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Participatory Planning for Social Inclusion

A participatory multi-stakeholder approach to effective planning, implementation and evaluation of social policies and services ensuring that the most vulnerable people are not left behind.

October 2025

The Participatory Planning for Social Inclusion (PPSI) methodology brings all local stakeholders together, including social service users, civil society organisations (CSOs), local authorities, government agencies, social service providers and citizens to effectively engage in a process of policy dialogue on social services or more broadly on social protection and inclusion issues.

Why do we use PPSI?

To ensure that the most vulnerable people are not left behind.

In the global effort to achieve the **Sustainable Development Goals** with its overarching mission of **leaving no-one behind**, **vulnerable people** in each community **need additional attention and support** not to be left behind. One of the important instruments to alleviate poverty and prevent social exclusion are various types of social protection instruments, such as social care (including prevention of exclusion, family support, counselling, rehabilitation, etc). In some societies, such support is provided mainly by community and informal structures, in others, state and local administrations provide social care services.

People in Need (PIN) uses an approach that draws on **the grassroots participation of the most vulnerable people and civil society organizations enabling them to engage in a systemic process of joint planning of social care/protection with decision-makers and social care providers. This ensures that the needs and interests of the most vulnerable are taken into account in a systematic, transparent and collaborative manner.**



Cover photo: Civil Society Fair titled *Local Voices* on the central square in Bujanovac, Serbia organized in cooperation with the British Embassy in Belgrade and the Civil Initiative. Twenty local civil society organizations and informal groups of citizens participated in the Fair, presenting their mission and results. PIN Archive

The Roots of PIN's Participatory Planning for Social Inclusion

In the Czech Republic, People in Need has been involved in Participatory Planning for Social Inclusion for over 20 years, since the approach was adapted from the UK model to the Czech context. Based on its experience, PIN applied and adapted the approach to contexts of additional countries: Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Serbia and Armenia.

PIN's experience with PPSI in the Czech Republic

Participatory (or community-based) planning of social policy and services is used throughout the Czech system at municipal and regional level. PIN's Social Integration Program team of approximately 300 staff and over 300 volunteers provide a wide range of social services for socially excluded or marginalized individuals and families covering over 50 municipalities. Having recognized it is impossible to change the status of socially vulnerable families without changing the approach of local and regional government authorities to the issue of social inclusion, PIN has been combining the social work practice with engagement in public policy planning since 1999. PIN's staff participates



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and, in some cases, is part of the managing team of community-based planning of social policy and services across the Czech Republic. PIN's involvement in this process has evolved into successful policy and advocacy work also at national level on issues such as widespread unlawful and unethical practices of lending companies and bailiff property seizures.

The Impact of PPSI

Based on PIN's 20 years of experience with the PPSI approach it has helped target localities in the Czech Republic, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Serbia and Armenia to:

- Acknowledge and effectively adjust policies and funding for services to address the most acute problems and vulnerable persons, even those, that were previously ignored and avoided.
- Engage in mutual learning and understanding of the problems faced by vulnerable and socially excluded persons from different perspectives.

- Build trust and collaborative spirit among various participating actors as well as ownership of the policies and plans elaborated.
- Plan services in target areas effectively addressing real local needs and issues, resulting in improvements that sometimes did not require additional investments and funding.
- Attract additional funds for addressing the identified problems (both from state and external funds).



Expansion of PPSI to Georgia, Kosovo and Moldova

Since 2016, PIN has been working in the EU neighbourhood to **empower actors of municipal social service provision and to facilitate their coordinated efforts to improve social service delivery**. PIN drew upon its Czech experience of Social Integration Programs and adjusted it to local contexts in 10 municipalities in Georgia, Moldova and Kosovo with a high number of vulnerable people (internally displaced persons (IDPs), ethnic minorities, people with disabilities). In line with local legal and policy frameworks, working structures (such as advisory committees on social inclusion) were established, consisting of senior municipal officials, local social service agencies, civil society organizations, representatives of vulnerable groups in each target municipality. These committees functioned as **efficient platforms for planning of social service policy and its delivery**. They were strengthened through capacity building activities and representatives of selected civil society organizations were appointed as the facilitators of the working structures. Based on the findings of participatory assessments of the social service delivery in target municipalities, the committees jointly developed **municipal strategies on social inclusion and annual action plans**. In order to support the implementation of the action plans, PIN together with local authorities, launched a grant scheme with co-funding from local authorities.



