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D2.3

Skills gap validation report: Report highlighting the results of focus groups and online survey.

INSPIRE PA – INtroducing Social Practices to Improve the
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Glossary of terms

- **Social Innovation** – the process of developing and implementing new solutions to social problems that have a positive impact on communities, institutions, or vulnerable groups. Social innovation involves cross-sector collaboration, civic engagement, and institutional transformation.
- **Co-creation** – a participatory method for developing solutions or public policies through direct involvement of citizens, beneficiaries, NGOs, and other relevant actors, alongside public administration.
- **Transformational Leadership** – a leadership style focused on change, internal motivation, and personal development, inspiring organization members to surpass their limits and contribute to a shared institutional vision.
- **Symbolic Capital** – sociological concept denoting the prestige, recognition, or authority acquired by a person or institution in a given social context. In public administration, symbolic capital influences the legitimacy of proposed innovations.
- **Reflexive Administration** – an administration capable of critically analyzing its own practices, adapting in real-time to citizens' needs, and learning from institutional failures.
- **Participatory Governance** – a model of decision-making in public administration that involves social actors (citizens, NGOs, businesses, etc.) in deliberation, planning, and monitoring of public policies.
- **Organizational Self-Assessment** – an internal process by which a public institution systematically reflects on its performance, skills, limitations, and development potential.
- **Institutional Coherence** – the degree of alignment between an institution's discourse, strategies, and practices; internal consistency of its policies, procedures, and promoted values.

- **Psychological Contract** – a set of mutual, implicit expectations between employee and institution that influence commitment, motivation, and job satisfaction.
- **Methodological Triangulation** – the combined use of multiple research methods (e.g., questionnaire, focus group, interview) to obtain a more complete and valid picture of a complex phenomenon.
- **Modular Curriculum** – a flexible training structure organized into autonomous or complementary modules, allowing educational pathways to be adapted to participants' needs and levels.
- **Institutional Ecosystem** – the totality of conditions, relationships, formal and informal rules that influence the functioning and adaptive capacity of a public institution.

List of abbreviations

- **INSPIRE PA** – Introducing Social Practices to Improve the Resilience of Public Administration
- **AMR** – Association of Romanian Municipalities
- **EU** – European Union
- **VET** – Vocational Education and Training
- **SIO** – Social Innovation Officer

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1. Introduction

1.1. General context of the INSPIRE PA project

The **INSPIRE PA** project (*Introducing Social Practices to Improve the Resilience of Public Administrations*) is part of the **Erasmus+ programme**, under **Key Action KA220-VET**, which supports cooperation partnerships in the field of vocational education and training. The initiative brings together organizations from **Italy, Greece, and Romania**, with the aim of supporting the transformation of European public administration into a **proactive actor in social innovation**.

In response to the growing need for institutional adaptation to **demographic, climate, and technological changes**, INSPIRE PA proposes the introduction of a new role within public administrations: the **Social Innovation Officer**. This professional profile will be supported by a **certified curriculum**, developed through a rigorous process of **research, mapping of best practices, and analysis of training needs**.

The project relies on **collaboration among local public authorities, vocational training organizations, universities, and civil society actors** to create an **active community of practice** in the field of social innovation. Through this approach, INSPIRE PA seeks to **enhance the quality of public services**, to **stimulate systems thinking in the development of local policies**, and to **promote citizen participation** in decision-making processes.

1.2. The role of AMR and the purpose of the study

Within the project, the **Association of Romanian Municipalities (AMR)** has assumed, as a partner, a **strategic role in strengthening the capacity of local public administrations in Romania** to integrate social innovation into institutional and decision-making processes. To this end, AMR conducted a study, **a key activity within Work Package 2 (WP2)**, focused on the **validation of skills gaps** among public officials in relation to social innovation practices.

This activity is **crucial for aligning the content of the future curriculum** with the actual needs identified among public administration professionals.

Thus, the study carried out by AMR not only contributes to achieving the objectives of the **INSPIRE PA project**, but also supports the **modernization and increased resilience of local public administration in Italy, Greece, and Romania**, by promoting **innovative, citizen-centered competencies** and by reinforcing the capacity of local government to become an **active actor in social innovation across Europe**.

1.3. Rationale: the need for innovative skills in public administration

European public administrations are currently facing a multitude of complex challenges, stemming from social crises, digital and ecological transitions, rising citizen expectations, and the growing need to enhance institutional resilience. In this context, the ability of public officials to adopt and implement innovative solutions has become a key condition for the modernization and increased efficiency of public services.

However, in many local administrations, **competencies related to social innovation, such as systems thinking, co-creation with local actors, participatory policy design, social impact assessment, and collaborative management, are either absent or underdeveloped**. The lack of adapted curricular frameworks, specialized continuous training programs, and mechanisms for the recognition of such competencies contributes to the persistence of a **traditional model of governance**, one that is rigid and insufficiently connected to community needs.

It is therefore imperative to develop relevant training tools that are **empirically validated and adaptable** to different institutional contexts. **INSPIRE PA addresses this need by developing a certified curriculum for the role of Social Innovation Officer**, a new professional profile designed to support local administrations in transitioning toward models of participatory, innovative governance that are focused on social impact.

The study coordinated by AMR contributes directly to this objective by **documenting existing skills gaps** and providing a **scientific foundation for the**

real training needs of public officials. This endeavor is essential not only for the success of the INSPIRE PA project, but also for broader efforts toward the **professionalization and transformation of the public sector across Europe**.

The results of the AMR study will be used by the entire INSPIRE PA consortium to:

- Align the content of the curriculum with the real needs of public officials;
- Establish the methodological foundations for the certification scheme of the Social Innovation Officer;
- Contribute to improving the quality and relevance of continuous professional training in local public administration;
- Support a common European approach to developing competencies for social innovation in the public sector.

Thus, the study conducted by AMR not only supports the achievement of the INSPIRE PA project's goals, but also contributes to the **modernization and resilience-building of Romania's local public administration**, by promoting **innovative, citizen-centered competencies**, and by reinforcing the capacity of local authorities to become **active agents of social innovation in Europe**.

2. Study objectives and methodology

2.1. Study objectives

The study coordinated by **AMR** within the **INSPIRE PA** project has the primary objective of **identifying and validating skills gaps in the field of social innovation within local public administration**. This endeavor supports the development of a **certified curriculum for the Social Innovation Officer role**, tailored to the actual needs of public officials.

General objectives and their corresponding specific objectives:

- **Establishing an overview of the current level of competencies related to social innovation in local administrations**

Specific objective: Investigating perceptions and experiences related to social innovation within public administrations in **Romania, Italy, and Greece.**

- **Identifying training needs through the organization of national focus groups**

Specific objectives:

- a. Organizing three focus groups (one in each of Romania, Italy, and Greece), each with a minimum of 10 public officials;
- b. Identifying both existing and lacking competencies among public servants;
- c. Collecting relevant data using qualitative research methods.

- **Expanding the analytical base through an online questionnaire conducted at the European level**

Specific objective:

- a. Implementing an online survey targeting public administrations across the EU, with a minimum of 60 respondents;
- b. Collecting relevant data using quantitative research methods.

- **Generating a consolidated report with conclusions and recommendations for the training program development**

Specific objective:

- a. Conducting an integrated analysis of the collected data and formulating recommendations to inform the structure and content of the professional training program.

2.2. Research methodology

To achieve the proposed objectives, the study adopts a **mixed research design**, combining **qualitative methods** (focus groups) with **quantitative methods** (online survey). This approach enables both an in-depth exploration and a broader generalization of findings based on a larger sample. The qualitative component allows for a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and needs, while the quantitative component ensures wider coverage and the ability

to analyze significant trends and correlations at the European level. The choice of this mixed methodology guarantees the **practical relevance** and **scientific validity** of the conclusions formulated.

Methodological steps:

- **Defining the research objectives and data collection tools** – drafting the interview guide for focus groups and the online questionnaire;
- **Conducting the focus groups** – one national focus group in each of Italy, Greece and Romania, with a minimum of 10 public officials per country;
- **Launching and collecting data via the online survey** – administered at the European level, with a target of at least 60 respondents;
- **Integrated analysis of the collected data** – triangulating qualitative and quantitative results to identify key themes and skills gaps;
- **Drafting the synthesis report** – a final document that will support the development of the content and methodology of the INSPIRE PA Curriculum.

This approach ensures not only the **relevance and validity** of the results but also the **transferability of conclusions**.

3. Focus groups: qualitative exploration of needs and perceptions

The methodology for organizing the focus groups was designed to **validate skills gaps within European public administrations** in the field of social innovation. It was implemented consistently across the three participating countries, **Italy, Greece and Romania**, in order to ensure **transnational comparability and relevance**.

Specific methodological objectives included:

- Identifying challenges and barriers in the implementation of social innovation in public administration;
- Gathering perceptions regarding the essential competencies required for the **Social Innovation Officer** role;
- Validating professional training needs;

- Assessing preferred educational formats and content;
- Collecting examples of good practices and systemic obstacles.

Target group: a minimum of 10 participants per country, representing various roles, **directors, public officials, experts, and operational staff** from local and regional public institutions.

Total targeted participants: minimum 30.

Format: online

Duration: 90 minutes

Focus group structure:

- **Introduction (10 min):** methodological explanations, confidentiality, and the opening question: *“What does social innovation mean to you in a professional context?”*
- **Needs and challenges (30 min):** exploration of barriers and relevant examples;
- **Validation of skills gaps (30 min):** discussion on training, required skills, and direct experiences;
- **Identification of training needs (30 min):** preferred methods, relevant content, and practical applicability;
- **Closing and feedback (20 min):** conclusions, reflections, and suggestions for the curriculum.

Tools: a shared discussion guide, observation notes, recordings, full transcripts, **thematic analysis using both inductive and deductive coding**, and transnational comparability.

This approach enabled the development of a **deep qualitative perspective on the relationship between institutional context, individual motivation, and the actual learning needs** of public officials involved in social innovation.

3.1. Case Study: Romania

The focus group organized in Romania within the INSPIRE PA project brought together 15 participants from local public administration, representing a variety of roles (civil servants, service managers, European project coordinators) from municipalities and the NGO sector. The event was held online, following the standardized methodology, with a duration of 90 minutes.

The concept of social innovation

From the outset, participants expressed divergent definitions of "social innovation," associating it with European projects, community initiatives, or institutional reforms. This plurality of meanings reflects both the absence of a consolidated organizational culture around the concept and the operational flexibility of the notion in different contexts.

"Social innovation is a fancy word, but in the end, it's about making things work better without always waiting for directions from the central level."
(participant, Romanian local public administration)

This semantic ambiguity is not necessarily a sign of conceptual confusion but rather evidence of how social innovation is perceived as contextual, pragmatic, and often emergent, rather than normatively defined. In the absence of an officially institutionalized definition, public officials interpret the concept based on their own professional experiences, which can lead to both communication barriers between institutions and opportunities for local adaptation. The risk, in this case, is that social innovation may be confused with any form of "procedural novelty," and the absence of a shared learning base and exchange of best practices may lead to fragmented innovation efforts.

Structural and cultural obstacles

Participants frequently mentioned bureaucratic difficulties, lack of piloting procedures, and managerial reluctance to take risks:

"We have no space for piloting social innovation projects. If you want to try something new, you must be ready to take the risk of being held accountable." (participant, Romanian local public administration)

They also pointed out persistent blockages in collaboration between departments and institutions, as well as discrepancies in priorities and perspectives between hierarchical levels. Although many institutions officially support innovation, in practice, civil servants indicated that they face rigid regulations, cumbersome procedures, and an internal framework that limits professional autonomy. Internal procedures generally involve multiple approvals, contradictory interpretations of regulations, and a lack of functional autonomy for operational staff. Initiatives outside administrative routine are often seen as risky or inappropriate in the absence of formal support and validation mechanisms.

In addition to structural barriers, cultural obstacles were also identified, such as fear of mistakes, lack of encouragement for initiative, and an excessive focus on formal task compliance at the expense of efficiency or social impact. These traits contribute to a professional environment where conformity is valued more than creativity, and change is viewed with suspicion.

These findings highlight the need for reform both in terms of internal regulation and organizational culture. The introduction of the Social Innovation Officer role will require not only appropriate professional training but also a more flexible institutional framework that allows for the testing of new solutions, supports intersectoral cooperation, and encourages accountable professional initiative. Only in such a context can an environment conducive to authentic innovation in the public sector develop.

The need for a community collaboration infrastructure

Experiences related to the Ukrainian refugee crisis or the implementation of social services in partnership with UNICEF illustrated the administration's capacity to respond creatively and adaptively in crisis situations. However, these examples were seen more as exceptions than standardized practices.

"We mobilize when there's external pressure, but otherwise, we just go around in circles within the rigid framework of job descriptions." (participant, Romanian local public administration)

Participants emphasized that these initiatives succeeded mainly due to ad-hoc partnerships, generated by urgency and public pressure, rather than through a pre-existing institutional framework that facilitates cooperation between the public sector, NGOs, academia, and the private sector.

In the absence of a clearly defined collaboration infrastructure, the exchange of resources, best practices, and expertise among local actors remains random, dependent on motivated individuals rather than predictable and replicable institutional mechanisms. This reliance on individual initiatives over institutionalized procedures creates vulnerability and fragility in the continuity of social interventions.

Participants highlighted the need to develop local-level platforms for dialogue and action, bringing together the administration, civil society, and other relevant institutions consistently, not just in times of crisis. They also discussed the need for clear rules of collaboration, transparent procedures for initiating partnerships, and administrative and legal support for public officials coordinating such processes.

From the perspective of designing a curriculum for the Social Innovation Officer, these findings point to the need to include competencies related to mobilizing local actors, managing intersectoral partnerships, collaborative negotiation, and facilitating participatory processes. Only by developing such skills, and having an administrative framework supportive of collaboration, can a local ecosystem capable of sustaining social innovation in a lasting way be created.

Defining the role of the social innovation officer

Participants agreed on the idea of a Social Innovation Officer as a transversal role, requiring both social and legal expertise as well as advanced interpersonal skills: coordination, negotiation, diplomacy, empathy.

"We need someone who understands the field, has access to information, and legitimacy in dialogue with colleagues and the community."
(participant, Romanian local public administration)

Discussions highlighted that this role cannot be reduced to a technical or operational function but should be strategically positioned between decision-making and operational levels. It must act as an interface between the administration and the community, capable of mediating interests, facilitating collaboration, and leading incremental or systemic change processes.

Participants identified several essential competencies for this role:

- Understanding the legal framework and social policies;
- Critical analysis of institutional and community contexts;
- Strategic communication and networking skills;
- Experience in attracting and managing resources (including EU funds);
- Digital skills applied to social innovation;
- Intercultural sensitivity and social equity;
- The ability to build trust and act as an informal leader.

