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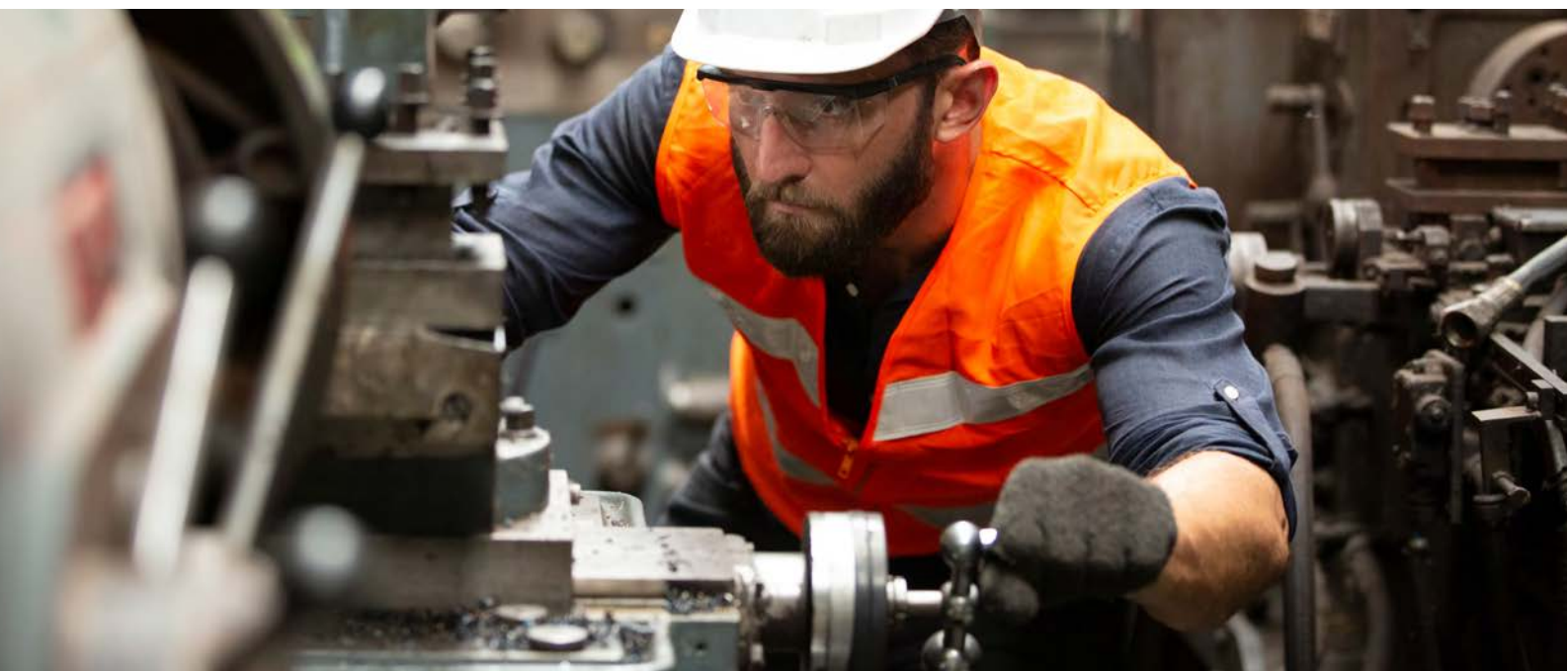
‘BUY SOCIAL’ AND SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

Research Paper



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Introduction

This paper delves into the concept of Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP), as defined by the European Commission. SRPP aims to achieve positive social outcomes in public procurement contracts¹. These outcomes encompass a broad spectrum of impacts, including employment opportunities, workforce reskilling, decent work conditions, social inclusion, gender equality, non-discrimination, accessibility, design-for-all, ethical trade, and a comprehensive approach to ensure broader compliance with social standards.



Fig 1. Target Countries of Research

In May 2023, ConsortiaCo, a business-to-government (B2G) commercial consultancy, undertook a research and benchmarking exercise to review best practice examples of Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP) from 10 countries worldwide. This research entailed mapping, analysing, and distilling SRPP policy successes, challenges, and trajectories within various local and regional contexts. The Amicitia social enterprise, based in Athenry, Co. Galway, supported this research.

The outcomes of this research are detailed in this paper, presenting the distinct approaches to SRPP interpretation and implementation at local, regional, and national levels. The research concluded in October 2023 with a visit to the Social Enterprise World Forum in Amsterdam, where leading officials and stakeholders from the social enterprise and social procurement sectors congregated to showcase the evolution of SRPP practices globally.

Scope

The scope of this project covered two distinct areas of research related to the current utilisation of social procurement and socially-oriented business activities. These areas include:

1. **SRPP - Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP):** This involves procurement practices that prioritise social value generation, with the aim of achieving positive impacts for specific target groups across the value chain of a public procurement contract.
2. **BuySocial:** This approach focuses on prioritising the procurement of goods and services from businesses that have a positive social impact, particularly those supporting marginalised groups or addressing social issues.

Glossary

Throughout the research, multiple terminologies relating to Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP) and Social Procurement were uncovered, revealing a variety of interpretations of socially-focused procurement across the target countries. These variations in terminology are appropriately considered within this document. They define each individual country's approach to social procurement in the context of their existing policy frameworks and settings.

Buy Social: A movement that encourages supplier-side social procurement, bridging mainstream and impact enterprises, and providing a recognised mark of recognition that extends into the private sector.

Blockchain: A decentralised and distributed digital ledger used to record transactions across multiple computers. In the context of the document, it's seen as a potential technology for validating social impact claims in procurement.

Circular Procurement (CP): A procurement approach that emphasises the purchase of goods and services that minimise waste and maximise the reuse and recycling of resources.

Enterprise Ecosystem: A conceptual framework that views relevant stakeholders in a particular domain (e.g., social procurement) as interconnected entities within a singular system, emphasising cross-sectoral intersections of public sector, industry, academia, environment, and society.

Just Transition: Refers to the approach that ensures fairness and protection for workers and communities during shifts to a sustainable, low-carbon economy. It emphasises that the transition to a green economy must be inclusive and beneficial for all.

Green Procurement (GPP): A procurement process that prioritises environmental considerations, ensuring that products and services purchased have a reduced environmental impact throughout their life cycle.

Knowledge Valorisation: The process of creating value from knowledge by making it available and suitable for economic or societal utilisation.

Pillar Champion: An individual responsible for a certain body or thematic area of work.

Social Procurement: A procurement process that prioritises the generation of social value, often by integrating community-based employment, involving social enterprises, or creating direct social value.

Social Clauses: Provisions in procurement contracts that primarily provide training and job opportunities for marginalised groups.

Social Return on Investment (SROI): A metric used to measure the social impact of a project or organisation, considering the value of social outcomes relative to the investment made.

Glossary

Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP): A procurement approach defined by the European Commission that aims to achieve positive social outcomes in public procurement contracts, such as employment opportunities, decent work conditions, gender equality, and more.

Sustainable Procurement: A broader term that encompasses various procurement approaches, including Green Procurement, Circular Procurement, and Social Procurement, aiming to achieve both environmental and social benefits.