PPSP Advocacy training; PIN Archive

Results of PPSI in Target Communities

Georgia:

- As a result of the intervention, **coordination, planning and policy dialogue on the social service provision in the target municipalities significantly improved**.
- **Long-term social services were developed** by both civil society organizations and local governmental bodies for children, youth, IDPs, elderly, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, to improve the quality of their lives.
- A one-time monetary assistance approach practiced as the main form of social assistance in target municipalities changed to **development of needs tailored, sustainable social services**.
- **An improved system of social service delivery in municipalities was established** through introduction and development of the criteria for selection of service users and better distribution of the budget among different social programs.
- The committees **continued to function as an effective mechanism** of community-based planning of social services in target municipalities for two years after project closure, becoming owned and financed by the municipalities themselves.

Cooperation with PIN has clearly demonstrated that even in conditions of tight budget it is possible to offer long-term services to the population. The municipality is slowly shifting towards social services as evidenced by the launch of the social laundry service... In the next year budget, we plan to support social programs, which will be tailored to the specific needs of the service users and bring tangible benefits.

Tkibuli Municipality
– Head of Healthcare
and Social Security
Department

So far, cooperation between local authorities and local non-profit organizations has rarely been practiced. Thanks to the project we have gained valuable experience which we should apply in the future.

Tkibuli Municipality –
Representative of IDP
community

Kosovo:

- **Attitude change of municipal officials towards marginalized ethnic groups:** As a result of the action plans, municipalities started to finance some of the services for marginalized groups (e.g. child learning centres, initiatives to combat bullying). Thus, more marginalized communities' members were supported with services and referral to existing support.
- **Strategic approach in social inclusion and education sector:** PIN has piloted a participatory approach to translating Kosovo's general local social inclusion strategy into a practical action plan.
- Coordination of actors through the municipal task force: Through participation in the meetings the municipalities came to terms with their obligations. Good policy ideas emerged because of the task force meetings, many of which were implemented in practice.

Moldova:

- **Interactive maps and the database of social services** were developed in all target districts.
- Target municipalities **started contributing financially to social services** implemented by NGOs.
- The number of **children placed in closed-type social institutions has decreased**, due to the fact that families with children have been supported through community-based services.

PPSI in Serbia and Kosovo – ALVED Project

The **Amplifying Local Voices for Equitable Development (ALVED)** project was implemented between 2020 and 2022 in eight municipalities across Serbia and Kosovo. It adapted the Participatory Planning for Social Inclusion approach, to strengthen cooperation between municipal authorities, civil society organizations, social service providers and representatives of vulnerable groups.

Through the establishment of Advisory Groups, the project created inclusive local platforms where diverse stakeholders could jointly identify community needs, develop strategies and design strategic and action plans for improved social service provision. These groups were supported with tailored capacity strengthening workshops, training and study visits, while selected civil society representatives were trained to facilitate the process.

To ensure that action plans translated into tangible improvements, the project also supported grassroots and community-based CSOs

through targeted grants and mentoring. These initiatives focused on strengthening social services for vulnerable groups, enhancing dialogue between communities and authorities and empowering young people to play active roles in civic life.

Project results

- Municipalities in Serbia and Kosovo adopted more inclusive approaches to social service provision, demonstrating greater responsiveness to the needs of marginalized groups such as women, youth, Roma, persons with disabilities and the elderly. Based on the surveys conducted in five municipalities in Kosovo the percentage of citizens who believe municipal authorities have become more responsive to their needs has increased from 37% to 68%.