They also emphasized the need for a structured training process, in which the Social Innovation Officer is not only a project specialist but also a professional with a systemic vision of social change in administration.

In this sense, the proposed role implies institutional repositioning: from a support or implementation function to a strategic one, with responsibilities in diagnosis, innovation, facilitation, and integration. This vision requires not only a revised job description but also formal recognition within the organizational structure of local public administration.

Defining such a profile, supported by a coherent, modular curriculum adapted to different levels of experience, is a key prerequisite for the professionalization of the role and its effectiveness in promoting social innovation at the local level.

Training Perspectives

The preferred format was hybrid and practice-oriented, emphasizing simulations, case studies, and peer learning. Theoretical lectures were dismissed as ineffective in relation to the daily realities of administration.

"We don't need PowerPoint slides with definitions, but simulation exercises, idea exchanges with other municipalities, and concrete cases from the country or the EU." (participant, Romanian local public administration)

Participants advocated for a practice-centered learning model, focusing on experience sharing, real-life case analysis, and inter-institutional collaboration. The advantages of a modular, flexible format were emphasized, one that allows for the personalization of the training path based on individual needs and the organizational context of each participant.

Clear expectations were expressed regarding interactivity, the opportunity to learn from peers in other administrations, and the need for formative, not punitive, assessment focused on reflection and applicability.

The need for a solid, though not exclusive, digital component was also noted, meaning that online resources should be complemented with face-to-face sessions, mentoring, or team projects. The proposal for a pilot program was positively received, with an emphasis on the importance of real-time feedback collection and continuous adaptation of content and methods.

"A training program must be alive, evolving along with the participants' needs and the realities on the ground." (participant, Romanian local public administration)

Conclusions

The focus group conducted in Romania provided a complex, nuanced, and deeply contextualized view of the challenges and potential related to the introduction of the Social Innovation Officer role in local public administration. Participants

demonstrated a solid understanding of internal administrative dynamics and expressed genuine concern for improving the relationship between institutions and communities, particularly in the areas of social services and local governance.

Key conclusions include:

- Social innovation is perceived as a contextual practice rather than a well-defined theoretical concept. This ambiguity offers opportunities for adaptation but also risks incoherence in implementation. Conceptual clarity is a prerequisite for the professionalization of the proposed role.
- Current institutional structures are perceived as inhibiting initiative due to rigid regulations, the absence of piloting mechanisms, and an organizational culture oriented toward compliance. Participants frequently expressed doubt in the administration's ability to support authentic change without systemic reforms.
- Interinstitutional and civil society collaboration remains limited, although local administrations have shown remarkable adaptive and mobilization capacities during crises (e.g., refugee response, UNICEF partnerships). These examples confirm that social innovation is possible but needs formal infrastructures and clear procedures to become sustainable.
- The Social Innovation Officer profile outlined by participants is complex, combining legal and social knowledge with leadership, negotiation, strategic communication, and community sensitivity. This is not merely a technical role, but one that serves as a connector between the institution, citizens, and local support networks.
- Professional training is considered essential for the success of this role, but participants emphasized its applied, modular nature tailored to real-world conditions. Purely theoretical or formal approaches were rejected in favor of participatory, interactive ones supported by mentoring and collaborative learning.

Overall, the focus group confirmed the need for a **systemic and coherent educational intervention**, as well as a **parallel organizational transformation**. Social innovation cannot be activated solely through the development of individual

competencies; it requires a reconfigured institutional ecosystem that fosters initiative, values collaboration, and allows safe spaces for experimentation. This conclusion underscores that the role of the Social Innovation Officer should not be viewed in isolation but as part of a broader process of administrative modernization and a reimagining of the relationship between state and citizen, in line with a socially impactful public service logic.

3.2. Case Study: Italy

The focus group in Italy took place on April 14, 2024, organized online by Casa Netural and Intellera Consulting, within the INSPIRE PA European project. Twelve public officials from local and regional administrations participated, with experience in youth policies, social services, urban planning, education, European projects, and innovation.

The Concept of Social Innovation

Participants offered a series of complementary interpretations of social innovation, indicating it should not be reduced to digital or procedural innovation. Recurring terms such as intersectoral collaboration, active participation, transparency, collective well-being, trust, and adaptability reflected a multidimensional understanding of the concept.

"Social innovation means rebuilding connections between administration and citizens, rethinking the purpose of public services from the perspective of social utility." (Participant, Italian local public administration)

This perception reveals an approach focused on concrete social impact and rebuilding trust between administration and community. Significantly, participants did not define social innovation merely as a set of tools or isolated projects, but as a paradigm shift involving listening to citizens' real needs, co-creating solutions, and continuously adapting services.

While aspiring to flexibility and openness, civil servants also face rigid bureaucratic norms, a lack of formal recognition for innovative efforts, and procedural

uncertainty. A mature conceptual understanding emerged, where innovation is seen as integral to institutional learning and public service modernization.

Structural and Cultural Obstacles

Participants identified major barriers to implementing social innovation:

- Resistance to internal change, illustrated by “this is how it’s always been done,” reflecting rigid and conservative institutional culture;
- Absence of an organizational framework for supporting and formally integrating innovative initiatives;
- Fragmented decision-making processes and inefficient communication between services;
- Lack of consistent political support, generating uncertainty for medium- and long-term implementation.

"We have excellent projects, but if the administration doesn't politically support them, they get stuck in bureaucracy." (participant, Italian local public administration)

Frustration was evident regarding the gap between innovative ideas and the constraints of the administrative system. Innovation is often driven by the personal commitment of a few individuals or by temporary political agendas, rather than being systematically supported by institutional structures. Differences between large urban and smaller local administrations, both in capacity and openness to innovation, were highlighted.

Discrepancies between executive staff and decision-makers were also seen as obstacles to consistent implementation.

This led to the proposal that the Social Innovation Officer should have a transversal and autonomous status, facilitating cross-departmental dialogue, identifying systemic blockages, and creating functional connections between strategic planning and execution.

The Need for a Community Collaboration Infrastructure

While positive collaborative experiences with universities and NGOs were mentioned, these were perceived as isolated episodes lacking institutional continuity.

"We have excellent collaborations with universities or local associations, but there is no framework to turn them into systematic practices. Everything depends on people and circumstances." (participant, Italian local public administration)

The absence of formalized partnerships was a major cause of discontinuity. Without clear protocols, a local innovation strategy, or designated staff responsible for external collaboration, multi-actor initiatives are often underutilized or blocked.

Participants stressed that social innovation requires a collaborative logic involving community engagement, co-creation of policies, and shared responsibilities. Without such infrastructure, public administration risks operating in an autoreferential mode, disconnected from citizens' real needs.

Structured dialogue mechanisms, like civic labs, consultative councils, or digital participation platforms, were recommended.

"We need stable spaces for interaction between administration and society. Without this dialogue, any innovation risks becoming formalism." (participant, Italian local public administration)

Defining the Role of the Social Innovation Officer

Participants considered the Social Innovation Officer role essential, as innovation currently depends on unsupported individual initiatives.

"We need someone who doesn't just write projects, but builds bridges between people, ideas, and structures. An architect of social transformation in the administration." (participant, Italian local public administration)

The envisioned role is transversal, with strategic and relational dimensions, positioned between institutional leadership and execution. Key functions include:

- Internal facilitation and interdepartmental coordination;
- Initiating participatory processes and co-design with citizens and local actors;
- Interinstitutional mediation and communication;
- Piloting, evaluating, and replicating best practices;
- Raising awareness and training staff toward a culture of openness, learning, and responsibility.

Essential competencies include:

- Understanding legislative processes and relevant regulatory frameworks;
- Social analysis and organizational diagnosis;
- Emotional intelligence and trust-building capacity;
- Knowledge of project financing and resource management;
- Digital skills for collaboration and monitoring.

This role requires recalibrating the HR structure and rethinking the administration's societal role, from compliance-based to transformative.

Training perspectives

Current public sector training offers were seen as outdated and insufficient. Participants advocated for:

- Applied learning based on real cases, comparative studies, and pilot projects;
- Development of interpersonal skills such as collaborative leadership, active listening, empathy, and intersectoral negotiation;
- Hybrid format: online sessions for accessibility, combined with in-person workshops, simulations, and mentoring;
- Peer learning and inter-administration exchanges;
- Reflective tools like learning journals and structured feedback.

Flexibility and modularity were emphasized, allowing personalized learning paths based on individual experience, role, and institutional context. A pilot format with formative evaluation and continuous adjustments based on participant feedback was strongly supported.

Training should not reproduce traditional public sector upskilling but offer a transformative learning experience aligned with institutional change.

Conclusions

The Italian focus group offered deep insights into the current state of social innovation in local public administration and the conditions needed for its professionalization and institutionalization.

Key conclusions:

- Social innovation is seen as a transversal dimension of modernization that requires reconnecting institutions with citizens through co-created, impact-oriented solutions.
- Major obstacles are institutional: lack of piloting mechanisms, internal fragmentation, absence of political support, and defensive culture.
- The Social Innovation Officer role is widely supported, envisioned as a connector and facilitator, integrating legal, social, and managerial expertise.
- Current professional training is inadequate; participants called for modular, applied, and collaborative curricula based on real-world practice.
- Community collaboration is essential but weakly institutionalized; partnerships depend on individuals rather than stable mechanisms.

Overall, the Italian focus group confirms considerable human and professional potential for transforming public administration into an active actor of social innovation. For this potential to be realized, an institutional framework, clear training strategy, and effective new role are essential catalysts for change.

3.3. Case Study: Greece

The focus group organized in Greece within the INSPIRE PA project was conducted online and brought together a representative group of public administration employees, including directors, department heads, digital transformation officers, and executive civil servants.

The concept of social innovation

Participants emphasized that "social innovation" should not be equated with digitalization or technocratic modernization. Instead, they viewed it as a profound paradigm shift in how administrations engage with citizens and communities. Terms such as co-creation, participation, intersectoral collaboration, and public utility frequently emerged in their definitions. Many associated social innovation with collaborative approaches in social policy, education, and urban regeneration.

For some, it meant shifting from top-down decision-making to horizontal, co-created processes, particularly in areas like social services, education, and urban policies. Others described it as a way to break administrative inertia and address complex challenges, such as youth unemployment or digital exclusion, by engaging diverse actors, including civil society, NGOs, and even tech companies. A few participants admitted that, although intrigued by the term, they had not encountered "social innovation" as a formal concept in their daily work, an early indicator of awareness and training gaps.

Structural and cultural obstacles

When asked about challenges to innovation in public administration, participants identified a wide range of structural and cultural obstacles. The most frequently mentioned issue was rigid hierarchy: a deeply entrenched administrative culture that discourages experimentation, relies heavily on formal procedures, and resists change. A director from a regional authority noted that while innovation is encouraged in national policy, local departments often lack the autonomy or resources to act.

The need for a community collaboration infrastructure

Participants also pointed out the lack of interdepartmental collaboration. They described the existence of "silos" within and between public services as a major barrier to developing integrated, human-centered solutions. Additionally, frequent political turnover and leadership changes disrupt public policy continuity, undermining long-term innovation strategies. While there were acknowledgments of progress in digital services, especially the success of platforms like gov.gr, participants were quick to stress that innovation is often conflated with digitalization, neglecting the essential dimensions of social transformation, participatory governance, and impact measurement.

Despite these challenges, positive examples were shared, including pilot initiatives led by innovative municipalities such as civic hackathons, participatory budgeting experiments, and community engagement campaigns for urban green spaces. One participant highlighted the Athens Digital Lab, a hub managed by the City of Athens in partnership with COSMOTE and Nokia, as a best practice where co-created solutions are tested directly in municipal services. However, such efforts were noted to lack institutionalization, continuity, and broader dissemination.

Participants also referenced social innovation initiatives outside urban centers. Notably, the municipal initiative in the Voio region, especially the shelter for unaccompanied minor girls in Pentalofos, was highlighted for focusing on vulnerable groups and community care, demonstrating bottom-up innovation that addresses both social and demographic challenges in rural areas.

Yet even the most promising local initiatives suffer from lack of institutional embedding and remain isolated from broader learning and policy dissemination processes.

Defining the role of the Social Innovation Officer

The focus group clearly revealed the absence of innovation-oriented competencies within Greek public administrations. Participants identified gaps at both the

individual and institutional levels that hinder the implementation of innovative practices.

At the individual level, many acknowledged having little experience or knowledge of participatory methods, design thinking, or stakeholder engagement tools. At the institutional level, there was a noted lack of understanding in building innovation ecosystems, managing cross-sector collaborations, or measuring social impact effectively.

Regarding how public administrations could cultivate these competencies, participants highlighted the need for formal training frameworks, internal "innovation champions", and active managerial support. Innovation, they argued, should not rely on a few enthusiastic individuals but must be integrated into strategic planning, human resource development, and service delivery.

Participants expressed frustration that digitally competent or innovative employees are often underutilized or discouraged. Young employees with new ideas face skepticism from superiors anchored in traditional approaches. There is almost no recognition or reward for innovation-related skills in recruitment, promotion, or evaluation processes.

When asked about missing knowledge or skills in their teams, participants mentioned:

- Lack of understanding of participatory process management;
- Difficulties in creating agile teams;
- Challenges in involving vulnerable groups in policy making;
- Technical gaps, such as using digital dashboards for performance monitoring or aligning projects with EU social policy frameworks.

Many admitted they did not know how to use public procurement mechanisms to support innovation, despite their potential impact. These deficiencies deeply affect daily operations. Participants noted that their teams often work reactively, not strategically, and that innovative projects are rarely monitored or evaluated for

social value. Staff are overloaded with procedural tasks, reducing both motivation and the space to explore new approaches.

Training perspectives

On what an ideal training program would look like, participants suggested a modular format with short online sessions (2–3 hours), supported by templates, reading materials, and a shared resource platform. They recommended a combination of asynchronous materials (videos, readings, examples) and synchronous interactions (workshops, peer feedback, mentoring). Most emphasized the need for immediate applicability: participants should implement a mini-project, write a reflective report, or test a tool in their department.

They also stressed the importance of managerial support and strategic alignment of training with institutional objectives. Without such integration, even well-designed training might be ignored or forgotten.

Conclusions

The Greek focus group offered a highly contextualized perspective on the dynamics of social innovation in public administration, highlighting both systemic potential and institutional barriers.

