



# LOCAL ACTION PLAN SLOVENIA

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D.T3.2.7 Local action plan in Slovenia

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## Executive Summary

The Local action plan for Slovenia - Podravje region builds on activities, deliverables, and outcomes of the CERUSI project to further foster social innovation and social entrepreneurship in the region, especially in its rural areas. The partnerships, that were made during the implementation of the RSI Lab caravans and Local policy forums, lead to joint planning and preparation of projects and activities, that will support social innovation and economy and use its potential for green, circular, and sustainable transition of the region and its smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The knowledge, experience, and tools from the CERUSI project are an important link in the chain in building a better society in the region and beyond.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. About CERUSI

CERUSI (Central European Rural Social Innovation) implements a Rural Social Innovation Lab Caravan to build skills and capacities for social innovation and social entrepreneurship. Rural regions in Central Europe often lack support structures to keep people in the region. Contrary to urban areas, there are fewer accelerator hubs or other options that offer support to people who want to change something for the better in their community. Although the EU has invested a lot in regional development, people in the most rural regions are often still not reached by the projects, because the institution conducting these projects are again situated in the comparatively well-equipped urban areas. Therefore, CERUSI adopts the innovative approach of RSI\_LAB Caravans, bringing the project to the people, harvesting challenges in their communities, their ideas and providing a temporary support framework to jointly elaborate innovative solutions. Through the interactions of local stakeholders and actors CERUSI will contribute to building a local and transnational partnership between local actors interested in bringing their region forward and their like-minded peers all over Central Europe.

Concretely, CERUSI produced the following outputs:

- The RSI\_Toolbox (O.T1.1), that presents practical tools to implement social innovation initiatives in rural areas
- The Upgraded RSI\_Skyrocket Platform (O.T1.2), a virtual knowledge hub on rural social innovation with 5 dedicated modules in all the PPs languages and in English as well a virtual market place to share and exchange social innovation initiatives in Central Europe and beyond
- The RSI\_Hybridisation tool (O.T1.3) detailing possible ways on how to best combine the virtual tools and real-life pilot actions of CERUSI
- The Transnational RSI\_Lab Caravan Cookbook (O.T2.1), a tool that outlines how to implement the RSI\_Caravan stops and the RSI\_Labs
- The RSI\_Lab Caravan pilot initiative (O.T2.2) a pilot action that implements RSI\_Caravan stops in the regions of CERUSI to harvest challenges and ideas and the RSI\_Labs, interactive working sessions bringing together local stakeholders and expert to find innovative solutions for the challenges identified during the Caravan stops

## 1.2. Aim of the Action Plan

The aim of the local action plan is to foster rural social innovation and social entrepreneurship by building on CERUSI tools and methods as well as to sustain the RSI\_partnership at local level. The local action plan will detail concrete steps to be taken, the timeline and the actors involved to support social innovation, social entrepreneurship, circular economy and regional development in the rural areas of Podravje region, Slovenia.

The local actions, presented in this document, aim to:

- Support social enterprises in realizing their potential for the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth of the region;
- Foster a conducive ecosystem for the growth of the social economy in the region;
- Contribute to green, circular and sustainable transition of the region.

## 1. Detailed Actions in Slovenia

### 1.1. Action I: ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS, CAPACITY BUILDING AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

**Background and relevance of the action (what is the challenge that this action tries to tackle)**

The concept of social enterprise is relatively new to Slovenia, it was used for the first time in the context of ESF-funded pilot projects launched in 2009 to support development of social enterprises. In 2011 Slovenia adopted the Social Entrepreneurship Act which provided definition of social entrepreneurship and social enterprises and was novelized in 2018. In this period more than 260 social enterprises were registered, nearly 30 % in Podravje region (fifth largest among 12 Slovenian statistical regions, 65 % of the area is rural). On the other hand, the supportive environment and measures didn't follow this development. There were certain projects and pilots supporting such measures but didn't result in setting up systematic supporting mechanism. Social entrepreneurs therefore often lack skills to shift from project-based funding into income generating activities on the market. There is a large share of SEs with the lack of entrepreneurial, business, and financial skills, as well as without proper market research, viable business model and knowledge of the market.

#### **Description of the Action: Activities to be implemented, objectives to be reached**

The purpose of the Action is to accelerate social innovation, development of business models of social economy entities (social enterprises and cooperatives) and their start-up and stable operations by connecting key actors, local communities, individuals, and socially responsible companies, to contribute to achieving sustainable goals of the region. Specific activities related to skills development, social innovation development and empowerment of social businesses will be implemented in the form of training, mentoring, consulting, and networking for social enterprises.