Public procurement is a crucial pillar of service delivery for governments and a strategic tool for achieving key policy objectives: from budget accountability, to spending efficiency, to buying green and improving health outcomes, to tackling global challenges such as climate change, and promoting social responsibility in global supply chains.

– OECD

Core Concepts

Although Socially Responsible Public Procurement is defined by the European Commission², it is not commonly used as a standard term across the European Union or in other countries involved in the research. Instead, elements from Green Procurement (GPP), Circular Procurement (CP), Social Procurement, and Procuring Innovation are identified and combined. These elements can be encapsulated under the broader and more widely used term 'Sustainable Procurement.' Sustainable Procurement is recognised as a consistent term in national policies and strategies. It is embedded in legal frameworks, core government policies, and specific initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable development awareness and engagement.

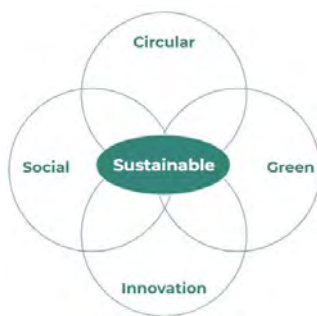


Fig 2. Terminology Linkages

A core concept of social procurement, as demonstrated by Canada's Guide to Social Procurement³, is the introduction of community into the typical Buyer/Supplier relationship. Understanding how community involvement can be integrated into public spending unlocks the potential for creating social impact. Furthermore, the concept of embedding the community into the procurement process itself, either through community-based employment and upskilling, involving social enterprises in the process, or direct social value creation, strengthens the understanding of the community's role in public spending.

In this context, the community represents all members of society but prioritises those who are marginalised or furthest from the labour market. A defined list of target individuals is provided on page 10, derived from the diverse target groups of stakeholders and beneficiaries identified from the analysis of the 10 countries. Supplier Diversity⁴, as exemplified in Canada's social procurement policies, is noted as a key enabler of social value creation. Supplier Diversity is defined as creating opportunities for groups such as Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and other traditionally underrepresented groups.

Across the leading examples and best practices identified worldwide in this study, Social Procurement is utilised as a catalyst for social innovation and reducing socio-economic inequalities. This model can unlock significant funds from public expenditure, enabling local authorities, government officials, and central government policymakers to directly contribute to socio-economic development. A core focus of social procurement is on socio-professional integration and role valorisation, aiming to support individuals from disadvantaged or marginalised backgrounds in becoming active and full members of society.

Considerable linkages have been identified between an individual's purpose in society through meaningful employment and the subsequent health and wellbeing of their communities. Enabling individuals through education, employment, and entrepreneurship is noted as a key priority for the sustainable development of towns, cities, and especially rural areas, which are typically at greater risk of social deprivation. Successful policy frameworks, such as the United Kingdom's 2012 Social Value Act⁵, posit that social impact creation can be achieved by embedding social enterprises into the procurement process, both in the pre-planning and tendering phases. This concept is exemplified by Buy Social movement, which is further explored on page 26.

Core Concepts

Social Enterprises are noted to be primary stakeholders in the creation of social value within the community and both Buy Social and SRPP initiatives unlock new revenue streams for social innovators and value creators to continue their work.

In the UK, the Volunteer, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector has seen direct inclusion in the country's 2012 Social Value Act which explicitly identifies the role of social enterprises and community organisations in public procurement. Together with initiatives to encourage SME participation, significant gains have been made by creating linkages between small to medium enterprises and social enterprises to activate early adoption of social procurement practices.

National initiatives to specifically target social enterprises and encourage their participation in the supply and value chain can be seen across the UK. The notable example of The Preston Model⁶, by Preston City Council, adopts community wealth building approaches to economic development and procurement, with a clear focus on enabling local businesses to be involved in their supply chain so that wealth is retained in the region.

Key Challenges

Across Ireland, the United Kingdom, Europe and worldwide, there is no single definition of "social enterprise", which poses the immediate challenge to social procurement implementation and buying social initiatives. Individual countries which were analysed in the research have each undertaken different positions on what is classified and qualified for the term, ranging from not-for-profit structures, to impact-focused business models with a wide spectrum of variations.

Social Enterprise NL (SENL), a leading player in the international landscape for both SRPP and Buy Social, uses the definition by the European Commission and the Social-Economic Council (SER). This European definition⁷ of 'sociale onderneming' includes the following criteria for enterprises that:

- Are impact first.
- Have a revenue model.
- Are transparent and fair.
- Sees profit as a means, not as a goal.
- Are social in the way the company is structured and led.
- Base their governance and policies on equal influence of stakeholders.
- Makes impact by supplying services and/or goods as an independent company.

The SENL approach recognises social enterprises by their impact, not just their legal form. This not only advances the social enterprise sector but also positions the Netherlands as a global leader in social entrepreneurship and procurement.

This blending of social and mainstream enterprises, seen in SENL, is also observed in other countries covered in the study. This is further developed on page 15, providing a pathway to address the issue of social enterprise's definition by legal structure alone. It has been clearly understood through the research and benchmarking that different countries are at different stages of development in terms of social procurement policy.

Core Concepts

Leading examples are observed from the United Kingdom, Canada, Sweden, and the Netherlands, where social procurement has been successfully positioned at the core of national priorities, enabling the implementation of legal frameworks and policy instruments. Meanwhile, countries like Estonia, Lithuania, and Finland may not have as clearly defined policies, they still lead in areas like educational innovation, embracing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and supporting research and innovation through active societal engagement.

Challenges in policy development related to Green Public Procurement (GPP) were also observed, where GPP becomes the dominant aspect in public procurement, encouraging buyers to prioritise environmental considerations, circular solutions, and carbon-neutral approaches to sustainable procurement. GPP plays a crucial role in defining and achieving key performance indicators, with most countries setting ambitious targets for mandatory GPP inclusion in public contracts. However, many have fallen short of these targets, which has hindered momentum in adopting additional sustainable and social procurement practices.

Northern Ireland's approach to social procurement integrates zero-carbon strategies into its social value scoring model⁸. Adopting a social-first approach to sustainable development offers a fresh perspective on sustainable procurement implementation, potentially enhancing synergies between Green Public Procurement (GPP), Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP), and Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP).

The rapidly evolving landscape of the European Union presents significant challenges for social procurement. As public policies adapt to climate change, digitalisation, and emerging technologies, the introduction of new frameworks and priorities has accelerated. The UN Sustainable Development Goals are recognised as a universal model, with governments using social procurement as a foundational tool to build a more resilient economy.

The Nordic Cooperation⁹ has aligned multiple governments in the region under the vision of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, promoting a range of international policies for sustainable development through Policy Coherence. This approach necessitates an integrated and holistic understanding of policy objectives for intergovernmental working groups to achieve collective action and progress, enabling sustainable change.

Policy coherence regarding social procurement has been identified in the public policy frameworks and legal structures of Canada, the UK, the Netherlands, and Sweden. It is recognised as a key enabler and critical success factor in the implementation of SRPP-related programmes and policies. To fully understand policy coherence at local and national levels, however, it is essential to consider policy trajectory, and how national government priorities and territorial considerations shape interpretations of SRPP.