On one hand, participants demonstrated a mature conceptual understanding of social innovation, avoiding simplistic digitalization equivalences. Terms like co-creation, intersectoral collaboration, and social utility shaped a complex semantic framework, positioning innovation as a transformation of the relationship between administrations and citizens. This conceptual clarity signals openness to participatory governance and demand-driven public service reconfiguration.

On the other hand, the group highlighted structural and cultural barriers hindering these aspirations. Hierarchical rigidity, lack of interdepartmental collaboration, fragmented decision-making, and political discontinuity were persistent systemic issues. These were compounded by a professional culture that rarely rewards

initiative, and where innovative behaviors are not integrated into evaluation or development systems.

Regarding the Social Innovation Officer profile, participants identified a wide range of necessary competencies, from participatory tools and policy co-design to digital skills and social impact evaluation. These skills are often lacking at both individual and organizational levels, with no coherent framework to systematically build them.

Proposals for training focused on modular, interactive formats emphasizing immediate application and supported by shared platforms. Strategic alignment, managerial involvement, and formal recognition were seen as essential for training to make an impact.

The primary conclusion of this focus group is that social innovation cannot be introduced through isolated interventions or individual voluntarism. It requires institutional support structures, a supportive management culture, and authentic professionalization of emerging roles. The Social Innovation Officer must be conceived not merely as a technical role but as an institutional transformation agent, capable of articulating coherence between local initiatives, national policies, and transnational learning.

3.4. Comparative analysis between the 3 focus groups

The focus groups conducted in Italy, Greece, and Romania within the INSPIRE PA project enabled an in-depth exploration of perceptions, obstacles, and training needs related to social innovation in public administration. While each national context reflects institutional and cultural particularities, the comparative analysis reveals several significant convergences as well as relevant differences for the design of a transnational curriculum tailored to the role of the Social Innovation Officer.

A. The concept of social innovation: between semantic convergence and contextual adaptation

All participants from the three countries associated social innovation with a reconfiguration of the relationship between public administration and citizens, emphasizing ideas such as co-creation, participation, public utility, and intersectoral collaboration. In Romania, the emphasis was placed on civic initiatives and youth engagement; in Italy, on organizational culture transformation and human-centered interaction; and in Greece, on participatory processes and social impact orientation. Despite these contextual nuances, all three cases lacked a formal framework for defining and applying the concept, indicating a shared need for terminological clarification and institutional operationalization.

B. Structural and cultural obstacles: similar barriers, diverse manifestations

All focus groups reported bureaucratic rigidity, lack of piloting frameworks, managerial resistance to change, and administrative fragmentation as major obstacles to implementing social innovation. In Italy, there was an articulated critique of the "we've always done it this way" culture; in Greece, hierarchical rigidity and political discontinuity were cited as key inhibitors; in Romania, institutional resignation and the lack of formal recognition for innovative initiatives were recurring themes. It is evident that current organizational structures do not systematically support innovative behaviors, and innovation remains dependent on isolated individual efforts.

C. The need for a collaboration infrastructure: converging aspirations, fragmented practices

Participants in all three focus groups emphasized the importance of supportive infrastructure for community collaboration, both within the administration and in relation to civil society. In Italy and Greece, remarkable local initiatives (Voio, Athens; Digital Lab, Torino) were mentioned but lacked mechanisms for scaling and dissemination. In Romania, innovative projects often emerge in partnership with NGOs or international organizations (e.g., UNICEF), but are rarely absorbed by public structures in the long term. This lack of continuity and integration indicates

a systemic institutional vulnerability in consolidating and multiplying good practices.

D. Shaping the social innovation officer profile: convergence of needs and competencies

Across all three countries, participants outlined a convergent profile of the Social Innovation Officer as a transversal role involving:

- Coordination and mediation capacities;
- Knowledge of social policies, law, and digitalization;
- Citizen engagement and participatory facilitation skills;
- Tools for impact assessment and institutional adaptation.

Notably, this role was perceived not only as technical but also as a cultural mediator and organizational facilitator. The position requires strategic placement, formal recognition, and managerial support, being seen as an opportunity to strengthen institutional capacity.

E. Training perspectives: between practical relevance and formal recognition

Participants from all three focus groups rejected theoretical training, preferring practical, modular, interactive formats focused on immediate applicability and collaborative learning. In Romania, there was an emphasis on simulations and peer learning; in Italy, on inter-administration exchanges and mentoring; in Greece, on implementing mini-projects as evaluation tools. There was also strong insistence on managerial involvement in supporting training, as well as the need for certification and formal recognition to foster motivation and professional integration of newly acquired skills.

Focus Group Conclusions The comparative analysis reveals a coherent picture of common challenges in the European public sector: the absence of an institutional culture of social innovation, the lack of a functional training and professional valorization framework, and the need for pivotal actors who connect ideas with organizational reality.

The Social Innovation Officer role is perceived as a systemic response to these issues, but it requires integrated interventions at the level of public policy, organizational culture, and educational infrastructure.

The curriculum developed within the project must therefore reflect not only individual competencies but also the institutional conditions required for them to be activated, valued, and supported over time. This is the key to transitioning from islands of innovation to a European administrative ecosystem centered on social impact, collaboration, and resilience.

4. Online survey analysis

The questionnaire used in this study comprised 27 questions, coherently structured into four thematic sections, each targeting essential dimensions of competencies, perceptions, and the organizational context in which public officials operate. Its structure was designed to allow for an integrated analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, of the degree of institutional preparedness for social innovation.

- **Section I – Demographic and Professional Data (Questions 1–9)** This section aimed to identify the respondent's profile: the country in which they work, gender, age, professional environment (urban/rural), institution, position held, field of activity, years of service, and level of education. The collected data provide a solid basis for correlating perceptions and competencies.
- **Section II – Familiarity, Perceptions, and Attitudes Toward Social Innovation (Questions 10–12)** This part explored the degree of familiarity with the term "social innovation," the level of knowledge of existing initiatives, and perceptions regarding the importance of this type of innovation in shaping public policies. It serves as a transition between the professional profile and the evaluation of competencies, useful for calibrating future training interventions.
- **Section III – Self-Assessment of Competencies (Questions 13–17)** Respondents were invited to assess their own competencies across five key dimensions (analytical, strategic, relational, leadership, and lifelong

learning), each broken down into specific items. A 1 to 5 scale was used (1 = very weak; 5 = very well developed), allowing the identification of perceived gaps and prioritization of training areas.

- **Section IV – Barriers, Training Needs, and Learning Perspectives (Questions 18–27)** This final section examined which competencies are currently missing from training programs, perceived barriers to the adoption of social innovation, the frequency of challenges in this area, preferred training formats, priority topics, willingness to participate in future courses, and knowledge of good practices. The conclusions provide a robust basis for designing a tailored curriculum.

This structure reflects a balanced approach between descriptive aspects ("who are the respondents"), evaluative components ("what do they know and how do they self-assess"), and prospective elements ("what do they need and how can they be supported"). The modular construction of the questionnaire supports the overall goal of the study: developing a training program tailored to the real needs of European public administrations in the field of social innovation.

4.1. Descriptive data: respondents' profile

To validate skill gaps in the field of social innovation within public administration, the INSPIRE PA project collected 226 responses through an online questionnaire distributed among employees in public administrations from both EU member states and other European countries interested in the modernization of public governance.

The research tool was designed to capture both self-assessed competency levels across key social innovation dimensions and perceptions regarding institutional barriers and development opportunities. Responses were collected voluntarily and anonymously, ensuring freedom of expression and honesty.

This section presents the demographic and professional characteristics of respondents, providing essential context for interpreting the data and understanding the institutional and cultural diversity influencing innovation practices in European local administrations.

4.1.1. Geographic distribution

The majority of respondents came from Romania (68.1%), followed by Italy (14.2%) and Greece (12.8%). Other represented countries include Bulgaria, France, Belgium, and Spain. Outside the European Union, responses were also recorded from Turkey. Combined, these countries represent approximately 4.9% of the total.

The number of responses per country is as follows:

- Romania: 154 respondents
- Italy: 32 respondents
- Greece: 29 respondents
- Non-EU (including Turkey): 5 respondents
- Bulgaria: 2 respondents
- France: 2 respondents
- Spain: 1 respondent
- Belgium: 1 respondent

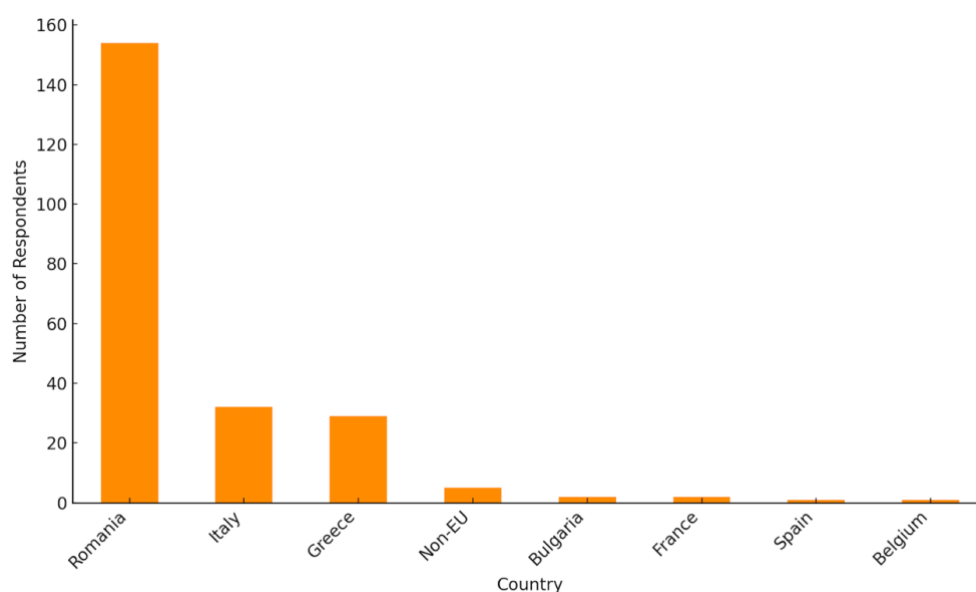


Fig. 1. Respondents by country

This geographical distribution reflects a significant reality:

- The dominance of Romanian respondents (68.1%) indicates a heightened interest and a high level of mobilization among local administrations in this country. It also reflects the essential contribution of AMR, as the coordinating partner of the study, in data collection. Furthermore, it may

point to a greater need for training and adaptation to innovative practices within Romanian public administration.

- Substantial participation from Italy and Greece (14.2% and 12.8%) ensures cultural and institutional diversity, allowing for relevant transnational comparisons regarding barriers, perceptions, and readiness for change.
- The marginal representation of other EU and non-EU states (4.9%), including Turkey, may be interpreted as an emerging interest in social innovation in regions where participatory policies are less institutionalized. At the same time, it offers potential for the future expansion of the project into contexts with distinct institutional challenges.

From a sociological perspective, this distribution supports the idea that social innovation in public administration is an asymmetric process across Europe, currently at different stages of development and adoption, with 8 at the forefront of exploratory interest and reform needs.

4.1.2. Gender of respondents

Among all respondents, 74.3% are women and 25.7% are men. This distribution partially reflects the staffing structure of local public administrations, where female presence is significant.

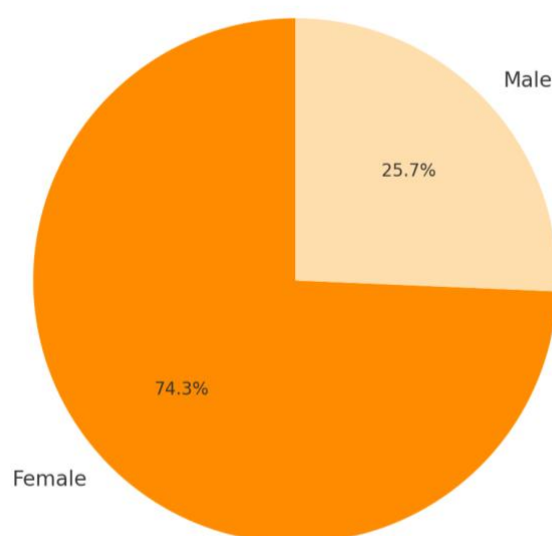


Fig. 2. Respondents by gender

This gender distribution can be interpreted from several sociological perspectives relevant to our study:

- **Actual representativeness in the administrative system:** The ratio faithfully reflects a known trend in the personnel structure of local public administrations, particularly in Eastern and Southern Europe, where operational roles, technical offices, social services, and auxiliary administrative fields are predominantly held by women. This phenomenon points to a feminization of the sector, especially in operational and support functions.
- **Impact on perceptions and organizational values:** The dominant presence of women in the sample is relevant to interpreting dimensions such as empathy, communication, collaboration, and lifelong learning, competencies often associated with a cooperative and relational work style. It may also influence how leadership is perceived, especially in relation to informal authority and openness to participatory innovation.
- **Equity dimension and access to leadership:** Although women are the majority in the system, this does not automatically translate into equality in leadership positions. The study could be complemented with a comparative analysis between gender and job position to assess whether women have proportional access to managerial roles or strategic training opportunities. If not, this disparity may indicate a systemic issue of equity in promotion and professional advancement.
- **Active engagement in training and innovation:** Based on research in the field of public administration, women tend to show a higher willingness for continuous professional learning and adaptation, which may also explain the increased participation rate in the questionnaire. This is a strategic asset for the success of social innovation initiatives and for the development of future Social Innovation Officers.

4.1.3. Age group

The participants largely belong to the professionally active and experienced age segment:

- 37–45 years: 31.9%

- 46–50 years: 21.7%
- 51–56 years: 18.6%
- 31–36 years: 10.2%
- 26–30 years: 6.2%
- 18–25 years: 2.7%
- 57–65 years: 8.8%

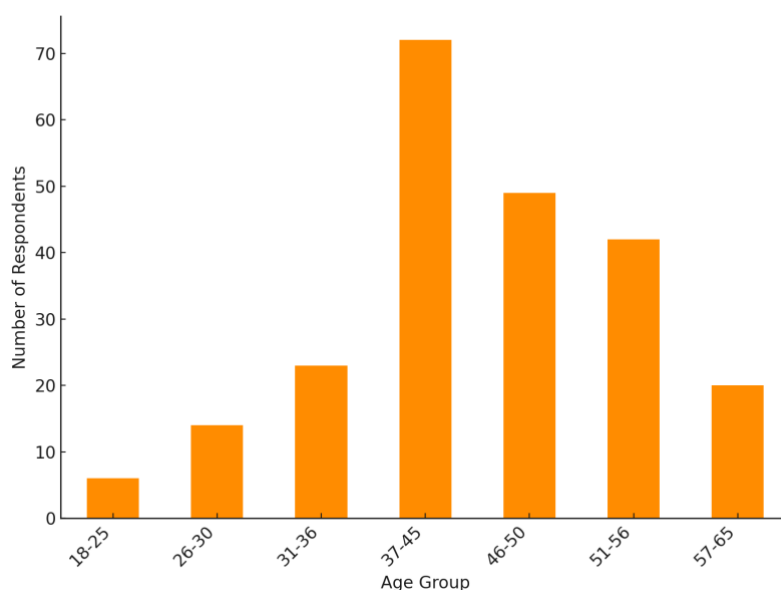


Fig. 3. Respondents by age

This age distribution reveals a dominant concentration in the mid-range of the active working life, with 72.2% of the sample aged between 37 and 56. This segment typically holds consolidated institutional experience and often informal or formal decision-making roles.