Roundtable on Language Rights Report in Peja/Peć, Kosovo, Nov. 17, 2022. PIN Archive



- PPSI Advisory Groups functioned as effective multi-stakeholder platforms, bringing together local self-government representatives, social service providers, CSOs and community members to jointly plan and monitor social services.
- Through targeted grants, CSOs and municipalities implemented a range of sustainable, needs-based social services and community initiatives. These included the establishment and strengthening of SOS hotlines for women and girls experiencing violence, the development of home-based assistance for elderly people and persons with disabilities, workshops and capacity-development for children and youth with disabilities and their parents, parenting support and educational initiatives for vulnerable Roma families.
- Capacity development efforts strengthened grassroots and community-based CSOs in areas such as advocacy, research, policy dialogue and service provision, enabling them to better represent and respond to citizens' needs.
- Municipal officials increasingly recognised their role in inclusive social service delivery and demonstrated greater openness to collaboration with civil society and minority groups.
- Citizens in targeted municipalities increasingly reported that they can influence municipal social service planning and that individuals from different ethnic groups can work together to address local problems. While not exclusively attributable to the project, ALVED contributed significantly to building trust, empathy and understanding across communities and towards local authorities.

PPSI in Armenia – Partnership for Syunik

The **Partnership for Syunik: Improved Community Social Services** project (2020–2024) applied the Participatory Planning for Social Inclusion approach to strengthen social service systems in the Syunik region of Armenia. Working closely with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and seven municipalities across northern and southern Syunik, the project supports the shift from temporary cash assistance and short-term measures to a more comprehensive, needs-based and sustainable model of community social services.

Based on PPSI approach, at the heart of the initiative are newly established Social Commissions, in each municipality, bringing together municipal representatives, civil society organizations, social service providers and community members. These commissions serve as inclusive local platforms for identifying priorities, developing strategies and overseeing the delivery of social services. They were

supported through capacity strengthening in social policy, community mobilization and evidence-based planning, complemented by exposure visits in Armenia and abroad.

To ensure the implementation of community social plans, the project launched sub-grant schemes for local CSOs, while also supporting municipalities to take a stronger role in co-financing and sustaining services. This combination of participatory governance, CSO empowerment and municipal investment laid the foundation for a resilient and locally owned social service system in Syunik.

Project results:

Social Commissions were established in all seven extended communities of Syunik and integrated into municipal structures, creating formal mechanisms for participatory planning and oversight of social services.

Commission members, together with municipal authorities, developed and secured approval of evidence-based community Social Plans tailored to local needs and aligned with national policy priorities.

Capacity of Social Commission members was significantly strengthened through tailored training on social policy, community engagement and data-driven decision-making, as well as study visits in Armenia and abroad to learn from successful service models.

In line with social plans developed, thirteen CSOs were awarded sub-grants, enabling the launch of essential and innovative community services such as home care for the elderly, day care for children, social taxi services for people with mobility challenges, home adaptations for children with disabilities and community houses for people with mental and psychological conditions.

New models of cooperation between municipalities and CSOs were introduced, including rent-free provision of municipal premises for service delivery and co-financing of social workers, reinforcing the long-term institutionalization of community-based services.

Local CSOs enhanced their organizational and technical capacities, including progress in the state accreditation process, positioning them as credible providers of social services and partners in policy dialogue.

Vulnerable groups in Syunik, over 1,000 people—including displaced persons, elderly people, persons with disabilities, war veterans and children in difficult circumstances—benefited directly from expanded and improved services, gaining greater access to care, protection and opportunities for social inclusion.

The project contributed to laying the foundation for a systemic shift from short-term, one-off assistance toward sustainable, needs-based social services, strengthening local governance structures and ensuring that community voices inform social protection policies and practices.

Examples of the Impact of PPSI

Georgia

In Georgia, many elderly people, especially in rural areas, live alone, isolated without family, sufficient income and face serious difficulties in self-care. As a result of the participatory planning process in Zugdidi, assistance to elderly people was identified as a priority and to improve the quality of life of elderly people in the Zugdidi municipality, the Social Department of Zugdidi Municipality City Hall has launched an initiative – “[Mobile Care Group for the Elderly](#)”. The initiative provides services to the elderly by a mobile team in a minibus equipped with a water tank, washing machine and cabinets. This mobile team includes a medical worker, a cleaner, a driver and youth volunteers. The mobile



team pays home visits to pre-selected isolated elderly clients and helps them with health and hygiene conditions, maintenance of their living environment and houses. Thirty elderly service users living alone were selected from 48 villages of the Zugdidi municipality. At the end of the project the municipality took over the service completely and is now serving over 100 elderly people. Also, the private sector started contributing, e.g. a restaurant is donating food and other products, which are delivered to the target groups.