Policy Trends

To map and interpret the future trajectory of social procurement policy, especially as new legal frameworks emerge across the European Commission, it is vital to consider and visualise the milestones in socially-focused procurement and trade agreements. The following section provides context to the background and current state of SRPP interpretation and guides future applications into the Industry 5.0 Market, which is further explored on page 15.

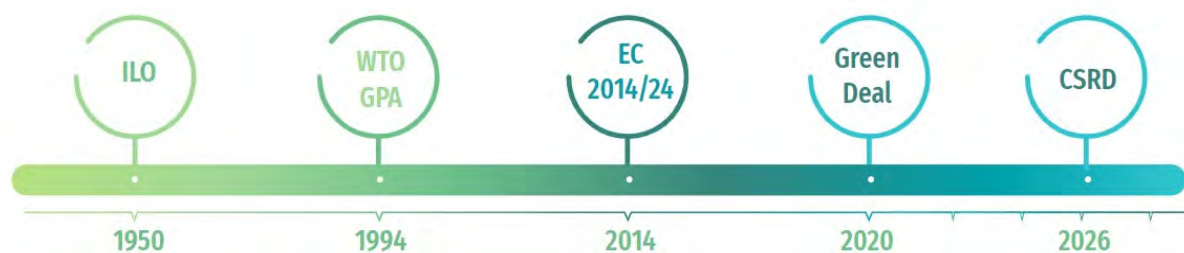


Fig3. Progression of policy frameworks

ILO Standards were established to ensure fair working conditions, rights, and safety for workers globally. By the 1950s, these standards had become increasingly integral to procurement policies, with many governments and organisations emphasising the importance of sourcing goods and services from suppliers adhering to ILO conventions.

The World Trade Organisation and the Government Procurement Agreement (GPA) aimed to establish an open and transparent framework among its member nations. This primarily focused on ensuring non-discrimination and transparency in government procurement, while also supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, by ensuring adherence to labour rights.

The EC 2014/24 Directive encourages EU member states to consider environmental, social, and innovation criteria in procurement decisions. This was marked by the introduction of the 'most economically advantageous tender' (MEAT) principle, which allows authorities to consider factors such as social impact and sustainability. This directive also introduced Sheltered Workshops, specifically related to social enterprises and civil societies working with people with disabilities.

The Green Deal is a roadmap for creating a sustainable and climate-neutral economy by 2050. As a cornerstone of the EU's growth strategy, the Green Deal emphasises integrating environmental, social, and circular considerations into all sectors, including public procurement. In the realm of social procurement, it accentuates the role of public purchasers in driving green innovations, promoting sustainable practices, and ensuring the responsible sourcing of goods and services.

The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) is a forthcoming regulatory framework set to influence all entities from 2024 to 2030. It aims to update and reinforce rules on reporting companies' social and environmental impacts. Consequently, organisations will need to disclose details about their supply chains, encompassing environmental and social risks, which will significantly affect social procurement activities.

Policy Trends

Between 2020 and 2024, numerous European policies and objectives further defining the trajectory of social procurement implementation have been released. The 2030 Goals set targets of a 40 to 55% reduction in greenhouse gases through the implementation of circular and carbon-neutral solutions in the economy. In recognition of these objectives, national governments across Europe have embraced the Agenda 2030 initiative, aligning sustainable procurement with the UN Sustainable Development Goals to commit to tangible and achievable outcomes for an environmentally friendly and socially conscious market.

Sweden's Agenda 2030¹⁰ strategy positions public actors to promote initiatives that can accelerate a more sustainable transition. In line with national procurement laws and the country's procurement strategy, contracting authorities are provided with optimal conditions to use purchasing as a strategic tool to achieve the goals of Agenda 2030. SDG Target 12.7 advocates for sustainable public procurement practices aligned with national policies and priorities¹¹. This offers local authorities and public sector procurement managers a widely accepted framework to implement socially sustainable actions through procurement.

Education, upskilling, and employability play a critical role in the future trajectory of social procurement. Countries such as Lithuania and Estonia have national policies for social innovation closely linked to the research, development, and innovation sector. Lithuania's State Digitisation¹² programme aims to enhance innovative product and service development while focusing on developing digital competence, particularly for vulnerable groups including people with disabilities and the youth.

Recent policy initiatives¹³ in Lithuania underscore the importance of youth-focused vocational training as a driver of enhanced capacity and increased competitiveness, providing an opportunity for the government to create incentives for enrolment in vocational training courses that address skill shortages in the market. The Lithuanian Government's Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3)¹⁴ interlocks specialist upskilling, digitalisation, and a socially inclusive perspective on market development. This strategy provides member states with an opportunity to drive a just transition while achieving digital transformation, offering a unique pathway for the potential of social procurement.

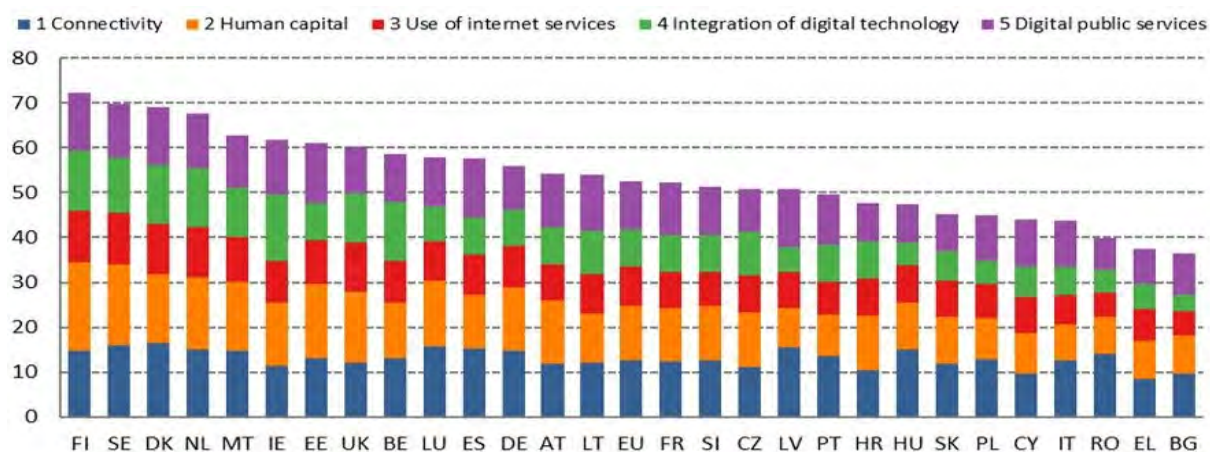


Fig 4: European Digital Index

Policy Frameworks

Significant opportunities exist to integrate social procurement with other policy and regulatory frameworks that align with both national and European objectives. These frameworks enable national governments to engage in social innovation activities and create social value in other priority areas, such as enhancing the circular economy, upskilling the labour force, creating jobs, and enhancing the regional enterprise landscapes of specific territories.

Below, we detail leading examples of Social Value models from various regions to demonstrate how policy coherence is achieved by defining appropriate social value metrics.

United Kingdom

The UK's Social Value Model outlines a comprehensive framework across five pillars of social value creation, encompassing COVID Recovery, Reducing Economic Inequality, Climate Action, Wellbeing, and Disability-Focused Employment. This model is designed to strengthen supply chain opportunities by fostering a diverse, resilient, and innovative supply market. It particularly emphasizes equal opportunities for new businesses, entrepreneurs, SMEs, and offers specific encouragement to the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprises (VCSE) sector to bid for government contracts.