This structure provides a solid foundation for analyzing perceptions and training needs, as:

- Respondents in these age groups are likely to have experienced multiple waves of administrative reform and possess a critical understanding of systemic limitations;
- They show openness to training, but demand programs that are relevant, applicable, and professionally recognized;

- The 31–36 age segment (10.2%) serves as a generational bridge, expressing transitional values between conformity and innovative aspirations;
- The low representation of young people (18–30 years – 8.9%) could indicate either a lack of involvement in institutional innovation processes or a systemic issue in attracting and retaining them in the public sector;
- The presence of respondents aged 57–65 (8.8%) provides insight into the resilience and adaptability of staff in the final phase of their careers, often custodians of institutional memory and informal influence.

This age structure enables a differentiated approach to training: one oriented toward consolidation and enhancement for mature groups, and another focused on exploration, mentoring, and integration for younger generations.

4.1.4. Background

Respondents overwhelmingly come from urban environments (94.2%), with only 5.8% working in rural public administrations. This disproportion should be considered when interpreting levels of exposure to innovative practices.

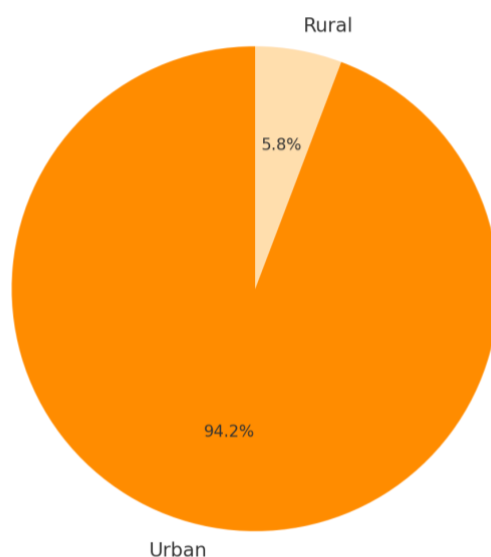


Fig. 4. Respondents by environment

This urban dominance reveals significant institutional and informational polarization in terms of access to innovation and the discourse surrounding administrative change. Several interpretations emerge:

- 1. Unequal access to training and participation opportunities:** Urban public servants generally benefit from denser professional networks, greater access to events, partnerships, EU projects, and digital resources. In contrast, rural administrations, often characterized by limited human and financial resources, face substantial challenges in active engagement with organizational learning or innovation.
- 2. Methodological bias in data collection:** This imbalance may also reflect a limitation in the questionnaire's distribution, emphasizing the need for stratified sampling in future research. Without addressing this tendency, results risk being relevant only to urban models of administration.
- 3. Risk of deepening the urban-rural innovation divide:** If future training programs are based solely on the needs of those already exposed to innovation, rural officials may be further marginalized. It is crucial that the forthcoming curriculum integrates territorial equity, adaptability to resource constraints, solutions for small communities, and scalable models.

In conclusion, this distribution highlights not only an administrative reality but also a systemic challenge for professionalization policies: “how can rural administrations be supported to become not just recipients but also active agents of social innovation?”

4.1.5. Professional position and institutional typology

- Public servant: 70.4%
- Manager/Director: 15.5%
- Public policy expert: 1.8%
- Other roles (including advisors, project coordinators, contractual staff): cumulatively under 10%

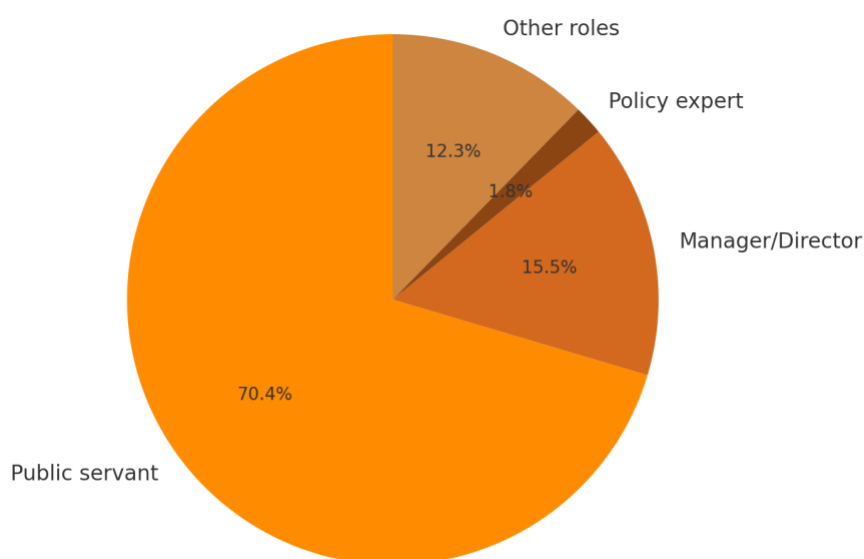


Fig. 5. Respondents by professional position

This distribution of professional positions clearly reflects the predominance of public servants (70.4%), followed distantly by managers and directors (15.5%). The rest of the sample includes specialists, advisors, project coordinators, and contractual staff.

This structure is significant from multiple perspectives:

- 1. Predominance of operational roles:** Most respondents come from the operational level of public administration. These employees frequently face procedural limitations and lack decision-making autonomy. They offer concrete perspectives on daily barriers and professional support needs, often overlooked in reform strategies.
- 2. Underrepresentation of strategic roles:** Managers and directors, though responsible for initiating and coordinating institutional innovation processes, are relatively underrepresented. This proportion may reflect hesitancy in participating in external evaluations, as well as cultural differences where leadership is not always embedded in participatory processes.
- 3. Value of specialist and non-permanent staff participation:** Though fewer in number, the presence of public policy experts, project coordinators, and contractual staff brings valuable diversity for understanding institutional

dynamics. These individuals often work in EU projects or NGO partnerships and may act as innovation vectors, though they frequently lack formal recognition.

- 4. Training engagement:** The professional structure of the sample suggests that the future curriculum should be accessible and relevant particularly to operational staff, while also incorporating leadership components tailored for managers and directors. Despite being fewer in the survey, these roles can act as key change multipliers.

The questionnaire was completed by respondents from a wide range of public institutions: 179 distinct organizations, mostly at the local level, municipalities, local councils, regional coordination structures, or project offices.

This institutional diversity is significant from a dual perspective:

- On one hand, it indicates broad geographic and organizational penetration of the survey, including in small localities and specialized institutions.
- On the other, the fact that most institutions are represented by a single respondent suggests a limitation in performing in-depth organizational analyses, justifying the importance of focus groups for qualitative triangulation.

From a sociological viewpoint, the typological diversity of institutions indicates the potential for adapting the proposed curriculum to different administrative contexts and confirms that the process of social innovation must be calibrated based on each public entity's resources, autonomy, and organizational culture.

4.1.6. Fields of activity

The top five fields in which respondents are active are:

- Administrative: 24.8%
- Project Management: 12.4%
- Social Services and Assistance: 7.5%
- Education and Training: 7.5%
- Financial: 6.6%

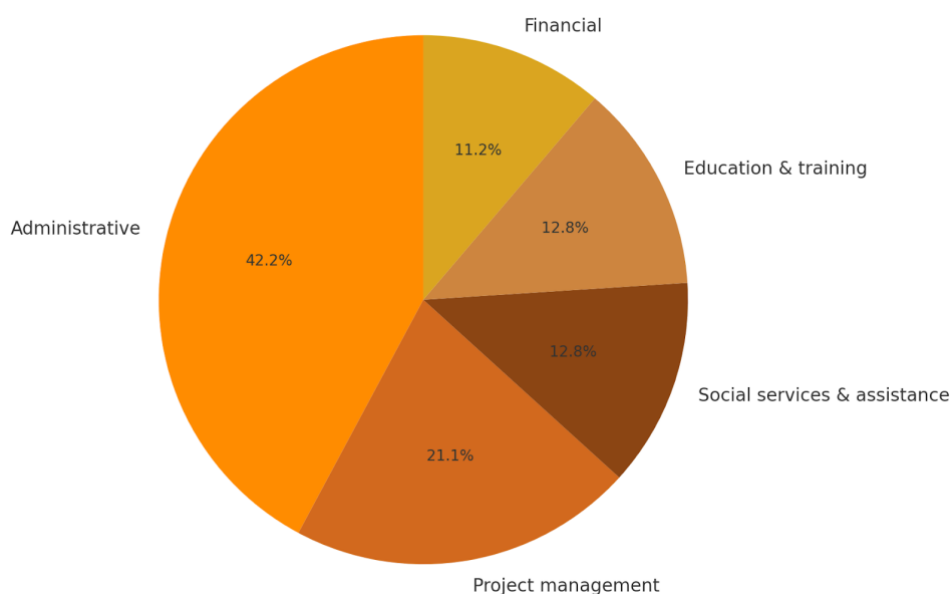


Fig. 6. Distribution of Respondents in the Top Five Fields of Activity

The distribution across fields of activity highlights a significant concentration in administrative functions (24.8%), followed by project management (12.4%), social services, education and training (7.5% each), and the financial sector (6.6%). This configuration is relevant for several analytical directions:

- 1. Prevalence of Administrative Activities:** Respondents working in administrative roles represent a key segment responsible for the operational implementation of public policies. They are often the first to face the effects of institutional changes and are also the most vulnerable to the lack of applied training. Their dominant presence offers an authentic perspective on the bottlenecks and opportunities within the front lines of public administration.
- 2. Strong Representation of Project Management:** The high proportion of respondents involved in project-based activities reflects an emerging trend toward professionalization through external funding, particularly European funds. These individuals may become natural promoters of innovation, given their exposure to European models and interinstitutional collaboration.
- 3. Implications of Social and Educational Fields:** The presence of social services, education, and training among the top activities is relevant, as these are areas with direct citizen interaction and immediate applicability

for social innovation, from participatory educational policies to inclusion-focused interventions.

- 4. The Financial Component—Between Control and Innovation:** Although less represented, the financial domain plays an essential role in supporting innovation processes. Its presence indicates either an interest in or pressure to integrate innovation even in areas typically seen as rigid, yet vital for long-term sustainability.

This professional diversity underscores the need to approach social innovation in an intersectoral manner, adapted to the specificities of each administrative domain, rather than as a generic competence to be uniformly applied.

Of particular note is the significant gap between the administrative field, which accounts for 24.8% of respondents, and the other fields, project management (12.4%), social services (7.5%), education and training (7.5%), and financial (6.6%). Together, these five fields comprise approximately 58.8% of respondents, leaving 41.2% distributed across a wide range of other professional areas, including IT, infrastructure, foreign affairs, environment, culture, and communication.

This distribution reveals a functional polarization: on the one hand, a concentration in administrative support activities points to a structural reliance on bureaucratic processes and compliance; on the other hand, the diversity of the remaining fields indicates a professional fragmentation that may limit cohesion and cross-departmental collaboration in innovation processes.

From a sociological perspective, this dual institutional structure presents both a challenge and an opportunity: the challenge lies in the organizational inertia dominant within administrative functions, while the opportunity lies in the latent professional diversity, which, if activated through internal networks, training, and transversal leadership, can drive genuine transformation within public administration.

Therefore, the Social Innovation Officer role must strategically address both the core of the administrative apparatus and the functional peripheries, where there is greater room for experimentation, collaboration, and openness toward society.

4.1.7. Educational level

The educational profile of the sample is high, distributed as follows:

- Master's degree: 69.5%
- Bachelor's degree: 20.4%
- Doctoral studies: 3.1%
- Other forms of education (secondary, vocational, VET, etc.): under 7%

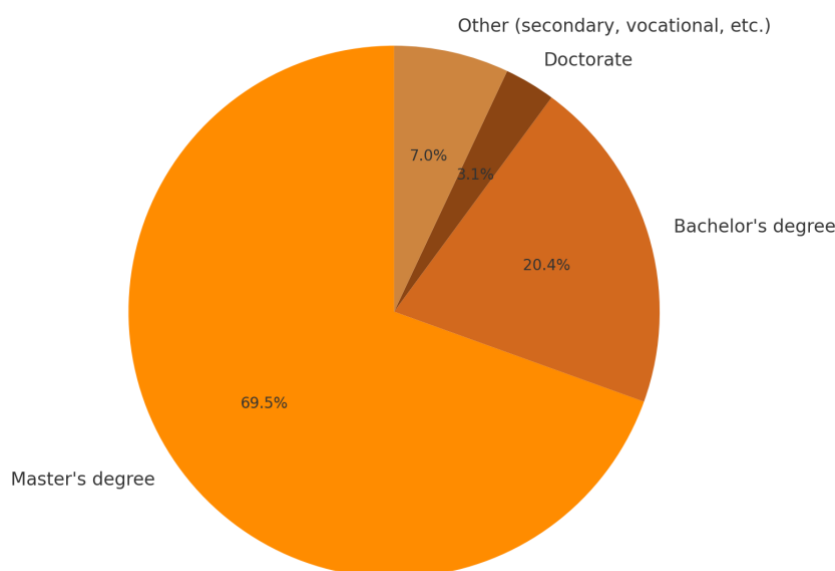


Fig. 7. Educational Background of Respondents

This distribution confirms that respondents possess a solid foundation of knowledge and professional experience, which lends credibility to the perceptions expressed and provides a valid basis for in-depth training needs analysis. Moreover, it suggests the potential profile for the Social Innovation Officer role: a position naturally suited to professionals with a strong theoretical foundation and advanced learning capacity.