By introducing a home care service through a multidisciplinary mobile team, elderly people have been provided with care, a safe environment and dignified conditions. This service has become popular and was introduced in other municipalities in Georgia and Armenia.

They supply me with all the medicines; help me cleaning the house and keeping the yard, doing the laundry and personal hygiene, even hair and manicure... They come once a week, and I am always looking forward to their visit. Sometimes just having someone around to say a word is the best treatment.

Zugdidi municipality, elderly person living on their own, user of the home care service



Roundtable on Language Rights Report in Leposavić, Kosovo, Oct. 12, 2022
PIN Kosovo.

Kosovo

Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo face many problems in the area of integration, employment, social inclusion and education. One social phenomenon that worries the families of the marginalized groups is child delinquency (including drug abuse, school abandonment, delinquent behaviour, begging in the streets). Families whose children face this problem often do not know how to deal with it and neither do the responsible institutions.

As a result of prioritizing this issue by the social inclusion task force in Fushe Kosova in its social inclusion action plan, a group called Young Advocates was supported by a small grant allocated by PIN and the Fushe Kosova municipality. The group started cooperation with the Social Work Centre and assisted by a psychologist they approached over 50 families in 6 months. This initiative helped 15 families facing issues related to child delinquency to start working with the psychologist and understand the root causes contributing to this behaviour, providing them with counselling and other services provided by NGOs or the Social Work Centre.

Armenia

In the remote communities of Armenia's Syunik region, many families face daily struggles to access the support they need. For parents of children with developmental needs, the challenge is even greater. Essential services such as speech therapy or psychological counselling were only available in distant towns, requiring long and costly journeys that few could manage.

As part of 17 initiatives launched under the project, the NGO **Inclusive Armenia** established the "SAFE" Child Development Centre in municipality of Kajaran. The Centre, created in line with the Municipality's social plan developed by the local Social Commission, provides professional support for children aged 1.5 to 18, including those with developmental needs. A dedicated team—comprising a psychologist, pedagogue, speech therapist, and social worker—offers free socio-psychological, behavioural, emotional, and speech therapy services. The centre also organises parenting sessions, strengthening family resilience and creating a more supportive environment for children.

For families like those of three-year-old Hayk, the centre has been life-changing. His mother, Armine, shares:

By grounding new services in community-driven plans, the project ensures that children and families in Syunik receive care that is both relevant and sustainable, paving the way for greater inclusion and dignity.

Hayk is strong—and so am I. Now that the results are more visible, it has become easier for me. At first, it was challenging because there was no clear progress.

Armine, mother of Hayk, service users of the 'SAFE' Child Development Centre

Partnership for Syunik: Kick-off meeting; PIN Archive



How does PPSI Work? – PPSI methodology in few steps

PIN has defined several core steps within the PPSI methodology:

→ Defining the territorial scope:

- Define which territorial unit is most relevant for such a process considering administrative units, decision-making authority, mechanisms of financing, of policies and services.

→ Ensuring the support of relevant actors for the process:

- Before starting, make sure that authorities and other actors are interested and will support and engage in the process.
- Reach out to various actors whose involvement and support is important in the planning process and try to gain their support for the process, especially social service providers and their clients, civil society and community organizations, representatives and staff of authorities, their respective councils, and committees.

→ Coordination of the planning process:

- The coordination can be led by a local authority representative or by a non-state actor, in which case the role of each of these two actors and the activities to be undertaken by each are defined in a mutual agreement.
- Subsequently a coordination group should be established, responsible for leading the whole planning process.

→ Forming relevant working structures:

- Based on the local context, the structures/groups in which the planning process will be held should be organized. In small municipalities, there can be just one group carrying out the whole planning process. In larger municipalities, often separate working groups are set up, which are led by coordinators elected from the whole planning group.

→ Informing and engaging the public:

- The general public should be informed about the whole process of participatory planning process, its objectives and opportunities to be involved and influence the process.

