WIN social innovation pilots in the Serbian pilot region were relevant, well-designed, and locally grounded. The involvement of the national WIN Innovation Group ensured a participatory and cross-sectoral approach, contributing to the quality and relevance of the tested solutions.

As a key overall conclusion, participants stressed that WIN project activities demonstrated to women that their knowledge and skills have clear market value, reduced fear of using digital tools, and increased awareness of legal opportunities related to establishing (social) enterprises.

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The evaluation of the overall pilot implementation also highlighted that there is considerable potential and space for the continuation and further development of these activities in the future. Participants agreed that, to ensure sustainability and scaling-up, continued and more systemic support from local self-government and relevant institutions will be necessary.

The conclusions and proposals emerging from this evaluation process, including those discussed during the focus group session and provided through written follow-up inputs, will serve as starting points for the preparation of the national action plan. These findings will inform future strategic directions and concrete measures aimed at improving the position of women in the local labour market.

The insights gathered through the focus group discussion and written evaluation inputs provide valuable input for future activities, local action planning, and the overall synthesis of results at the project level.

Annex – Focus group participants (organisations)

The online focus group session conducted on 29 January 2026 involved representatives of the following organisations, members of the national WIN Innovation Group / national WIN group for social innovations:

- PP9 Association of Business Women in Serbia (ABW Serbia) – coordination of the WIN Innovation Group and pilot implementation
- National Employment Service (NES), Loznica branch office – labour market perspective and outreach to unemployed women (two representatives)
- Association of Business Women of Loznica Kreativna vizija (Creative Vision) – support to women entrepreneurs and local networking, represented by members, women entrepreneurs from Loznica:
    - In Café, Loznica – women-led micro-enterprise
    - Eko Tim Loznica – women-led enterprise
- Novitas Consult, Šabac – women-led company specialised in employment and support services for persons with disabilities, including social entrepreneurship expertise

Separate interviews were held with representatives of the following institutions, WIG members who were not able to attend the focus group session:

- Tourism Organization of Loznica (TOL) – ASP representative and support to pilot implementation

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- Institute "Mihajlo Pupin" Belgrade – Science and Technology Policy Research Center (CIRNT) – research and innovation perspective

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Field survey framework Report -Bulgaria

Aim of the survey and short introduction to the project context

This field survey aimed to reflect on the experience, results, and future potential of the WIN pilot actions in the Radomir region through direct dialogue with key stakeholders who were actively involved in the process. The survey focused on collecting qualitative insights, lived experiences, and practical reflections rather than formal evaluation data.

The WIN pilot actions in Radomir were implemented in close cooperation with a local innovation group and a core circle of engaged women from the region. The pilot aimed to strengthen women's confidence, skills, and visibility, while fostering trust, collaboration, and mutual support. Particular attention was given to the specific social and economic context of the region, where women often combine professional activity with strong family and care responsibilities and where access to diverse labour market opportunities remains limited.

Applied field survey method (when, who, how)

The field survey was conducted as an in-person group discussion in Radomir. The meeting brought together the core members of the local WIN innovation group, five leading women who had been actively engaged in the pilot actions, and two core representatives of the National Management School. All participants were familiar with the project and its development, having worked together for more than one year.

The discussion followed a focus group-style format and was guided by open questions related to reflection on the pilot actions, perceived results, challenges, and future perspectives. The conversational approach encouraged participants to speak freely and to share concrete examples from their personal and professional experience.

The atmosphere of the meeting was very open and friendly; there was a strong sense of familiarity and trust among participants. The in-person meeting created space for reconnecting, exchanging updates, and reflecting together on the process and its outcomes.

Results

Reflection on the WIN process and pilot actions

A central part of the discussion focused on reflecting on the one-year process and how it had evolved. Participants discussed what had worked well, what could be improved, and how the cooperation could continue beyond the formal project framework.

All participants expressed a high level of satisfaction with their involvement in the innovation group and the pilot actions. A particularly strong outcome was the sense of gratitude and appreciation expressed towards the initiative. Participants highlighted that being part of a community of women was one of the most valuable aspects of the process. Through regular interaction, they were able to get to know each other more deeply, build trust, and feel supported both personally and professionally.

Several participants emphasised that the pilot actions created connections that would not have happened otherwise. These connections went beyond networking and, in some cases, developed into concrete professional cooperation. One example shared during the meeting concerned a woman working in ceramics and art therapy who runs a small atelier in the region. Through participation in one of the WIN workshops, she met another woman previously unknown to her. As a result, they started a joint professional initiative together at the beginning of 2026. This example was seen by the group as clear evidence that the pilot actions have led to self-driven initiatives that will continue beyond the project.

Participants also reflected on communication and exchange formats. While the project provided official channels such as the online platform and the Facebook page, women participating in the activities created an additional informal women-only group (using a dedicated Viber channel). This group is actively used for sharing ideas, asking questions, exchanging know-how, and offering mutual support. Participants perceived this as a strong indicator of ownership, trust, and sustainability.

Overall, participants stated that they were very satisfied with both the process and the results of the pilot actions and confirmed that they would gladly participate again in a similar setting.

Future perspectives for women in the local labour market

The discussion also focused on future perspectives for women in the Radomir region. Participants described specific regional challenges that shape women's opportunities. Many women carry significant family and care responsibilities, including caring for children or other family members. Even when women participate in education or training, opportunities for employment and work diversification remain limited.

As a result, many women in the region orient themselves towards creative and craft-based activities such as ceramics, jewellery, handmade notebooks, clothing, or home-produced food. While these activities are often well developed in terms of skills and creativity, visibility and access to markets were identified as major challenges.

In this context, participants highlighted the importance of continuing workshops related to women's digital skills, particularly practical tools such as Canva. These skills help women create attractive visual content and present their work more professionally online. Digital visibility was seen as essential for sustaining creative activities and for expanding women's opportunities in the local labour market.

Participants agreed that these digital workshops should continue in the coming months, making use of the space and tools created through the WIN project, including the Edna ZaDruga platform and the Facebook page. The WIN pilot actions were recognised as having provided the initial structure and impulse that now allows women to continue developing their activities more independently and confidently.

Challenges and policy-related reflections

Alongside positive feedback, participants openly discussed challenges. One of the main difficulties identified was the relationship with local authorities and municipal structures. Several women shared personal experiences of struggling to communicate with the local municipality and to receive institutional support. Deeply rooted traditions and gender stereotypes were described as persistent barriers that make it difficult for women to step outside established roles.

This challenge was also seen as having affected the pilot actions, limiting their broader visibility and momentum. At the same time, the discussion was constructive and solution oriented. Participants shared ideas on how communication with municipal representatives could be improved, including how to frame messages, present results, and demonstrate the value of such initiatives for regional development.

The upcoming meeting with municipal representatives was perceived as an important opportunity to present achieved results, share good practices, and show how supporting women's creativity and entrepreneurship can contribute to the social and economic development of the region.

Conclusion

The field survey showed that the WIN pilot actions in the Radomir region have created a meaningful and lasting impact. Participants expressed warm feelings, strong appreciation, and a clear willingness to remain engaged. They stated that if there is a continuation of the initiative or a new project with a similar focus, they would be eager to participate again and to take on leadership roles.

The project team also confirmed its commitment to continue working with the women in the region after the end of the project through additional training, meetings, and ongoing support. Sustaining the spark that has been created was seen as essential for continuing to expand opportunities for women in Radomir.

Overall, the survey highlighted that the greatest value of the pilot actions lies not only in specific skills or activities, but in the creation of trust, community, and self-driven collaboration, which form a strong foundation for long term change.