Canada¹⁵

Public Services and Procurement Canada outlines several policy frameworks at the federal level, providing structure to areas of procurement innovation, social and sustainable impacts of government spending. Notably, the 'Better Buying' initiative focuses on simplifying public procurement processes and enabling greater diversity and accessibility for suppliers. 'Smart Procurement' advocates for innovative and open practices as catalysts for socio-economic development, while 'Collaborative Procurement' facilitates group buying and decision-making among multiple stakeholders within the public sector. Canada also has distinct Green Procurement policies, which define typical environmental considerations for achieving net-zero and embracing a circular economy. Additionally, its Social Procurement framework presents a comprehensive approach to social considerations, value creation, and impact through public spending.

Sweden¹⁶

Under Sweden's Socially Sustainable Public Procurement policy, a variety of socio-professional considerations are accounted for, enabling contracting authorities to undertake actions that directly support responsible business behaviour, Sustainable Development Goals, and enhanced employment and labour conditions. Specific policies under national SRPP include enhanced Labour Law Conditions, Responsible Supply Chains, and Procurement for Equality, which champions gender equality in public contracts and service delivery. Sweden adopts both traditional and innovative approaches to SRPP, encompassing Accessibility, Fair Trade, and a distinctive emphasis on the importance of Children's Rights. Contracts are assessed based on the extent of utilisation of a good or service by children, with appropriate safeguards established.

SRPP Instruments

Across the 10 countries included in the research, key priorities for Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP) have been identified, mapped, and curated. These priorities range from procurement instruments used in tender competitions to specific mentions of priority groups targeted for social impact creation.

These priority groups vary from country to country but typically include individuals furthest from the labour market, marginalised individuals, and people with disabilities. The primary focus of SRPP policies is to enable these individuals to lead full and active lives, providing a sense of purpose and belonging through meaningful training and employment.

This section outlines some of the traditional and widely adopted SRPP instruments, as well as novel approaches being undertaken in territories with a greater appetite for innovation.

- **Social Clauses** are broadly adopted instruments that primarily offer training and job opportunities for marginalised groups. For instance, Belgium has developed a culture of acceptance and routine application of social clauses in public tenders, with almost 500 social clauses used in public competitions in 2021¹⁷.
- **Social Returns on Investment (SROIs)**, widely used in the Netherlands, oblige or encourage contractors to employ disadvantaged individuals within the supply chain of a public contract. This enables them to gain work experience and enter the workforce. SROIs have evolved significantly, especially with the development of the Buy Social B2B¹⁸ movement launched in October 2023, alongside social financing models and impact investment.
- **Preliminary Market Consultations (PMCs)** involve actors with specialised knowledge of the social context of contracts to explore achievable social outcomes. PMCs have been recognized in Estonia, Finland, and Lithuania as enablers of procurement innovation by including diverse stakeholders early in the tender process.
- **International Social Conditions (ISC)** involve the application of uniform frameworks within national procurement to promote wider adoption of social procurement at local and regional government levels. ISCs feature prominently in the Dutch 2022-2025 SPP Manifesto¹⁹, which has been successful in introducing SRPP to a diverse group of government stakeholders.
- **Mandatory Criteria** involve setting essential and weighted award criteria for social elements within the tender process. This weighted criterion is noted as one of the most important aspects of SRPP implementation, with buyers committing to targets across various tendering activities in works, utilities, goods, and services. France's PNAD aims for at least one third of all tenders to include social considerations by 2025, while the UK has successfully implemented the universal application of social criteria in all tenders, ranging from 10% to 20% of the award criteria.²⁰

Key Stakeholders

The instruments mentioned above exemplify the technical tools available to public buyers under existing regulatory frameworks, including those derived from the European 2014/24 Directive and ILO Standards. These instruments, informed by EC Directives, facilitate the easy adoption of Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP) practices across the public sector, especially within local authorities and semi-state organisations. Further information on initiatives, tools, and mechanisms supporting SRPP implementation for both buyers and suppliers is provided on pages 17 and 20, respectively.

The subsequent section delves into the specific target groups, key stakeholders, and actors involved in SRPP, encompassing perspectives from beneficiaries, buyers, and suppliers. This analysis includes outcomes observed from successful SRPP implementations in the researched countries, encompassing both primary and peripheral social impacts resulting from procurement initiatives.

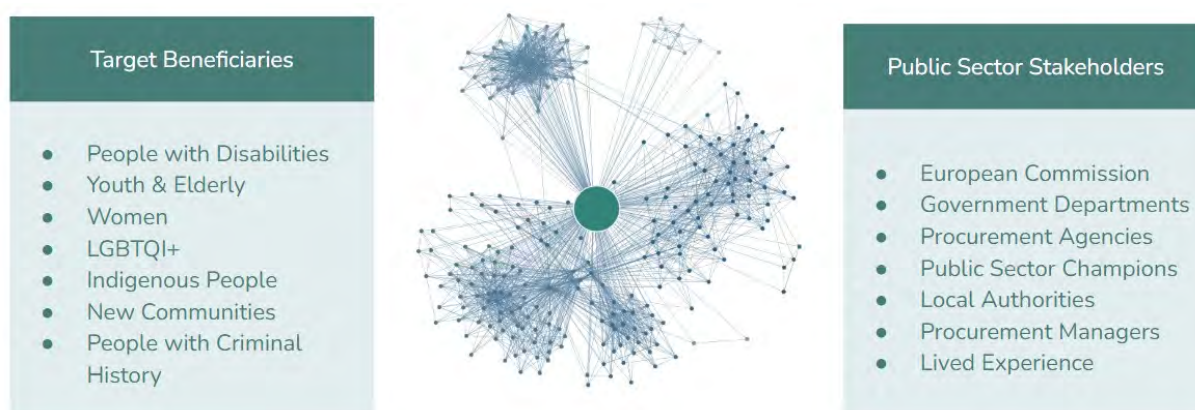


Fig 5: Ecosystem of Actors (non-exhaustive)

The concept of the Enterprise Ecosystem, best exemplified by Lithuania's Impact Procurement Model²¹, underscores the need to perceive relevant stakeholders as part of a circular, singular organism, rather than as discrete entities. Enterprise Ecosystems are increasingly utilised at the European level to conceptualise the cross-sectoral intersections of the public sector, industry, academia, the environment, and society.

In the context of Buyer-Side SRPP, key stakeholders within the public sector ecosystem include thematic groups at the European Commission level, communities of practice, and platforms for sustainable procurement, as further explored on page 17. At the national level, the Central Government is instrumental in interpreting, defining, and implementing national policy.

Meanwhile, public sector bodies, semi-states, and local authorities are responsible for policy implementation on the ground within regional and community settings. PSB (Public Sector Buying) Champions, as identified in the research, play a pivotal role in the successful adoption, implementation, and evolution of SRPP. Notably, public agents with lived experience of social exclusion, poverty, disability, or other forms of marginalisation have been identified as particularly successful in their role as social procurement champions. (This insight is derived from a live viewing of the 'Role of Government in Social Procurement' at the Social Enterprise World Forum in Amsterdam on October 12th, 2023.)"