This configuration provides several relevant perspectives:

- 1. Reflective and Self-Assessment Capacity:** Respondents with higher education tend to have an enhanced ability to critically analyze institutional structures, grasp concepts associated with social innovation, and reflect realistically on their own competencies. This lends epistemic validity to the responses and supports the coherence of the derived conclusions.
- 2. High Expectations from Professional Training:** A high educational level generally implies more sophisticated expectations regarding training programs: practical content, flexible formats, official recognition, and alignment with professional mobility. Training must meet these standards to be considered relevant and acceptable.
- 3. Risk of Exclusion of Those with Non-Tertiary Education:** Although they represent less than 7% of the sample, employees with secondary or vocational training often perform essential tasks in local administration (e.g., operations, public relations, logistics). Their underrepresentation among respondents may signal a barrier to access to training and decision-making processes, pointing to an equity issue that must be addressed through inclusive methodological and curricular strategies. These officials, often in operational roles or rural settings, risk being excluded from innovation-focused reforms if training remains elitist, academic, and insufficiently nuanced. Sociologically, this educational gap highlights the risk of professional fragmentation within the public sector between those able to participate in innovation processes and those perceived (or perceiving themselves) as outside them. An effective curriculum for the Social Innovation Officer must therefore include mechanisms for accessibility, differentiation, and mentoring, so as not to exacerbate existing cognitive hierarchies.
- 4. Argument for Professionalizing the Social Innovation Officer Role:** The high educational level of those interested in social innovation underscores the opportunity to ground this role in a robust academic framework, possibly linked to universities and European research networks, thereby ensuring formal recognition and a clear professional trajectory.

Moreover, this educational profile validates the opportunity to institutionalize the Social Innovation Officer role within a formal professionalization framework, potentially including European certification, institutional recognition, and alignment with European standards for innovation and public sector leadership competencies.

4.1.8. Years of service in the institution

An analysis of respondents' tenure in their current institutions reveals a significant distribution across professional experience ranges. Based on estimations and the conversion of open answers (e.g., "since 2003" or "working for 15 years"), the structure is as follows:

- 0–5 years: approx. 18%
- 6–10 years: approx. 22%
- 11–15 years: approx. 20%
- 16–20 years: approx. 15%
- 21–25 years: approx. 14%
- More than 25 years: approx. 11%

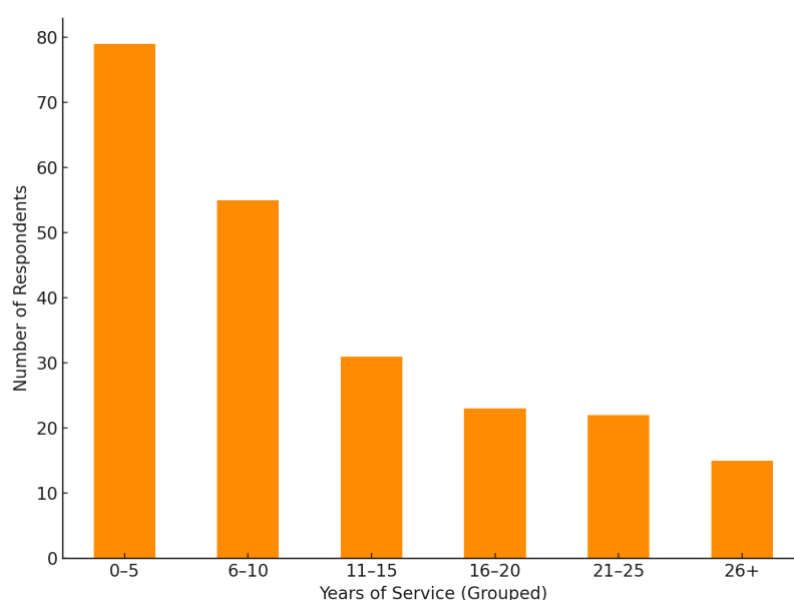


Fig. 8. Years of service

This distribution highlights two dominant segments: on the one hand, a substantial group of employees with up to 10 years of experience (40%), including

both recent hires and mid-career professionals; on the other, a stable core of officials with over 15 years in the same institution, comprising nearly 40% of the sample. Therefore, the data show both a significant presence of long-serving employees and a visible proportion of respondents in the early stages of their careers. This dual polarization suggests an institutional configuration marked by both professional stability and gradual human resource renewal.

From a sociological perspective, long tenure within the same institution indicates accumulated institutional capital but also entrenched organizational routines. Long-serving officials may have a deep understanding of structures and processes, but may also exhibit resistance to change or participatory approaches. Conversely, younger officials tend to bring innovative attitudes and methodological openness, though their limited institutional experience may restrict their impact.

This complementarity between seniority and fresh perspectives should be leveraged in training initiatives: the Social Innovation Officer should not replace these dynamics, but rather mediate them—building bridges between accumulated experience and the need for continuous adaptation. The associated curriculum should include intergenerational collaboration, collaborative learning, and organizational reflection to transform tenure into an advantage in institutional innovation processes.

4.2. Familiarity, perceptions, and attitudes towards social innovation

This thematic analysis is grounded not only in the frequency of responses or quantitative self-assessments, but also in the relational logic between perceptions, organizational contexts, and types of institutional behavior. Through a transversal reading of the data, recurring patterns were identified that reveal how public employees relate to their own competencies and to the potential for innovation within their institutions. The five selected dimensions are not merely a proposed theoretical framework, but correspond to real configurations of existing competence capital, expressed professional aspirations, and perceived barriers. Thus, the analysis focuses on the dynamic interplay between "knowing," "being

able," and "being allowed" to innovate, a central tension in any administrative reform.

The analysis was conducted by correlating answers related to competence levels, perceptions of the importance of social innovation, obstacles to implementation, and expressed training needs. The structure of the analysis follows five main dimensions, which align with the proposed competence framework for the role of Social Innovation Officer.

4.2.1. Level of familiarity with the concept of social innovation

This dimension includes competencies such as critical thinking, the ability to analyze complex information, decision-making in ambiguous institutional contexts, and basic financial management. Although the majority of respondents rated these skills as moderate to high, a closer examination of the responses reveals a latent tension between aspirational and operational levels. Despite moderate and high self-assessments, qualitative analysis highlights persistent deficits in financial literacy and the concrete application of strategic analysis in dynamic institutional settings.

In particular, financial competencies, essential for the sustainability of social initiatives, appear underdeveloped, despite their central role in evaluating the feasibility and impact of public programs. Respondents also report difficulties in integrating analytical approaches into long-term planning, suggesting a shortfall in strategic thinking rather than in day-to-day procedural logic.

This gap can be explained by an institutional climate in which decision-making is often formalized but not internalized, that is, civil servants are encouraged to follow procedures but rarely empowered to exercise analytical autonomy. In this context, the ability to integrate data, assess impact, and prioritize interventions with social added value remains dormant without systematic training.

From a sociological perspective, these findings indicate that public administration operates within a framework focused on compliance and control, to the detriment

of decision-making autonomy and critical reflection. Civil servants are not lacking in analytical potential, but rather in institutional and cultural tools that would enable them to think critically without fear of sanction.

Training programs addressing this dimension must go beyond technical modules to include the development of the ability to understand systemic interdependencies, manage risk and uncertainty, and apply ethical decision-making in public service. Furthermore, training in budget analysis and public resource management must be adapted to local realities and each participant's decision-making level.

To effectively address these realities, a Social Innovation Officer curriculum should incorporate applied training in cost-benefit analysis, systems thinking, strategic scenario planning, and participatory decision-making evaluation. Only by developing this solid cognitive core can the public servant evolve from a policy implementer to an innovation generator.

4.2.2. Knowledge of existing initiatives

To assess the extent to which social innovation is conceptually understood and professionally embraced within public administrations, the questionnaire included a question on respondents' familiarity with the term. Answers were distributed along a scale ranging from "not at all familiar" to "very familiar".

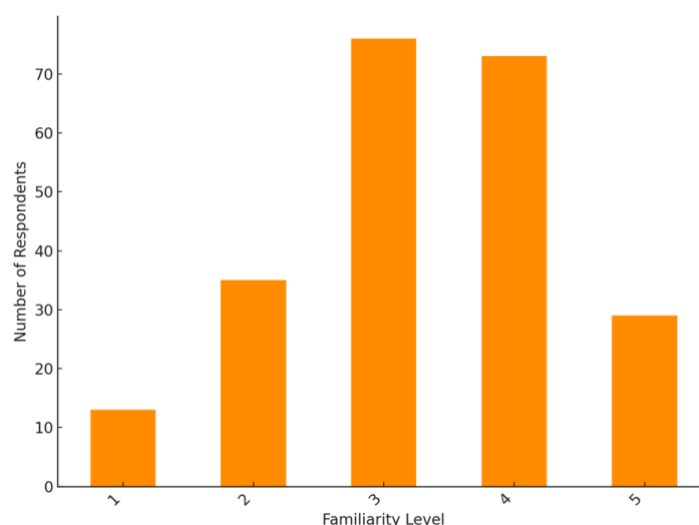


Fig. 9. Respondents' Level of Familiarity with the Concept of Social Innovation

Most respondents reported being moderately or somewhat familiar with the term, suggesting that the concept is present but with uncertain applicability. The proportion of those reporting high familiarity is significantly smaller, indicating that the term is more commonly used in formal contexts or external projects (e.g., EU-funded initiatives) than as part of institutional everyday language.

From a sociological perspective, this reflects a dissonance between the vocabulary of innovation and actual organizational practices. The term "social innovation" circulates professionally as a “valuable label” without being embedded in the professional culture of local administrations.

This observation supports the idea that any training targeting future Social Innovation Officers must include not only the development of skills but also conceptual literacy and the contextualization of social innovation as a strategic tool in public service.

4.2.3. Knowledge of existing social innovation initiatives in public administration

To evaluate not only conceptual familiarity but also practical exposure, the questionnaire included a question regarding the extent to which respondents were aware of existing social innovation initiatives already implemented in the public sector. The distribution of answers shows that most respondents rate their knowledge as moderate or low, with only a small percentage indicating that they are “very well informed”.

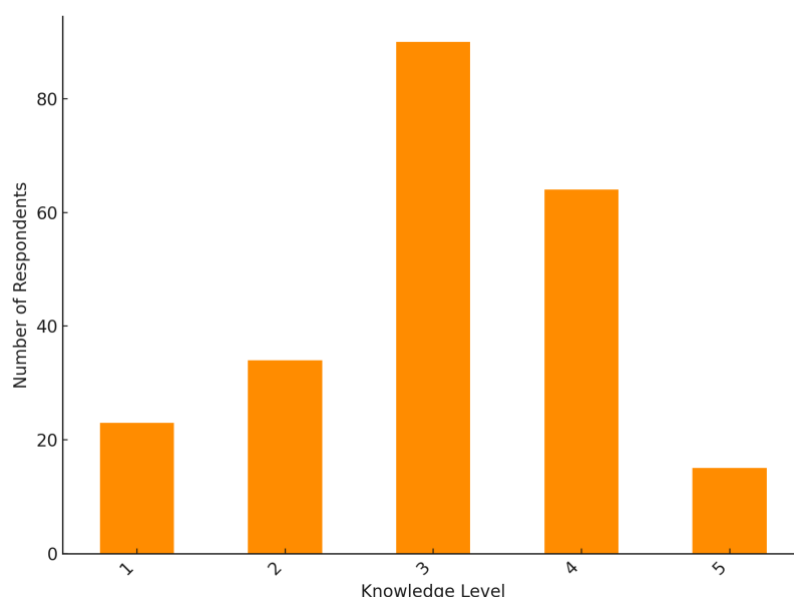


Fig. 10. Respondents' Level of Familiarity with the Concept of Social Innovation

This knowledge gap highlights an issue of institutional dissemination and visibility: even when innovative projects have been launched at the local or regional level, they are often neither recognized nor shared, nor integrated into a collective professional memory. Instead of serving as inspirational references or sources of organizational learning, these initiatives remain isolated or invisible.

Sociologically, this reflects the absence of an institutional culture of sharing innovation. The lack of internal dissemination mechanisms and spaces for interinstitutional reflection leads to fragmented innovation, dependent on individuals and specific contexts. Without collective capitalization on experience, public administrations risk repeating the same mistakes and remaining locked in a perpetually restarting present.

To counteract this tendency, training for Social Innovation Officers should include modules on analyzing and documenting best practices, as well as internal dissemination tools and institutional storytelling. Only through recognition and valorization of what works can an administrative ecosystem be built in which innovation is cumulative and reproducible.

4.2.4. Perceived importance of social innovation

Responses to the question about the role of social innovation in public policy design offer a clear picture of how public servants perceive its strategic value. The overwhelming majority of respondents consider this process important or very important, reflecting a widespread conceptual openness across the European public sector.

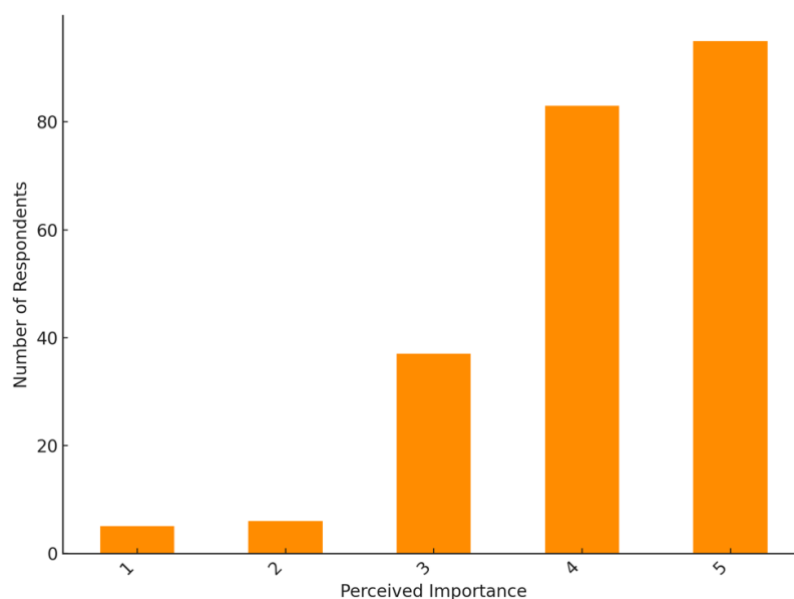


Fig. 11. Perceived Importance of Social Innovation in Shaping Public Policies

This positive trend indicates that, despite structural or cultural barriers, social innovation is recognized as a systemic necessity, not merely an ideological option or the prerogative of NGOs. This perception can serve as a foundation for implementing the Social Innovation Officer role, as it demonstrates that the idea already holds legitimacy within public administration.

From a sociological standpoint, innovation is no longer perceived exclusively as an exceptional act or an external intervention (through projects), but rather as an intrinsic function of modern administration, linked to citizen responsibility, institutional efficiency, and the capacity to adapt to change. This attitudinal maturity creates the conditions for training in innovation to be received not as an “external pressure,” but as a natural response to contemporary expectations of the public sector.