→ **Initial fact-finding:**

- A crucial stage in the process is defining the information that needs to be gathered and analysed to inform the planning process. Typically, this includes mapping of the existing social services available, assessment of the needs of vulnerable groups and scope of main social issues identified. Such research should be carried out with the participation of the local actors, so that they build their capacity to gather similar information again in the future.

→ **Capacity strengthening of actors in the process:**

- Capacity strengthening is an important component for actors of the participatory planning process. This may include the capacity to engage in the planning process but also introduce new approaches towards social services and social protection, which are effective elsewhere in similar contexts.

→ **Drafting a strategy of social inclusion and related action plan:**

- Based on the comparison of identified needs, current situation and financial, as well as administrative means, the working structures formulate a strategy of social inclusion (or specifically social service development), which includes the general direction and main priorities of the strategy.
- Based on this strategy, an action plan with specific measures in the form of adequate, realistic and time-bound deliverables is drawn up with allocation of responsibilities for implementation of each measure.

→ **Consultation and approval of the strategy and action plan:**

- The draft strategy and plan are submitted for public consultation with sufficient time and technical means for the public to express their comments.
- After incorporating relevant comments from the consultation by the working structures, the final strategy and plan is submitted for approval to the relevant responsible authorities.

→ **Support of the implementation of the action plan:**

- Due to the fact, that authorities often are short of funds to address even most pressing needs of vulnerable groups, it is advisable for implementing agencies to introduce a grant scheme for the support of the implementation of the measures included in the action plan.

→ **Monitoring, evaluation and follow-up:**

- During action plan implementation, continuous monitoring needs to be in place, so that it is possible to revise the measures in case the context changes or unexpected barriers to implementation arise.
- The strategy and action plan are drawn up for a specific timeframe. At the end of this timeframe, the results of the implementation of the current plan and measures need to be evaluated. The findings are to be used for the assessment of the new situation for a new planning period as part of the cyclical process of participatory planning.



Photo © Tereza Hronová

Best practices and key lessons learnt

- ✓ **Define the scope of the participatory planning process broadly.** In some cases, the participatory process focuses predominantly on planning of social services. The broadening of the focus to the overall policy and strategy of social protection and inclusion on a given territory may bring more impact and substantial improvements, especially so in contexts where few services exist and there are little available funds for them.
- ✓ **Identify** within participatory planning process also relevant **cross-sectoral influences** from other sectors that have impact on vulnerable people, the social protection and inclusion situation. Invite key actors from these sectors as well (e.g. police representatives for safety issues, education, health representatives, water and natural resources management key representatives, etc.).
- ✓ **Ensure representation of interests of a wide range of groups reflecting the diversity of the local population.** Especially ensuring representation of various age groups (youth and elderly), gender balance, representation of distinct social and ethnic groups, specific vulnerabilities such as persons with disabilities.
- ✓ **Embed the participatory planning process in existing legal or policy framework.** In many cases the legal or policy framework envisages some kind of strategies or bodies (committees, task forces, consultation mechanisms) to be established. If the participatory planning process is integrated with such structures, it can make them functional and enhance the sustainability of the effort.
- ✓ **Clearly identify and describe** in the **statute of the working structure** the aim and objectives, powers and functions, composition, structure, principles and work format of the body to ensure efficient functioning.
- ✓ **Monitor the social protection budget spending** by independent civil society actors to complement the implementation of the action plans.



People in Need is a Czech nongovernmental organisation (NGO) that has been providing aid in troubled regions and supporting human rights since 1992. Since then, People in Need has grown into one of the largest NGOs in Central Europe. Today, its work focuses on humanitarian and development aid, advocacy for human rights and democratic freedom, field social work, and education, awareness and information.

peopleinneed.net

Alliance2015 is a strategic partnership of seven European NGOs engaged in humanitarian and development activities. Besides People in Need (Czech Republic), Alliance2015 members are ACTED (France), Cesvi (Italy), Concern Worldwide (Ireland), HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation (Switzerland), Welthungerhilfe (Germany) and Ayuda en Acción (Spain).

alliance2015.org