The objectives to be reach by this Action are to:

- strengthen the skills and competencies of social entrepreneurs for setting up new and developing existing social enterprises,
- increase opportunities for starting new social enterprises,
- promote the growth of existing social enterprises,
- contribute to job creation and connections with the local environment,
- empower citizens to look for opportunities and implement social entrepreneurship in the local environment,
- empower local authorities to establish an effective supportive ecosystem for the social economy,
- raise awareness and activate young people to look for social and entrepreneurial opportunities.

#### **Role of CERUSI Tools and Methods (optional)**

Most of the CERUSI tools and methods are relevant for this action, from Caravans for identifying opportunities in local environment, Labs for developing innovative ideas, Toolbox and Cookbook to support these two processes and RSI Academy to support development of skills and competencies of (future) social entrepreneurs.

## Indicative list of stakeholders to involve

Regional development agencies, local/rural development organisations, local communities, social business support organisations, education/training institutions, local initiatives, NGOs, citizens.

## Timeframe

2022 - 2027

## Indicative budget

Activities of this Action are a part of two project proposals prepared on regional level, with the total budget of more than 4 mio EUR. One proposal was already submitted to the national call for proposals, the other one was submitted to the action plan of the regional development program.

## Possible funding sources

European Regional Development Fund, Slovenian sources for co-financing of cohesion policy

## Result indicators

Number of supported (social) enterprises receiving non-financial support  
Number of socially innovative products  
Number of jobs in SE sector

# 1.2. Action II: BETTER ACCESS TO BUSINESS SUPPORT

## Background and relevance of the action

To support the development of young companies in the region and to promote entrepreneurial activity and entrepreneurial culture, Podravje region has its Network Business Incubator established. It provides young companies with an efficient business environment, which includes physical infrastructure in several locations, professional support, networking services and professional assistance in finding sources of funding from private and public funds. The establishment of a regional incubator upgrades the supportive environment for entrepreneurship at the regional level, in close cooperation with local communities, promotes the creation of new companies, and provides concrete assistance in the operation, growth and development of established companies. The network business incubator is of strategic importance for the entire region, with several micro locations throughout the Podravje region, which acts as a generator of business support for the creation and development of new companies also in regions rural areas. Nevertheless, the incubator doesn't specifically offer space and support for development of social innovation and social businesses. It doesn't consider the special features of social business models in terms of governance, profit allocation, working conditions and societal impact.

## Description of the Action: Activities to be implemented, objectives to be reached

Foundation Prizma will join the existing Podravje Network business incubator with the activities that will support initiatives and business that have a positive impact on the environment and society (social entrepreneurs) - link to Action I. (regular delivery in the incubator premises). In addition to activities, already implemented in local, also rural, environments, the incubator offers a physical place, where people can generate ideas in cooperation, exchange the ideas, learn from peers, network, inspiring each other, etc. And since the incubator is a network of several physical places, it covers not only city area, but also rural locations in the region. To the members, interested in development of SE ideas, workshops, counselling and events will be offered to support social business ideas that will make the region a better place to live and work.

## Role of CERUSI Tools and Methods (optional)

For the incubator activities especially Toolbox, Cookbook and Lab methods will be used.

## Indicative list of stakeholders to involve

Regional development agency Podravje - Maribor, local/rural development organisations, educational and training organisations, local authorities, business support organisations, local SMEs, business experts, banks and funding organisations,

## Timeframe

2022 - on

## Indicative budget

Within budget for Action I.

## Possible funding sources

European Regional Development Fund, Slovenian sources for co-financing of cohesion policy

## Result indicators

Number of incubated (social) enterprises  
Number of supported (social) enterprises receiving non-financial support  
Number of socially innovative products  
Number of jobs in SE sector

# 1.3. Action III: TOWARDS GREEN TRANSITION AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY

## Background and relevance of the action

The COVID-19 crisis caused 6.3 % contraction in the EU economy in 2020 accompanied by major turnover losses and a decline in jobs and investment. The European Commission published an update of the EU's industrial strategy on 5 May 2021 to learn the lessons of the crisis, strengthen our economic resilience and accelerate the twin green and digital transitions while preserving and creating jobs. The EU's immediate opportunity to support businesses and local communities lies in its recovery efforts. The EU Budget 2021-2027 and NextGenerationEU, and notably the Recovery and Resilience Facility, should be used as a springboard to speed up the recovery in Europe and accelerate the green and digital transition in different industrial ecosystems and economic sectors. In doing so, we must not neglect tackling global challenges through the concept of circular economy.