4.3. Self-assessment of skills relevant to the Social Innovation Officer

The assessment of competencies in this study was not conducted in a generic manner, but structured across five key dimensions essential to the Social Innovation Officer role, each with a specific set of competencies:

- **Analytical and decision-making competencies** (e.g., critical thinking, information analysis, decision-making, financial literacy)
- **Strategic and innovation competencies** (e.g., creativity, adaptability, planning)
- **Relational and communication competencies** (e.g., negotiation, collaboration, relationship management)
- **Leadership and management competencies** (e.g., resilience, team coordination, strategic planning)
- **Reflective and lifelong learning competencies** (e.g., curiosity, self-assessment, learning from failure)

This approach has strong methodological and sociological grounding. Rather than using a general self-assessment model, the breakdown by dimension enabled:

- a precise diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses,
- correlation with other variables (e.g., age, role, institutional support),
- and alignment with the European competence framework for social innovation in public administration.

The choice of these dimensions is not arbitrary. They reflect the contemporary demands of a transformative public sector, and their integration into a formal curriculum for the Social Innovation Officer supports the development of authentic professionalization in public innovation.

4.3.1. Analytical and decision-making skills

This dimension targets public officials' ability to process information, formulate judgments, and make decisions in complex contexts, including those with social impact. Respondents were invited to self-assess their current level of competence in the following areas: critical thinking, problem solving, information analysis and synthesis, decision-making, analytical thinking, financial literacy, and financial management.

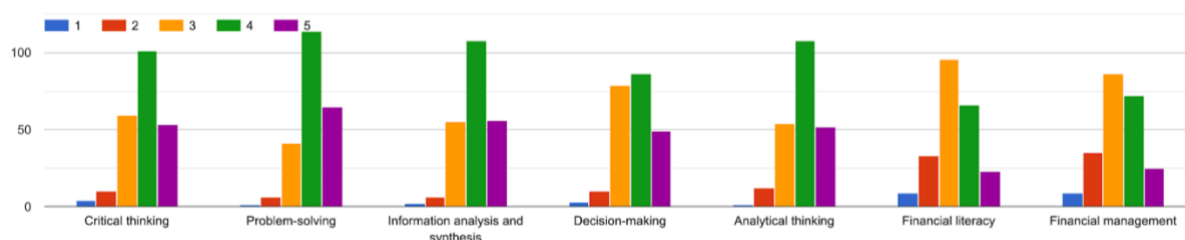


Fig. 12. Analytical and Decision-Making Skills

Results show a predominantly moderate to high level of self-assessed competence, but with notable gaps in financial analysis and strategic decision-making. For example, critical thinking and problem-solving are frequently associated with satisfactory competence levels, yet systemic analysis and the use of data in decision-making are consistently undervalued.

From a sociological perspective, this reveals an asymmetry between individual cognitive capacities and the institutional culture of decision-making: civil servants appear capable of analyzing and understanding, but do not feel authorized to decide. A lack of autonomy, rigid procedures, and the absence of a space for initiative constrain the practical expression of these competencies.

To strengthen this dimension, the proposed curriculum should include: comparative analysis exercises, decision-making simulations, impact analysis, participatory budgeting, and financial management in innovation contexts. These components would not only enhance skills, but also anchor them in real institutional processes.

4.3.2. Strategic and innovation skills

This dimension reflects respondents' ability to conceptualize long-term visions, integrate new ideas into existing policies, and build plans with social added value. The self-assessed competencies in this category include: creativity, goal-setting, adaptability, planning, and organization.

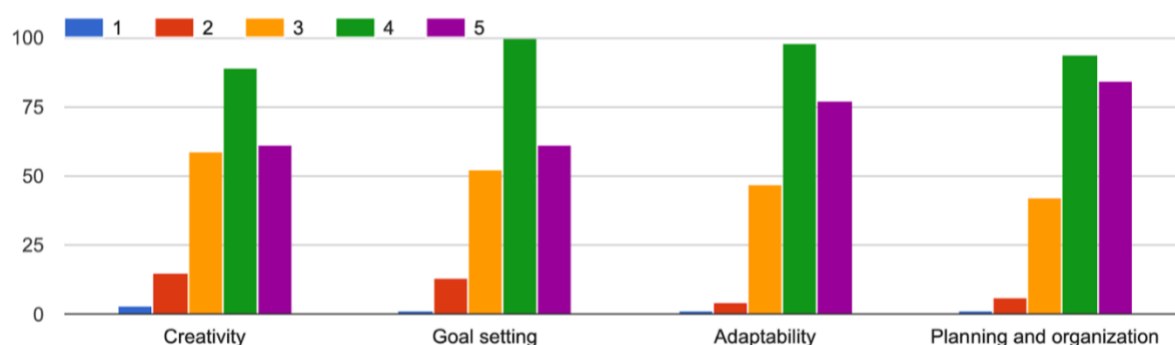


Fig. 13. Strategic and Innovation Thinking Skills

Data show that respondents feel significantly less confident in this area, especially regarding anticipatory thinking and planned innovation. The issue is not a lack of intention, but rather an institutional deficit in training for systems thinking and forward-looking approaches.

Culturally, public administration is shaped by a procedural rather than a prospective ethos. As a result, even employees with innovative inclinations tend to internalize structural constraints and adopt risk-averse behaviors. Reversing this trend requires a program that cultivates projective thinking, solution prototyping, adaptive scenarios, foresight, and calculated risk-taking.

From the perspective of social innovation, these competencies are not optional, they are foundational. Without vision, experimentation, and the ability to match social needs with administrative tools, innovation remains an unimplementable intention. Therefore, the curriculum should include policy design, institutional foresight, actor mapping, and organizational transformation simulations.

4.3.3. Communication and interpersonal skills

Interinstitutional collaboration and communication with citizens are recognized as essential, but perceived as underdeveloped, especially in more conservative administrative settings. The need for training in negotiation and relationship-building frequently emerges in the responses.

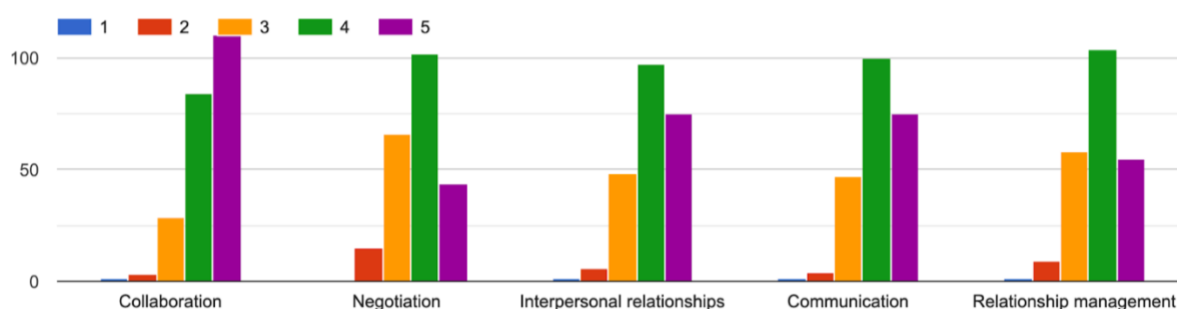


Fig. 14. Relational and Communication Skills

Social innovation is not a technocratic process, but a deeply relational one, based on dialogue, trust, and inter-actor collaboration. The responses indicate an insufficient level of development in both internal and external communication skills, a particularly serious issue for institutions legally bound to be transparent, accessible, and responsive to community needs.

Sociologically, this deficiency highlights a fracture between administration and society, between authority and citizen, between specialists and vulnerable groups. Effective communication is not just about information transfer, it entails constructing a shared space for understanding and co-producing solutions.

Accordingly, the Social Innovation Officer curriculum must include training in participatory process facilitation, active listening, mediation techniques, and strategic communication adapted to multicultural and multisectoral contexts. Effective relationship-building is the foundation of cooperation, and without cooperation, innovation becomes isolated and fails.

4.3.4. Leadership and management skills

Coordination, resilience, and transformational leadership skills are partially developed, particularly among managers. However, execution-level civil servants report a lack of institutional support for assuming informal leadership or initiative-based roles.

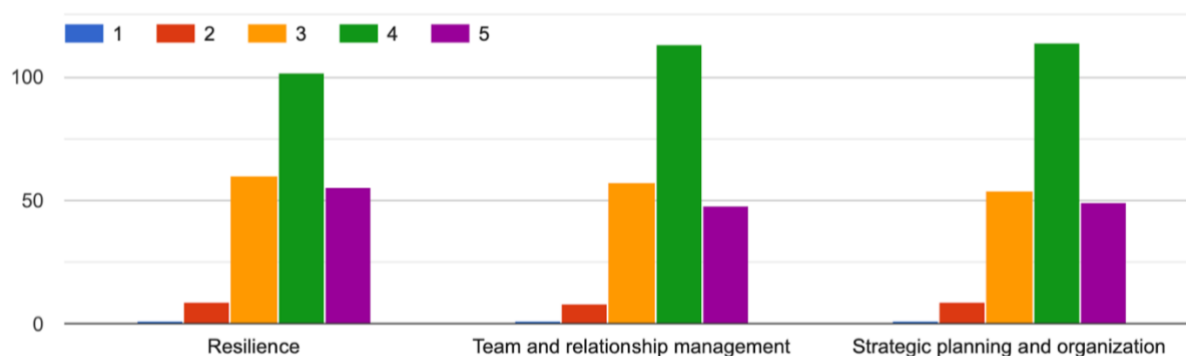


Fig. 15. Leadership and Coordination Skills

The public servant is not merely an executor but a potential change agent, a catalyst for collective initiatives. Respondents moderately rate their leadership skills, yet clearly express a need for a managerial model based on inspiration rather than control, mobilization rather than imposition.

This reflects a structural deficit in the managerial culture of the public sector, where informal leaders are rarely institutionally recognized, and distributed leadership is confused with formal delegation. Paradoxically, innovation is expected “from the top,” yet hindered by the lack of empowerment “from below.”

To cultivate leaders in social innovation, the curriculum must include components on transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, managing diverse teams, and building a shared institutional vision. These leaders are not “administrative heroes,” but architects of coherence between public values and organizational action.

4.3.5. Observation and lifelong learning skills

Respondents value curiosity and openness to new methods as essential to the field of social innovation. However, self-assessed competencies in trend monitoring and social impact evaluation are weak, indicating a need for training geared toward continuous professional updating.



Fig. 16. Reflexive and Lifelong Learning Skills

This dimension is arguably the most strategic, as it reflects the administration's capacity to become a reflexive, adaptive actor, connected to a constantly changing social reality. Respondents express a strong interest in learning, yet also point to a chronic absence of institutional frameworks to support it.

This phenomenon reveals a deep tension between institutional routine and the logic of organizational learning. The absence of feedback, participatory evaluation, and mechanisms for learning from failure traps civil servants in cycles of repetition and professional burnout. Even the most motivated individuals may adapt negatively, through silence, conformity, or disengagement.

A training program in this area must include practices for critical reflection, project-based learning methodologies, self-assessment, and the institutionalization of routines for monitoring, learning, and adaptation, essential to the sustainability of social innovation.

Taken together, this thematic analysis provides a robust foundation for defining the curriculum scope and training modules to be developed under the INSPIRE PA project.

4.4. Identified skills gaps and training priorities

4.4.1. Correlation of demographic data with perceptions and self-assessments

A detailed examination of the responses reveals clear influences of demographic variables on how respondents perceive their own competencies:

- **Age:** Younger public servants (18–30 years) report a higher level of openness toward participatory methods but demonstrate weaker financial and strategic literacy. Those aged 37–56 tend to place greater importance on structured training and show more confidence in their analytical capacities.
- **Job position:** Managers and directors rate themselves higher in leadership and planning but frequently point to the absence of a coherent institutional vision for innovation. Executive-level staff often report procedural blockages and an organizational culture resistant to individual initiative.
- **Education:** Respondents with postgraduate education are better at distinguishing between traditional and innovative approaches and request more practice-based training. Those with pre-tertiary or vocational education express strong interest in training but report limited access.
- **Environment:** In urban contexts, there is greater concern for efficiency and participation, while respondents from rural areas emphasize the lack of opportunities and logistical support.

These demographic correlations demonstrate that perceptions of competencies are not homogeneous but deeply shaped by professional experience, organizational status, and educational capital. For instance, younger respondents' openness to participatory methods may stem from recent training rooted in modern pedagogical discourses, yet they lack institutional experience and validation. In contrast, more senior staff exhibit consolidated confidence but may also display rigidity in the absence of continuous learning opportunities.

The disparities between executive staff and management reflect asymmetries in access to strategic information and professional development opportunities, as well as differences in organizational culture. It is worth noting that, although managers tend to rate themselves higher, they also report the lack of an

overarching institutional vision, an indicator of the misalignment between formal responsibility and support infrastructure for innovation.

Education plays a significantly differentiating role: those with postgraduate degrees show strong reflexive capacity and sophisticated learning aspirations, whereas individuals with vocational or high school education signal practical readiness for training but perceive institutional barriers in accessing it. This disjunction raises important questions about equity in training and the need for curricula tailored to the diversity of profiles within the public sector.

Urban respondents tend to describe a more active organizational culture, embedded in external networks, whereas rural respondents describe isolated institutional contexts, limited resource access, and reliance on external initiatives. This urban-rural polarization must be carefully addressed in the design phase of training programs to prevent the replication of structural inequalities in access to professional development.

4.4.2. Training needs matrix vs. institutional support

A major tension highlighted in the responses is the gap between the individual desire for training and the perceived institutional support:

- While over 90% of respondents consider training in social innovation to be “very important,” only a minority report having recently accessed relevant professional development opportunities.
- Commonly cited obstacles include the lack of time allocated to training, absence of dedicated budgets, and an organizational culture focused exclusively on compliance and repetitive tasks.

This reality underscores the need for an enabling institutional framework that supports learning and the strategic allocation of resources for professional development.

This systemic discrepancy between individual motivation and organizational support reveals a deep fracture in the psychological contract between public

servants and their institutions. On one hand, employees express a genuine willingness to engage in training programs that enhance their skills and provide professional meaning amid rapid social and administrative change. On the other, institutions, with their bureaucratic culture and rigid resource allocation mechanisms, fail to validate this effort, either through internal policies or active learning infrastructures.

This disconnect is illustrative of what public sector literature calls the “training paradox”: while training is rhetorically recognized as a priority, it remains marginalized in managerial practice.

The lack of allocated time and resources, absence of performance indicators linked to learning, and the prevailing orientation toward procedural compliance create a latent disengagement climate, where learning becomes an individual initiative rather than an organizational project.