Key Stakeholders

On the beneficiary side of the Enterprise Ecosystem, as identified in previous sections, are priority groups that are furthest from the labour market or most at risk of marginalisation. Aiming to enhance inclusive workforce development, social cohesion, social innovation, and employment equity, these beneficiary groups vary from country to country. Lithuania's 2020 Program of the Eighteenth Government illustrates the wide spectrum of SRPP beneficiaries through the following mechanisms:

Sport as a Tool for Social Inclusion: Utilising sports to reduce the separation between different social groups, with the objective of significantly contributing to economic and social cohesion, as well as social integration.

Effective Employment Programs for People with Disabilities: Adapting working environments and workplaces to the individual needs of disabled persons, including incentives for employers and social enterprises working with them.



Development of Social Dialogue and Corporate Social Responsibility: Promoting collaboration with social partnerships, particularly trade unions and associations, to enhance the social responsibility of businesses.

Youth Entrepreneurship Initiatives: Encouraging youth entrepreneurship at the regional level, particularly targeting returnees from emigration, to promote business, social projects, and employment.

Silver Economy: Focusing on healthy ageing, tourism, entrepreneurship, and education for older persons, in collaboration with higher education institutions to maintain skills development.

Strengthening Rural Communities: Emphasising job creation with respect to climate change mitigation, just transition, and the evolving quality of life in rural settings.

Both Indigenous Peoples and Communities are recognised within respective public procurement frameworks as key priorities for social procurement. In Canada, Aboriginal and Indigenous rights are acknowledged as a distinct initiative, although social procurement is frequently utilised in relation to Indigenous suppliers, persons, and communities.

Key Stakeholders

Legal designations for Indigenous-owned businesses are enshrined in law, supported by regional action plans and frameworks designed to assist this target group. For example, Winnipeg's Social Procurement Framework²² offers an alternative approach to sustainable procurement, combining four pillars – environmental, ethical, social, and Indigenous considerations – to achieve positive social and Indigenous impacts throughout the City's supply chain.

Individuals who have been in prison are also specifically addressed within distinct SRPP policies and programmes, notably in the Correctional Service Canada's programme known as CORCAN²³. This key rehabilitation programme is mandated to provide employment training and employability skills to offenders in federal correctional institutions, supporting the social policy of the Government of Canada.

In 2020, Buy Social Canada reported that 28 Vancouver social enterprises alone employed 1,355 full- and part-time employees with barriers. These employment opportunities can result in increased social inclusion for people while also building job skills, income and a sense of dignity. And it benefits the community at large through the recirculation of revenues and a reduction in emergency and support services.

- Buy Social Canada

Industry 5.0

The Quintuple Helix model of Industry 5.0²⁴ is the European Commission's latest policy initiative, designed to integrate new technologies, digital skills development, and innovations in climate-neutral & circular economy with industrial innovation.

The Industry 5.0 Model plays a crucial role in mapping and planning the trajectory of national government policies that could impact the implementation of Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP). As highlighted earlier, the beneficiaries of SRPP include a wide array of stakeholders, all committed to enhancing socio-professional opportunities for individuals and fostering a more balanced society.



Fig 6: Quintuple Helix of Industry 5.0

Several examples demonstrate successful implementations of SRPP, aligning with the European Commission's emphasis on innovation, upskilling, and workforce development. These initiatives showcase effective collaborations between industry, the public sector, and tertiary education, serving as catalysts:

The Future-making Academy at Malmö University, Sweden²⁵: This initiative aims to make academic research accessible, furthering advancements in social procurement and social innovation practices. The programme fosters the mobilisation of actors and resources across various sectors, including private businesses, civil society, NGOs, municipalities, and the public sector.

Buying Social Justice²⁶: A collaborative project involving Queen Mary University of London, Warwick University, UWE Bristol, and the Economic and Social Research Council. This initiative aims to capture the social value of public sector spending in the construction sector. It provides recommendations for incorporating employment equality measures into social procurement.

The Social Entrepreneurship Akademia (SEA)²⁷: A consortium of Munich-based academic institutions designed to catalyse the social enterprise market. SEA bridges the gap for social enterprises and the broader enterprise ecosystem across Germany, supporting over 137 social startups and engaging more than 37,223 individuals since its inception.

The Government Outcomes Lab (Go Lab)²⁸: Located at the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, is a research and policy centre established in partnership between the School and the UK Government. Funded by various organisations, its primary role is to explore how governments can partner with the private and social sectors to improve social outcomes. The GO Lab provides in-depth research papers, policy guidance, training, and materials to support engagement with social impact creation.

Industry 5.0

In the aforementioned examples, academic partners are identified as key stakeholders in the development of social procurement, social innovation, and future-focused models for socio-economic integration. This tertiary level collaboration with the public sector and industry enables researchers to inform policy through citizen's science, open innovation, and innovative knowledge valorisation.

This collaboration catalyses socially inclusive models for sustainable growth and development. Many of these programmes and initiatives have received funding from the European Commission, which provides a pathway for potential funding in areas such as public sector innovation, social cohesion, and workforce development. Increasingly, social enterprises and socially-focused commercial actors are being recognised as vital players in bridging social value and economic growth²⁹.



Fig 6: Quintuple Helix of Industry 5.0

Impact & Mainstream Enterprises

In summary, the key stakeholders involved in social procurement and 'buying social' initiatives demonstrate how interlinkages between the public sector, private sector, and academia provide a platform for enhanced collaboration and access to research, innovation, and novel approaches to societal challenges. With the core objective of impacting diverse beneficiary groups who are marginalised, at risk of social exclusion, and distant from the labour market, the social value model requires social and impact-oriented enterprises to serve as a bridge between policy and practical application on the ground.

The concept of Impact Enterprise³⁰ is employed in the Netherlands, encompassing everything from municipality action plans for social procurement implementation to 'Buy Social' campaigns in the private sector. The term 'Impact Enterprises' extends beyond the traditional definition of social enterprise, enabling enterprise actors to unite under a social-value-based business model and influence the behaviour of the mainstream enterprise sector. The B2B 'Buy Social' Campaign, launched in October 2023 and led by Euclid, involves 23 organisations across 17 markets at local, national, and European levels. This initiative bridges mainstream and social enterprises with the goal of expanding the enterprise ecosystem, thereby supporting the growth of the social economy sector and advancing the goals of socially responsible public procurement across Europe.

Supports & Initiatives^(buyer)

Across the various countries analysed in the research on SRPP and Buy Social, national governments that have made significant progress in the implementation of social procurement were observed to have done so through comprehensive, system-wide awareness building, training, and support programmes. These supports range from technical toolkits and platforms to guidance materials covering each step of the tender lifecycle. The subsequent section details a variety of initiatives under the following headings:

Procurement Toolkits: These include online tools and sustainable criterion selection platforms, allowing public buyers to access standardised and scenario-based models for SRPP utilisation.

Guidance Documents: Comprehensive guidance materials on SRPP across the tender lifecycle are provided, along with public-sector specific action plans, manifestos, and discrete policies.

Networks & Platforms: These facilitate the connection of communities of public buyers to share and develop skills through best practice examples, utilising a peer-to-peer learning approach.