## Description of the Action: Activities to be implemented, objectives to be reached

Within this Action, activities will be implemented with the aim to direct the local economy towards a sustainable and inclusive pathway, create new jobs, mitigate the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and accelerate a new, green, and fairer recovery. With these activities we will support co-creative processes to actively involve relevant stakeholders in development of sustainable solutions, focusing especially to the rural areas. These processes will start with the stakeholders mapping, analysis of most pressing challenges, identification of existing good practices and bottom-up co-creation of sustainable solutions. During the process different methods will be used, among others: design thinking, world-cafe, user persona, focus groups, feedback workshops and usability evaluations.





With this we aim to boost territorial resilience and re-design of economic growth through citizen's empowerment, cities/local authorities' involvement, local businesses, and social economy enterprises participation.

Objectives of the Action are to:

- create open innovation co-creative space for all circular economy and sustainability related actors in the region of Podravje,
- empower end users for bottom-up co-creation of solutions, thus making these solutions work better and be better accepted by citizens and the civil society,
- carry out targeted eco-sensitisation campaigns for different age groups,
- support the green, social and digital transition at local level, especially in rural areas,
- support resilient and sustainable business models based on social economy,
- boost the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy,
- ensure more community resilience and better living conditions for the population.

### Role of CERUSI Tools and Methods (optional)

For this Action especially Cookbook with Caravans and Labs will be used while implementing activities on identification of challenges, existing ideas/initiatives and development of innovative green, circular and community ideas. Also, a platform that will combine experience with the Skyrocket platform and the one for participatory budgeting, developed in another Interreg project, will be prepared, and used to boost participation and co-creative processes aimed at sustainable, green solutions that can be implemented in the future.

### Indicative list of stakeholders to involve

Regional/local development agencies, NGOs, local authorities, local communities, citizens, SMEs, educational & training institutes, R&D organisations, public companies, etc.

### Timeframe

2022 - 2028

### Indicative budget

150.000 EUR

### Possible funding sources

LIFE and COSME programs

### Result indicators

Number of green/social initiatives reflected in regional development strategies

Number of new grassroots actions supported at local level and their impact in employment, social resilience, and environmental sustainability

Number of new circular products

Number of community-based innovations

Number of citizens and civil society actors engaged in the process and learning



## 2. Conclusions and Recommendations

Despite the recent development of the social economy sector in Slovenia and Podravje region, the misconception of its mission is still present, and the full potential is not yet recognised. But there is no doubt, that social enterprises can have a strong entrepreneurial dimension and make a considerable contribution to sustainable growth and jobs, although some tend to remain small and local. However, the support schemes are not strongly present in the Podravje region nor in the rest of Slovenia, rather we see project-based activities that lack sustainability, especially in the financial side. Therefore, the activities aimed at training, reskilling, mentoring, counselling, and networking should be in place to support the creation, operation, and growth of social businesses. Significantly related to this is social innovation that offers new ways of producing / delivering products and new forms of civic participation responding to social challenges. Since social enterprises have close relation with communities, citizens, and their social problems, they have the capacity to find innovative solutions and play important role in social innovation. However, scaling social innovations remains a challenge, therefore support activities should also include the area of social innovation, that is especially well covered with CERUSI tools and methods, so the exploitation of their potential to boost social innovation in region is well incorporated in the Local action plan.

We are also witnessing the growing number of mainstream businesses moving closer to social economy goals, supported with some national programs and recognitions like Horus - reward for social responsibility and certificate for Socially responsible employer. These is also contributing to the new opportunities for cooperation and cross-fertilization as well as access to new markets, therefore networking and cooperation activities are planned and will be used in all three actions of the local plan.

As the EU Action plan for the social economy recognises the important contribution of social economy to the green transition and development of circular economy, the Local action plan for Podravje provides the integration of social economy and social innovation with these two fields through the projects for setting up Local green deal and Life Super sustainable regions and cities, where our efforts will focus on rural areas of the region. It is highly recommended to enable the social economy business models as agents of the green transition and pioneering activities and business models that retain the value of products and materials for as long as possible, reduce waste, provide cost-saving opportunities to citizens, and create local jobs, especially in repair, reuse, sharing and recycling activities. By doing so the CERUSI tools and methods are very useful in community engagement, identification of challenges and potentials, development of innovative ideas and creation of solutions supporting greener and circular practices.