For a Social Innovation Officer curriculum to be sustainable and implementable, it must be anchored in a reformed institutional framework that includes:

- formal mechanisms for recognizing participation in training,
- non-financial incentives for skills development, and
- a redefinition of human resource management in the public sector, centered on continuous learning as an organizational value.

This institutional tension is also confirmed by data regarding the frequency with which public employees encounter challenges in implementing social innovation initiatives (question 20). Most respondents indicate that such challenges are recurring, not isolated, confirming the systemic nature of organizational resistance.

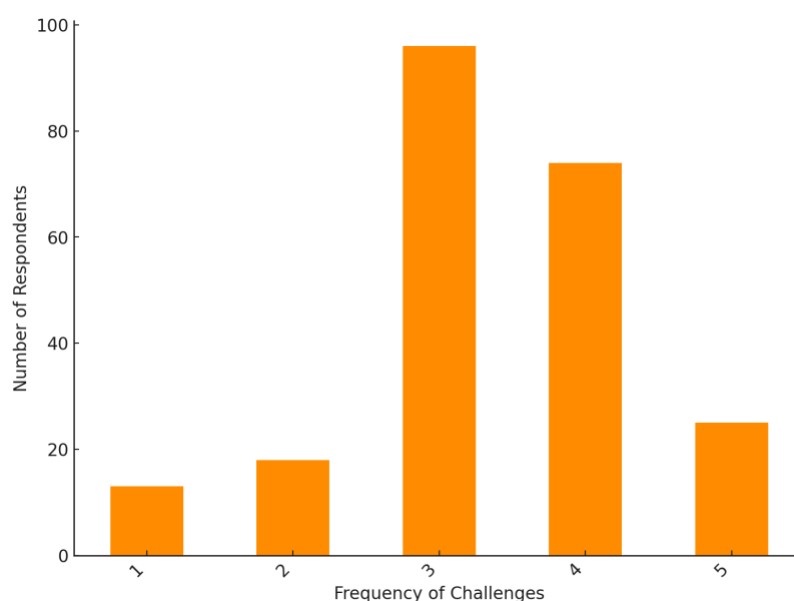


Fig. 17. Frequency of Challenges in Implementing Social Innovation

Sociologically, this phenomenon illustrates what could be termed "negative institutional saturation": a condition in which new ideas are not only met with reluctance but encounter an organizational ecology hostile to change. The reported challenges are often the result of a decision-making system where mid-level or execution-level actors have little room for maneuver, and innovation is treated as a deviation from routine rather than an adaptive improvement.

The high frequency of these blockages thus becomes an indirect indicator of institutional closure, and the individual efforts of civil servants who wish to innovate are not only unsupported but often rendered invisible or penalized through managerial omission.

This reality directly impacts motivation for training: in a system where innovation is perceived as impossible to implement, the desire to acquire innovative competencies erodes, and professional development risks becoming a symbolic exercise in conformity rather than authentic growth.

To ensure real impact, a Social Innovation Officer curriculum must align expressed needs for learning, applicability, and autonomy with explicit organizational commitments: openness to experimentation, formal recognition of initiative, and

integration of innovative effort into the institutional performance evaluation system.

4.4.3. Systemic vs. cultural barriers to adopting social innovation

Based on the responses, a typology of perceived barriers emerges:

- **Structural obstacles:** lack of funding, shortage of qualified personnel, over-bureaucratization, rigid or contradictory regulations.
- **Cultural obstacles:** resistance to change, disregard for bottom-up ideas, lack of trust in collaboration with citizens and the NGO sector.

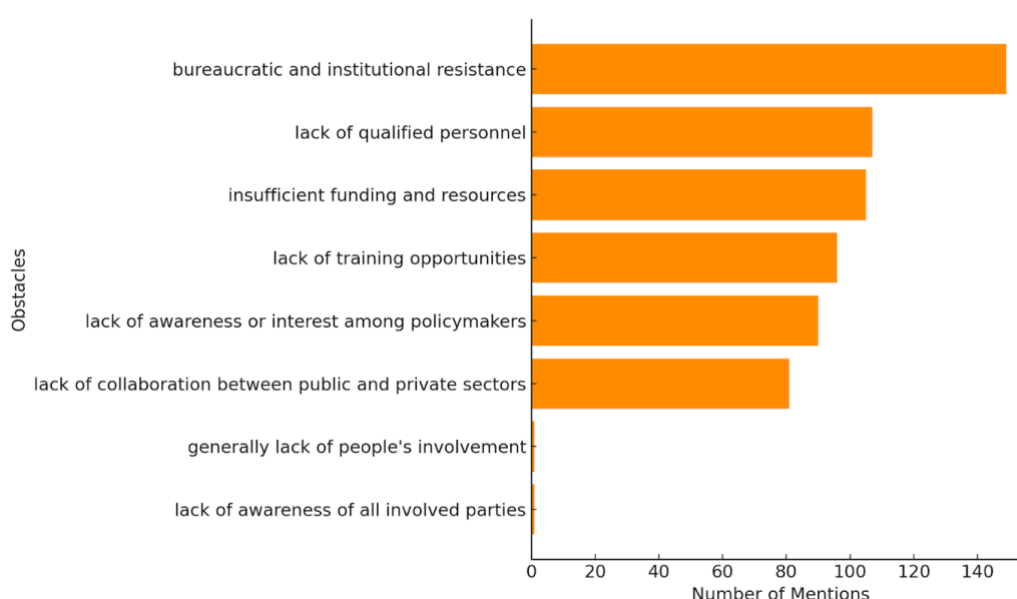


Fig. 18. Most Frequently Reported Obstacles to Social Innovation in Public Administration

The successful implementation of the Social Innovation Officer function will require intervention on both fronts: reforming the formal framework and cultivating an inclusive, reflexive organizational culture.

The typology of barriers identified confirms that social innovation in public administration is hindered not only by technical or financial constraints, but especially by deeply rooted cultural and symbolic factors embedded in organizational ethos. Structural barriers, such as chronic underfunding, staffing shortages, and excessive bureaucratization, are visible and measurable, but cannot

be fully understood or overcome without addressing institutionalized cultural resistance.

This resistance manifests through the discouragement of initiative, rigid hierarchies of expertise, and the marginalization of ideas emerging from lower administrative levels. Notably, respondents highlight a lack of trust in partnerships with civil society and NGOs, which reflects an administration that remains self-centered and insufficiently open to deliberative or co-creation processes.

Sociologically, this dynamic may be explained by the “defensive authority syndrome,” whereby institutions perceive change as a threat rather than an opportunity. In the absence of formal recognition, civil servants internalize negative adaptation through conformity, silence, or passivity.

To operationalize and legitimize the Social Innovation Officer role within the public administration ecosystem, a dual and synchronized intervention is needed:

- **On one hand**, reforming the regulatory and procedural framework to reduce structural constraints and introduce flexibility, autonomy, and transparency;
- **On the other**, transforming organizational culture through participatory leadership models, reflexive learning practices, recognition of professional diversity, and encouragement of bottom-up initiative.

Thus, the identified barriers are not merely obstacles, they are strategic entry points for coherent and sustainable change policies.

4.4.4. Skills considered lacking in current training programs

One of the most relevant insights from the online questionnaire concerns public servants' perceptions of critical gaps in current professional training offerings. The open-ended question on missing competencies generated a wide variety of responses, which were coded and synthesized into a list of the most frequently mentioned skill gaps.

The most commonly cited deficits include:

- Transformational leadership

- Strategic planning
- Critical and decision-making thinking
- Intersectoral collaboration
- Digital skills and data management
- Public participation and citizen engagement
- Innovation in public services
- Empathy and interpersonal communication
- Change management
- Applied financial literacy



Fig. 19. Top 10 Missing Skills in Current Public Administration Training Programs

This distribution highlights a dual need: on the one hand, for technical skills related to digital and administrative transformation, and on the other, for social and relational competencies without which public servants cannot act as agents of change.

From a sociological perspective, the responses reflect a tension between the existing organizational culture, based on compliance and repetitive tasks, and the individual aspiration toward social relevance and participatory effectiveness. While public employees clearly identify the skills they lack, current training systems appear ill-equipped to support such reflexive and applied learning.

This section validates the directions proposed in the Social Innovation Officer curriculum and justifies the inclusion of integrated modules combining technical training, critical analysis skills, and relational competencies tailored to a constantly evolving administrative environment.

4.4.5. Preferred areas, formats, and expectations in training programs

The integrated analysis of questions 21–23 from the questionnaire provides a coherent and insightful picture of how public servants perceive professional training in relation to their actual needs and the systemic challenges facing contemporary administration.

Beyond identifying skill gaps, this triad of questions enables a nuanced analysis of training demand in terms of content, methodology, and intensity. The data reveal not only what public servants want to learn, but also how, when, and at what level of complexity they deem a training intervention effective.

1. Priority Training Areas (Q22)

Responses indicate a clear cluster of interests centered on:

- developing applied innovation capacity in public services,
- collaborative leadership and strategic influence,
- citizen participation tools and policy design,
- impact analysis, communication, and institutional adaptability.

This orientation expresses a desire for transformative professionalization, where the civil servant becomes an actor of change, not merely a passive recipient of externally imposed reforms. The convergence toward transversal and interpersonal skills is particularly noteworthy, marking a cultural shift away from the traditional bureaucratic ethos.

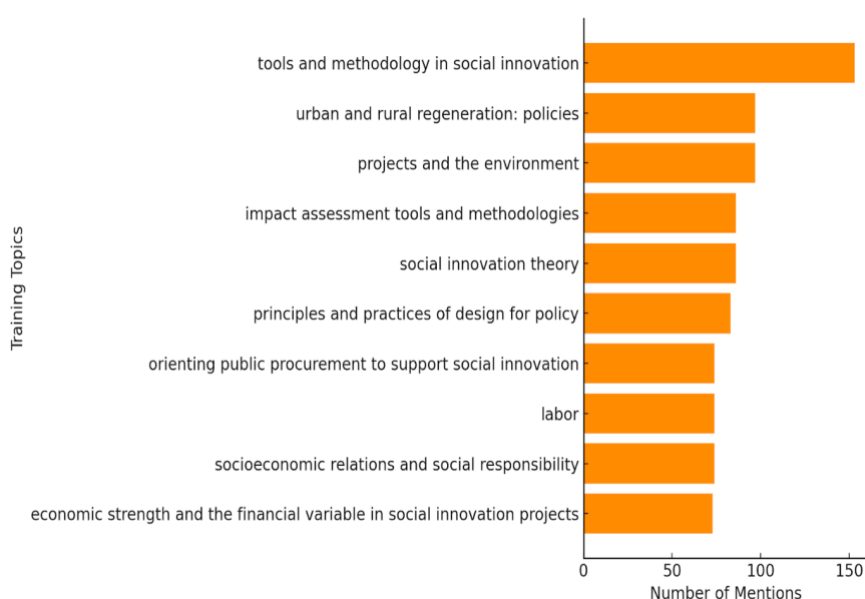


Fig. 20. Top 10 Training Topics Desired in Social Innovation Programs

2. Preferred Training Formats (Q21)

Respondents show a marked preference for:

- interactive workshops and peer learning activities,
- hybrid training formats (online/offline) allowing flexibility,
- case studies and practical applications over theoretical lectures.

These choices suggest a shift toward experiential and collaborative learning, as well as a higher demand for the immediate relevance of training content. Public servants are not merely looking to "learn" but to apply and enact change.



Fig. 21. Top Preferred Training Formats in Social Innovation

3. Desired Difficulty Level (Q23)

Responses regarding the level of difficulty indicate interesting diversification:

- the majority prefer intermediate to advanced levels,
- a significant minority seek introductory courses, suggesting a critical mass of civil servants at the beginning of their social innovation journey.

This distribution supports the need for a modular curriculum with customizable learning paths based on professional experience and profile. From an institutional standpoint, it is crucial that the training system recognizes and accommodates different learning rhythms, styles, and motivations in order to avoid reproducing structural inequalities in access to development.

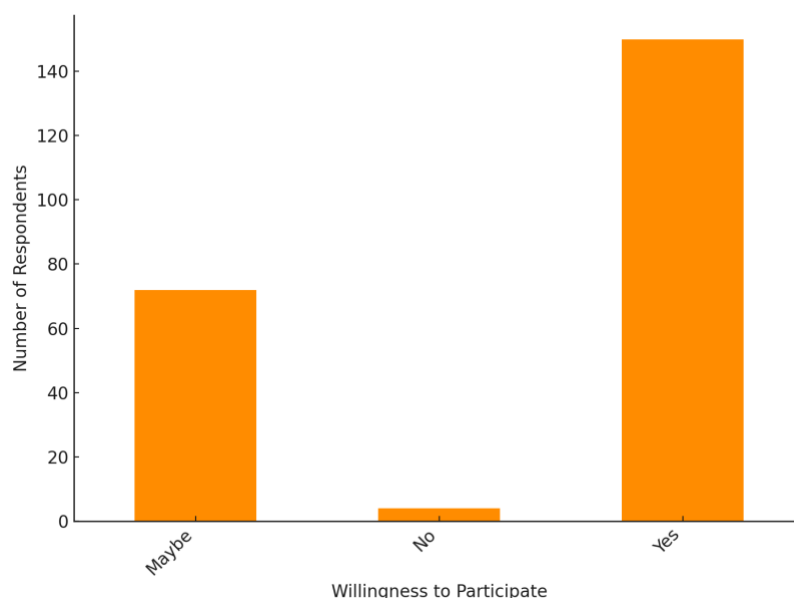


Fig. 22. Willingness to Participate in Future Social Innovation Training

This integrated analysis reinforces the report's overall conclusion: training in social innovation must be designed as an adaptive ecosystem, one that supports diversity, practical relevance, and institutional alignment, equipping public servants with the tools and confidence they need to act as innovators in their own context.

4.4.6. Organizational climate and institutional conditions for innovation

Questions 24–27 explore the level of organizational openness to innovation, perceptions of managerial support, and the broader institutional culture around

new ideas. These questions do not measure competencies directly, but rather the degree of institutional permeability to innovative behaviors.

From a sociological perspective, this set of questions addresses:

- informal organizational norms (what is acceptable, encouraged, or penalized),
- collective representations of innovation (is it an institutional objective or a slogan?),
- the relationship between individual initiative and formal systems of recognition/validation.

Responses to these questions provide a valuable snapshot of the organizational atmosphere within public administration, focusing on openness to innovation, managerial support, recognition of new ideas, and the actual involvement of public employees in innovative projects. Together, these items allow for the development of a qualitative indicator of “institutional climate for innovation,” highly relevant for assessing the feasibility of implementing the Social Innovation Officer function.