Capacity Development Programmes: Targeted learning and development initiatives, accelerators, and upskilling programmes are designed to develop the capacity of public sector agents, local authorities, and government officials in the areas of social, sustainable, and circular procurement.

Centres of Excellence: Physical centres are established where buyers can collaborate to develop policy, share and transfer knowledge, and upskill the next generation of public procurement excellence.

Procurement Toolkits

The Dutch and Flemish Government's Sustainable Public Procurement Tool³¹ stands out as one of the most successful examples of Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP) guidance, thanks to its simple yet effective toolkit. It includes a 5% Social Return clause across 48 product groups and over 800 criteria. This initiative serves as a discretionary mechanism for Contracting Authorities, facilitating their understanding of how to incorporate social scoring into tender evaluation criteria.

The French RAPIDD platform³² offers resources and information relating to socially and ecologically responsible procurement for public buyers. It features thematic groups for expertise exchange between peers, as well as access to specialised worksheets, tender examples, and templates. Another notable online toolkit is 'Tools for Transition'³³, developed by the Stockholm Environment Institute in collaboration with six municipalities and the national Agenda 2030 coordinator. This toolkit aids municipalities and regions in their sustainability efforts, enabling broader engagement with systematic methods using the SDG framework.

Guidance Documents

Central governments and local municipalities have developed numerous guidance documents on social procurement. By directing SRPP-related materials to the appropriate governmental layer, significant improvements in social procurement awareness and capacity development have been observed. This highlights the importance of tailoring support material to suit each type of buyer.

Supports & Initiatives^(buyer)

Of the vast amount of guidance documentation collated during the research, the following are highlighted of key importance:

- **The UK Local Government Association³⁴** offers a comprehensive suite of resources pointing to best practices in socially responsible public procurement. This assists local authorities in becoming more autonomous in adopting and implementing national policies.
- **The UK's 2023 Sourcing Playbook³⁵** guides public procurers towards Preliminary Market Engagement, encouraging them to actively seek suppliers who can contribute to improved service delivery. This includes Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprises sector.
- **'Buying with Impact'³⁶** showcases how Canadian universities, colleges, research institutes, and other post-secondary education centres can integrate social enterprise procurement into their purchasing practices.
- **The Regional Guidebook on Circular Procurement³⁷**, developed by the Lithuanian Innovation Centre in 2020, introduces circular business modelling and value chain impacts. It covers circular ecosystems and responsible business activities as a precursor to Socially Responsible Procurement actions.

Beyond targeted guidance for specific public sector tiers, there are numerous macro-level policies that enhance awareness of social value models, encourage collaboration with social enterprises, and champion procurement strategies for social impact creation. The visual below references several of the national guidebooks identified:



Finland³⁸



Canada³⁹



UK⁴⁰



Netherlands⁴¹

Networks & Platforms

Local and regional networks are instrumental in the evolution of social procurement. An example of this is the German Sustainability Kompass⁴², which documents the progress and success of sustainable procurement over the past two decades, encompassing more than 1,000 case studies. The Kompass facilitates a peer-led approach to SRPP implementation, enabling buyers to benchmark from their counterparts across the country. This aids in understanding how social procurement exercises have been conducted.

Supports & Initiatives ^(buyer)

Dutch Municipalities' individual action plans offer a fully transparent repository of all local authorities' commitments to social procurement. These plans allow authorities to access the strategies of neighbouring regions, providing live examples of SRPP policies and initiatives⁴³.

The Nordic Council of Ministers operates an intergovernmental cooperative focused on sustainable procurement, policy development, and collective action, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

This Council has initiated several successful projects, elevating the standards of social procurement by leveraging the UN Sustainable Development Goals to propel sustainable public procurement forward. Intra-European networks such as Procure2Innovate (P2I)⁴⁴ share tools, novel approaches, and peer-based results from 10 EU competence centres through a knowledge-sharing network. This network provides comprehensive resources across the territories, emphasising peer-to-peer collaboration to enhance capacity throughout the Union.

Capacity Development and Centres of Excellence

The establishment of centres for capacity development and procurement excellence were observed in several countries where national governments have invested in dedicated hubs for enhancing the adoption of social procurement through innovation and knowledge sharing.

These include Finland's KEINO⁴⁵, funded by the Ministry of Employment and Economy, PIANO⁴⁶, from the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy, and the German Competence Center for Sustainable Procurement (KNB), set up by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community⁴⁷. In these institutions, both suppliers and buyers are brought together as part of advancing social procurement awareness through tailored supports, developing a culture of cross-sector collaboration.



Supports & Initiatives ^(supplier)

Supplier-specific supports and awareness-building initiatives were highlighted in the research, where the government's objective is to encourage participation in Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP) by initially strengthening ties between businesses, social enterprises, and the local public sector. Enhanced collaboration through dialogue and discussion is viewed as a precursor to more targeted programmes on social procurement and the technical aspects of tendering. In this section, we explore the best practices identified in supplier-side supports across the following areas:

Circulatory & Social Value: Interlinking the circular economy with SRPP outcomes, where circularity serves as a pathway to raise awareness of social and environmental considerations.

SME and VCSE Participation: Encouraging participation from both Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprises (VCSEs) by embedding their roles in the procurement process through open collaboration strategies.

Incubators and Accelerators: Establishing dedicated learning and development programmes to catalyse social procurement, social enterprise development, and the social economy.

Guides and Toolkits: Providing comprehensive guidance material on engaging with the concepts, technical instruments, and practicalities of social procurement.

Verification Methods: Enabling both suppliers and buyers of social value to demonstrate certified and verifiable impact measurement models.



Circularity and Social Value

The Flanders Circular Works Hubs⁴⁸ in Belgium function as local partnerships, aiming to foster new circular entrepreneurship with a social impact in their regions. These partnerships are designed to include a diversity of actors, encompassing companies, municipal governments, knowledge institutions, and social profit organisations. Similarly, the Ghent Social-Circular Hub⁴⁹, established in 2021, was launched and funded by the European Social Fund. This initiative is geared towards stimulating cooperation between the social and circular economies. It focuses on the creation of new circular ideas to promote social employment and socio-professional integration.

Supports & Initiatives ^(supplier)

The employment of hubs, living labs, and spaces for enterprise engagement acts as a focal point for Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP)-related activities in the examples mentioned. These initiatives significantly enhance the awareness and capacity of suppliers in the principles of sustainable procurement, both environmental and social, leading to notable success stories in driving social procurement at a national level.

Aligning SRPP with the Circular Economy aligns with the European Circular Economy Action Plan⁵⁰, which focuses on enabling consumers, enterprises, regional and local authorities to adopt socially and environmentally responsible behaviour as part of a sustainable transition and circular modelling. In early 2022, the Circular Cities and Regions Initiative⁵¹ was launched as a resource for local and regional governments to implement circular systemic solutions. This initiative also offers potential funding for the establishment of hubs and living labs to support newcomers.



SME and VCSE Participation

In the United Kingdom, the government's strategy to advance Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP) involves supporting start-ups and small businesses through government procurement via the SME Advisory Panel⁵². Comprising entrepreneurs and leading business figures, the panel facilitates enhanced collaboration between SMEs and the government to remove barriers and increase spending on goods and services with small and medium-sized enterprises. Established in November 2016, the panel has collaborated with individual departments across the public sector to develop tailored SME action plans. These plans include dedicated sections on social value creation, such as the Ministry of Justice's Action Plan for SMEs and VCSEs⁵³. This plan outlines a collaborative method for delivering the action plan with the support of an SME commercial champion, chief commercial officer, and a dedicated social value team.

Similar policy approaches for including SMEs to catalyse social enterprise participation are evident in the Swedish Accurate Procurement model⁵⁴. This model employs market consultations, relationship building with suppliers, and an SME-friendly focus as precursors to sustainable procurement. In the Netherlands, PIANOo emphasises the importance of enterprise development, featuring dedicated Buyer Groups⁵⁵. These groups enable public and private clients to collaborate on a shared market vision and strategy for making a specific product category more sustainable. Buyers commit to implementing specific goals in procurement practice within two years, stimulating the market to develop sustainable solutions that meet a concrete, widely supported need.

Supports & Initiatives (supplier)

Incubators and Accelerators

Incubators and Accelerators are crucial in enterprise development, with many national governments hosting dedicated programmes and funding schemes to bolster the indigenous startup and SME ecosystem. Countries that successfully blend mainstream enterprises with social and impact-oriented enterprise landscapes have shown exemplary instances of social innovation, a robust social economy, and advanced progression in social procurement adoption. Some of the more notable examples include:

The Finnish Social Enterprises incubator⁵⁶, launched in spring 2023, is a collaborative business incubator organised by VAMK – Vaasa University of Applied Sciences and YVO through the Center of Expertise of Social Enterprises. This incubator focuses on developing new ideas and innovation for transformative societal improvements through social entrepreneurship.

In the United Kingdom, the **Social Enterprise Knowledge Centre⁵⁷** supports social enterprise development by adopting an evidence-based approach. It evaluates the value of social enterprise development across the UK, producing evidence for various audiences and exploring key thematic areas of interest for social enterprises and their support ecosystem.

Germany boasts several active programmes, including the **Social Entrepreneurship Akademia**, **Social Startup Hub Bavaria**, and other capacity development initiatives for social startups. These programmes provide region-by-region support to facilitate the creation and advancement of social businesses.

The **Lithuanian CCI Accelerator⁵⁸**, launched in 2021, is designed to enhance the efficiency of the Lithuanian Culture and Creative Industries sector. It focuses on creating innovations and the valorisation of culture, dissemination and promotion of social impact.

The Impact Factory⁵⁹ in Germany is the country's largest incubator and accelerator for impact startups. It offers a unique start-up grant, providing social entrepreneurs from across Germany with a collaborative space. This environment fosters the creation of scalable innovations aimed at solving complex social and ecological challenges.

The potential for achieving sustainable impacts through Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and social enterprise development is exemplified by Estonia's burgeoning StartUp Ecosystem⁶⁰. This ecosystem enables startups to act as accelerators, increasing the scale and diffusion of solutions that address societal and global challenges. While social procurement adoption is still in its early stages in Estonia, there is a widely recognised use of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This positions the Estonian startup sector with a unique opportunity to catalyse social and sustainable impacts through enterprise development.

Supports & Initiatives^(supplier)

Guides and Toolkit

Complementary to acceleration and capacity development programmes for the social economy sector, robust guidance materials, toolkits, and documents play a crucial role in the practical implementation of social procurement for SMEs and social enterprises.



The UK's **'Selling to Government'** guide⁶¹ offers advice, tips, and strategies for tendering with government, along with signposts to additional support for SMEs. It categorises social value creation into three areas, each with actionable items for suppliers to consider when implementing social value models:

1. Economic: Focusing on employment or apprenticeship and training opportunities,
2. Social: Activities promoting cohesive communities,
3. Environmental: Efforts to reduce carbon emissions. The guide provides 10 tips for suppliers, ranging from finding tenders to proactive engagement with buyers post tender submission.



The **Canadian Supplier Guide to Social Procurement**⁶² is designed to aid social value suppliers in preparing for and effectively engaging with purchasers. It serves both as a journey through the procurement process and as a hands-on toolkit. The guide helps suppliers understand and recognise social procurement opportunities and prepare for procurement. Special emphasis is placed on understanding the demand-side considerations of social procurement and familiarity with definitions, which are essential for maximising the guide's value.



The Finnish central government's **Strategy for Social Enterprises**⁶³ aims to employ individuals with partial work capacity and those facing challenges in the labour market. This Strategy serves as an exemplary model of government policy that facilitates the integration of social enterprise into public procurement.

It simultaneously enhances awareness and provides guidance to prospective suppliers on socially responsible procurement activities. The strategy positions social enterprises as key catalysts in building a sustainable and resilient society, involving a diverse range of actors and stakeholders.

The overarching goal is to cultivate a dynamic ecosystem for social enterprises that effectively addresses societal challenges and offers employment opportunities to those who are partially incapacitated or otherwise disadvantaged in the labour market.

Supports & Initiatives^(supplier)

In the array of documents analysed during the research, a significant emphasis was placed on the importance of verifying the validity of social impact claims as organisations engage in social procurement practices. A variety of instruments were identified, ranging from self-assessment questionnaires to third-party verification models. These tools offer both buyers and suppliers the opportunity to engage with recognised standards for certifying claims. The following section delves into some of the verification methods currently employed by public authorities in the target countries under analysis.

Verification Methods

Verification instruments are essential in validating social impact claims during procurement processes. The emergence of labels and quality marks, such as the European Eco-label, has led contracting authorities to encourage third-party recognition to aid compliance in determining social value creation within competitions.

For instance, the Finnish Ministry of Employment⁶⁴ provided self-assessments to clarify a bidder's commitment to social responsibility in risk countries where production might occur. While this example highlights social responsibility across the supply chain, it lacks integration of local actors within the value chain.

In France, COLECOSOL⁶⁵ (Collective for the Promotion of Fair Trade in Alsace) ensures that fair trade criteria are adhered to across both local and international supply chains. Quality labels and certifications are used by suppliers and authorities in public procurement to demonstrate their commitment to social and environmental responsibilities. The Strasbourg Authorities' publication of 14 such certifications⁶⁶ illustrates how regional governments can foster awareness of sustainable activities through engagement with both national and international programmes, highlighting commitments and actions in various fields of activity.

In the UK, the Social Value Portal⁶⁷, a government-endorsed, B-Corp Certified organisation, provides a platform for procuring, measuring, and validating social impacts. This platform enables buyers and suppliers to trade impacts under a verifiable scheme, adding transparency and credibility to the social value sector across the UK.

At a more advanced level, quality certification marks like the British Standards Institute's BS 8950:2020⁶⁸ aim to help organisations across sectors understand, preserve, and enhance their social value. It outlines principles to assist organisations in recognising, accounting for, and reporting on social value. Corporate standards, including ISO 20400 for sustainable procurement and ISO 26000⁶⁹ for social responsibility, guide businesses and organisations committed to socially responsible operations.

In Germany, Meta Seals and Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives (MSI) aggregate criteria from existing quality marks, while MSIs involve collaborative efforts among stakeholders for specific social value creation. Meta seals summarise criteria and compliance, whereas MSIs facilitate multi-perspective engagement and integrated solutions to social challenges.⁷⁰

Supports & Initiatives ^(supplier)

Blockchain-Based Evidence technology offers secure and traceable documentation for social and sustainability statements. Blockchain enables real-time, cost-effective, and tamper-proof verification across supply chains, creating a robust model for authorities to verify bidders' impacts. With the European Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) implementation, technology-based solutions for wider value chain analysis may become increasingly valuable.

Current availability of suitable blockchain platforms for procurement procedures is limited, but this area presents opportunities for future development. A study on the uptake of emerging technologies in public procurement⁷¹ suggests that Blockchain has numerous potential use cases yet to be tested in practice, with artificial intelligence and procurement posing additional requirements for verifiable models of social impact claims.

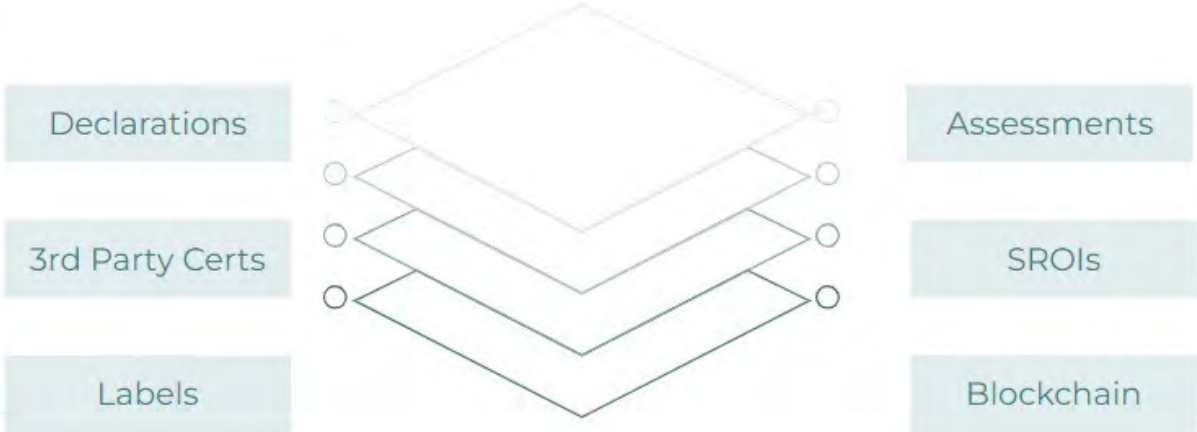


Fig 9: Validation Methods

In the final section, we will explore the use of 'Buy Social' as a model to encourage supplier-side social procurement, create a bridge between mainstream and impact enterprises, and offer a well recognised mark of quality that extends into the corporate private sector. This section will briefly examine the origins of 'Buy Social', as well as the latest developments in the trajectory of the movement. We will focus on how social procurement is transitioning from public to private sector purchasing dynamics.

Buy Social

'Buy Social' has significantly evolved over the past decade, originating from socially-conscious purchasing power, where consumers favour businesses demonstrating strong ethical and social impact. In our research, Buy Social movements and campaigns were analysed in five target countries: Canada, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands. These campaigns were examined both as discrete initiatives and in terms of their linkage to social procurement and the transition towards socially oriented business models. In each of these examples, social enterprises are critical as the recognised business type providing ethical, inclusive, and impact-driven goods and services.

In the United Kingdom, the Buy Social Corporate Challenge⁷², spearheaded by Social Enterprise UK in partnership with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, was launched in April 2016. As a primary driver of the Buy Social movement in the country, it is expected to see a spend of over £1 Billion by 2026. Positioned as “the world’s largest commitment to social procurement”, Buy Social UK has shifted from a Business to Customer (B2C) model to a Business to Business (B2B) model targeting corporate buyers.

This evolution marks a significant milestone in Buy Social's journey, focusing on the corporate sector where social considerations align with the corporate responsibility ethos of both SMEs and large enterprises. For example, PwC reported in 2022 that it engaged with over 70 social enterprises in their supply chain, resulting in a spend of £1.7m and bringing their cumulative expenditure in the social enterprise sector to £10 million since 2016.

The '2032 Social Value Roadmap'⁷³ from Social Enterprise UK, launched in 2022, outlines the future trajectory for the UK's progression of social value models over the next decade. It provides a snapshot of policy initiatives, standards, and guidance materials to promote social value in both public and private sectors. Buy Social is highlighted as a key enabler for the wider adoption of social procurement across the enterprise ecosystem and commercial landscape. The roadmap includes actions such as the development of a Social Value Playbook, a Social Value Council, and an Institute of Social Value by 2028, with a recommendation to expand the mandatory criterion of the Social Value Act to all businesses over 250 staff by 2032.

UnLtd⁷⁴, another key player in the UK, is a not-for-profit organisation that advances policy works and communication campaigns for social procurement through initiatives like 'Leaders with Lived Experience'. This programme promotes enterprising leaders with first-hand experience of social issues as key drivers of social change. As noted in previous sections, integrating lived experience into policy making and accelerating public sector social procurement was a prominent topic at the Social Enterprise World Forum 2023. Participants from the Netherlands, Australia, the US, and Malaysia discussed their roles as champions of social procurement, stemming from an understanding of marginalisation through personal circumstances.

In the Netherlands, 'Buy Social' targets all buyers, encompassing SMEs, corporates, government entities, and the broader business community. Its objective is to disseminate knowledge and inspiration, enabling every buyer to implement their organisation's social objectives by procuring services and products from social enterprises.

Buy Social

Mirroring the UK corporate model, it has evolved into the business-to-business sector, notably with the recent launch of the 'Buy Social Europe B2B' consortium in October 2023⁷⁵. The consortium, supported by an expert advisory board comprising international organisations such as SAP, Zurich Insurance, the Social Enterprise World Forum, and the Sustainable Procurement Pledge, includes 23 members across 17 countries. The model operates across three distinct target groups: 'Buy Social for Mainstream Enterprises', 'Buy Social for Social Enterprises', and 'Buy Social for Policy Makers'. The Dutch Buy Social Model and the recent integration of B2B Buy Social activities serve as a cohesive link between the social economy, and the public and private sectors.

'Buy Social Canada' follows a similar framework but places greater emphasis on the community's role in social procurement and social impact buying. The image below, extracted from the 'Buy Social Canada's Supplier Guide', illustrates a framework for community value creation. It incorporates value streams from purchasers, suppliers, and social value creators into a unified model. By integrating social enterprises into the core of an organisation's supply chain, tangible and measurable impacts in areas such as inclusion, community interest, and socio-professional opportunities can be realised.



Fig 10: Buy Social Canada Social Procurement Model⁷⁶

Like their counterparts in the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands, 'Buy Social Canada' collaborates with a wide range of organisations in both the public and private sectors. It offers comprehensive social procurement policy and programme development, with a strong focus on multi-stakeholder engagement. 'Buy Social Canada' operates across three distinct layers in its social impact market:

1. **Certified Social Enterprise:** These are verified social enterprises from across Canada, identifiable by their location, social value, and the type of goods or services they offer.
2. **Social Purchasing Partners:** These partners are incorporating social value into their supply chains and set an example for others to follow.
3. **Community Champions:** These are the individuals and organisations that support the 'Buy Social' mission. They promote and advance social procurement activities within their networks and communities, helping to extend the reach and impact of social procurement."

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