Perceived institutional support for innovation (Q24) is an initial indicator of organizational maturity. Data show moderate polarization: some institutions explicitly encourage social innovation, while for a substantial portion of respondents, support remains symbolic or unstructured by clear policies. This contrast signals an institutional dissonance: innovation is recognized as a value but not embedded in the everyday decision-making architecture. Sociologically, this reflects a form of “mimetic modernity”, organizations adopt the rhetoric of innovation while maintaining traditional bureaucratic forms.

Regarding leadership and its capacity to support new ideas (Q25), data reveal a strong correlation between leadership style and perceived initiative. Managers who foster dialogue, involve staff in collective reflection, and validate unconventional efforts create a more favorable climate for participation. In contrast, hierarchical, authoritarian, or purely operational leadership structurally inhibits new ideas. Innovation becomes accidental, not systemic.

Question 26, which assesses the extent to which employees feel their ideas are taken seriously, addresses a key issue: symbolic recognition of individual contributions. In organizational sociology, this is a core aspect of the "psychological contract" between employee and institution. The lack of recognition leads to demotivation, attitudinal conservatism, and symbolic withdrawal, employees remain formally present but disengage from transformative processes.

Question 27 explores behavior: how many respondents have participated in or proposed innovative projects. The answers indicate an active minority, suggesting that innovation, even among the motivated, is a marginal activity. This does not imply a lack of will, but a lack of institutional support: without incubation spaces, stimulation policies, or tolerance for experimentation, civil servants avoid the risks associated with proposing change.

In conclusion, these four items converge to present a coherent picture: public institutions do not explicitly reject innovation, but neither do they actively support it. It is permitted, but rarely encouraged; tolerated, but rarely recognized; invoked, but rarely implemented. For this reason, introducing a Social Innovation Officer cannot be solely a training initiative, it must be accompanied by genuine organizational transformation: participatory leadership, flexible procedures, spaces for dialogue, and policies that recognize the value of initiative.

This section strongly justifies the inclusion in the proposed curriculum not only of technical skills modules but also those dedicated to fostering an innovative institutional culture, one capable of restoring trust, motivation, and responsibility among public servants.

5. Recommendations for Future Research and Tool Improvement

Considering the methodological limitations and the dynamic nature of the phenomenon under analysis, we propose the following development directions:

- Implementation of a **stratified sampling method** to ensure representativeness across regions, locality sizes, and institutional types;

- **Methodological triangulation** through semi-structured interviews, qualitative case studies, and participatory observation in pilot institutions;
- In-depth **exploration of gender dimensions**: how men and women perceive their role in innovation, their trust in leadership, and access to training.

These directions may reinforce a more accurate and profound diagnosis of how social innovation can be nurtured within the institutional framework of public administration.

The recommendations aim not only to refine future research methodologies but also to contribute to the construction of an applied epistemology of social innovation in public administration, one capable of generating knowledge that is both relevant and transformative. In this regard, a **stratified sampling approach** is essential to avoid dominance of certain types of institutions or regions in the final analysis. Functional representativeness, beyond geography, must include diverse types of administrations (urban/rural, small/large, central/local) and enable the detection of contextual patterns affecting innovation receptivity.

The proposed **mixed-methods triangulation**, semi-structured interviews, case studies, and participatory observation, is vital for understanding the often tacit mechanisms that determine the success or failure of a Social Innovation Officer initiative. This approach can reveal dissonances between organizational discourse and the lived realities of public service, offering a more realistic picture of both limitations and action potential.

Exploring gender dimensions adds particular value by interrogating the symbolic distribution of authority, trust, and access to resources by gender. In a sector where women are the majority at operational levels but underrepresented in strategic positions, this analysis is crucial for designing an inclusive and equitable curriculum.

Overall, these directions aim not only to improve the technical precision of tools but also to foster a culture of applied research within institutions, where data serve

not just reporting, but critical rethinking of public policy and professional development.

6. Sociological conclusion: social innovation as an indicator of institutional maturity

The capacity of a public administration to adopt and integrate social innovation can be considered an indicator of its institutional maturity. This involves not only the development of technical and managerial skills but also the presence of an organizational environment that is open, reflexive, and oriented toward collaboration and social impact.

This study shows that:

- There exists a valuable, motivated, and educated human capital, but it is insufficiently supported by formal systems;
- Organizational mindsets and lack of resources are major obstacles to institutional transformation;
- There is a genuine demand for relevant and adaptive training that must be met through coherent policies and sustainable resources.

In this light, the **Social Innovation Officer** role is not merely a technical novelty, it is an instrument for institutional reform. It can contribute to strengthening participatory democracy, increasing efficiency, and restoring citizens' trust in public administration.

The research clearly demonstrates that social innovation cannot be effectively introduced into an administration operating exclusively on bureaucratic principles without mechanisms for institutional adaptation and organizational learning. Civil servants have shown genuine self-reflection, clear motivation for training, and a nuanced understanding of their limitations, but what is lacking are the infrastructures that could transform this human potential into drivers of change.

In this context, the Social Innovation Officer is not merely a technical position, but a strategic lever for organizational transformation, one capable of reconfiguring the internal dynamic between authority and participation, reducing the gaps

between vision and implementation, and supporting the institutionalization of innovation processes.

To make this role truly effective, it must be supported by **clear policies for skill recognition**, integration into formal organizational structures, and **official acknowledgment within the architecture of public administration**. Only then can social innovation become a structural component of institutional maturity, rather than an isolated initiative dependent on individual will or favorable circumstances.

7. Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1. Common needs identified at the European level

The comparative analysis of responses from Italy, Greece, Romania and other European countries indicates a shared core of challenges and aspirations among civil servants involved in institutional modernization. Despite differing administrative contexts, respondents converge on the following key needs:

- Development of **applied transversal skills**, particularly in strategic planning, decision analysis, collaborative leadership, and intersectoral communication;
- Lack of **institutional infrastructures** to support continuous learning and internal innovation;
- A clear **desire to participate** in relevant training programs, alongside persistent obstacles related to access, resources, and managerial support;
- A widespread perception that **social innovation is essential** for increasing efficiency, relevance, and legitimacy of public administration, but remains poorly understood and insufficiently formalized.

These needs reveal that the Social Innovation Officer role is not merely an option, it is a **functional necessity** for transforming the public sector in line with the principles of democratic, open, and participatory governance.

7.2. Recommendations for structuring the Social Innovation Officer Curriculum

Based on both quantitative and qualitative analyses conducted within the INSPIRE PA project, the training curriculum for the Social Innovation Officer must respond to complex and convergent requirements identified in Italy, Greece and Romania. Questionnaire data and insights from focus groups emphasize the need for a training program that is not only informative but also transformative, contributing to changes in professional practices and organizational culture.

The proposed curriculum must be:

- **Modular and adaptive**, to reflect institutional diversity and varying levels of professional experience;
- **Transdisciplinary**, integrating perspectives from social sciences, digital governance, sustainable development, and public innovation;
- **Application-oriented**, including practical exercises, pilot projects, formative assessments, and mentorship.

It is recommended that the curriculum be structured into five core dimensions, empirically validated in the three focus groups:

1. Analytical Dimension

Focused on developing the capacity for critical understanding of social and institutional realities:

- Critical and systems thinking
- Qualitative and quantitative data analysis
- Social impact assessment and theory of change
- Participatory budgeting and social justice in resource allocation

2. Strategic Dimension

Addressing vision, planning, and policy formulation:

- Institutional foresight and adaptive scenarios
- Policy and public service design
- Innovation management and integration of the European framework for just and digital transition

3. Relational and Participatory Dimension

Respondents highlighted significant gaps in inter-institutional communication and collaboration with external actors:

- Participatory facilitation and social dialogue
- Co-design with communities and stakeholders
- Intersectoral collaboration and citizen partnership development
- Institutional negotiation and diplomacy

4. Managerial Dimension

The Social Innovation Officer role involves operational leadership, coordination, and organizational thinking:

- Collaborative leadership and distributed governance
- Coordination of interdisciplinary teams
- Emotional intelligence, empathy, and professional resilience
- Change management and open institutional culture

5. Reflexive and adaptive dimension

Crucial for lifelong learning and organizational recalibration:

- Self-assessment and organizational learning
- Institutional observation and constructive feedback
- Context-based training and professional reflection
- Promoting a learning culture as a public transformation strategy

Proposed methodology

Participants from all three countries advocated for a **practical, collaborative, and flexible approach**. The curriculum should include:

- Hybrid formats: short online sessions, synchronous workshops, and asynchronous materials;
- Practical exercises: pilot projects, simulations, hackathons, innovation labs;
- Peer learning and transnational exchanges between administrations;
- Mentorship and institutional practice guidelines;
- Assessment through professional portfolios and written reflection.

Institutional recommendations

To ensure systemic impact, the curriculum must be accompanied by:

- **Official recognition** of the Social Innovation Officer role within public institution organizational charts;
- Integration of the relevant competencies into **job descriptions**, career pathways, and performance evaluations;
- Inclusion of a continuous training framework for this role in **national and European public policies**;
- Creation of professional networks and communities of practice to support lifelong learning.

This structure offers not only a foundation for training new professionals in social innovation but also a strategic direction for transforming European public administration by strengthening resilience, collaboration, and the social relevance of public services.

7.3. Implications for training strategies in local public administration

The study's findings clearly indicate that current training strategies must be reconfigured on participatory and anticipatory foundations aligned with the principles of reflexive public administration. Accordingly:

- Training programs should **focus on building institutional capacity**, not just transferring individual knowledge;
- It is essential to introduce **mechanisms for evaluating organizational culture** and conducting internal diagnostics on innovation potential;
- Local or regional centers for administrative innovation should be established in partnership with **universities, NGOs, and local stakeholders**;
- Public servants must be supported to become **actors of change**, not just training recipients, through recognition, autonomy, and institutional space for experimentation;
- Professional development should be **aligned with strategic public policies**, sustainable development goals, and the requirements of data-driven and trust-based governance.

In this regard, the Social Innovation Officer is not only an investment in human capital but also a key commitment to the future of European local governance, one that places the citizen, the community, and the state's learning capacity at its core.

7.4. Social inclusion and sustainability as strategic dimensions of public sector innovation

Contemporary public administrations are increasingly confronted with the challenge of aligning institutional resilience with broader societal goals. Among these, social inclusion and sustainability emerge not as peripheral ideals, but as foundational dimensions of meaningful, transformative innovation. The empirical insights of the INSPIRE PA study, grounded in qualitative data from focus groups and quantitative data from an extensive online survey, confirm the necessity of explicitly integrating these dimensions within the strategic design and implementation of innovation-driven training and professionalization processes in the public sector.

Social inclusion, in this context, refers not only to equal access to public services or formal equity provisions, but to the capacity of public administrations to actively recognize and engage with diverse social realities. This includes the needs of vulnerable or underrepresented groups, such as rural officials with limited access to training, employees with vocational backgrounds, or civil servants operating outside urban centers. These profiles were consistently underrepresented in training programs and institutional innovation efforts, as highlighted by participants across national focus groups.

The study reveals a pronounced dependency on informal, ad-hoc partnerships for inclusion-oriented initiatives, such as responses to refugee crises or collaborations with NGOs, which, while impactful, lack structural integration into administrative procedures. Innovation thus remains contingent on individual agency, rather than embedded in institutional logic. The absence of frameworks to ensure participatory policymaking, co-design with marginalized stakeholders, or long-term engagement with community-based organizations underscores the urgency of professional profiles equipped to bridge this gap.

The envisioned role of the Social Innovation Officer is inherently inclusive. As a facilitator of collaborative processes, this professional must develop competencies in intercultural sensitivity, community engagement, equity-driven policy analysis, and participatory negotiation. The curriculum must therefore support not only technical skill-building, but also a normative commitment to inclusive governance.

Curriculumul Social Innovation Officer-ului should include modules on stakeholder mapping, social impact measurement, inclusive facilitation methods, tools for collaborative decision-making, and ethical principles for engaging underrepresented communities. These are essential to cultivating a reflexive, citizen-centered public administration.

Parallel to this, sustainability appears throughout the study as a latent, but decisive concern, not only in environmental terms, but also as institutional sustainability, social continuity, and systemic foresight. Across the three countries analyzed, participants emphasized the fragility of innovation practices in the absence of continuity, political support, or strategic anchoring. Initiatives often begin with enthusiasm, but fade due to the lack of structures for replication, interdepartmental collaboration, or long-term resource planning.

In this sense, sustainability should be understood as the administration's capacity to maintain innovative efforts over time, through iterative learning, strategic alignment, and ecological responsibility. The Social Innovation Officer, if adequately trained, becomes a steward of sustainable transformation, able to link community needs with policy tools, to embed social innovation in strategic planning processes, and to anticipate future challenges through adaptive governance models.

Moreover, the intersection between sustainability and inclusion, for instance in green policies that disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups, must be explicitly addressed through integrative approaches that combine social justice with ecological responsibility.

Ultimately, the incorporation of social inclusion and sustainability as core principles of the Social Innovation Officer's curriculum not only strengthens the relevance of the professional profile, but redefines the mission of public administration itself, from reactive compliance to proactive co-creation, from fragmented service delivery to resilient, people-centered governance. By fostering these transversal competencies, local administrations can move beyond isolated innovations and toward institutional ecosystems capable of delivering equity, adaptability, and long-term public value.

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Annexes

1. Focus group moderation guide

Methodology for organizing focus groups

Purpose of this document

This document serves as a comprehensive methodology for organizing focus groups aimed at identifying and validating skill gaps in public administration related to social innovation.

The findings gathered through 3 focus groups and online surveys will inform the development of a specialized training curriculum for Social Innovation Officers. The goal is to ensure that the training program aligns with the practical needs of public sector employees, equipping them with the necessary skills to foster and implement innovative solutions within their institutions.

Additionally, this document provides a structured approach for collecting qualitative and quantitative data, ensuring a strategic basis for designing a professional development program that is both relevant and effective

General Objective

The general objective of this methodology is to identify and validate the skills gaps in public administrations related to social innovation, contributing to the development of a comprehensive and effective training curriculum for Social Innovation Officers. This process ensures that the training program aligns with the real needs of public sector employees and enhances their capacity to implement innovative solutions in their respective institutions.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the current challenges and barriers faced by public administration staff in adopting social innovation practices.
2. To identify the key competencies required for a Social Innovation Officer.
3. To validate the skills gaps and training needs through qualitative and quantitative methods.
4. To collect insights from decision-makers, officials, and frontline staff on the most effective training methodologies.
5. To provide strategic recommendations for structuring a professional training program that addresses the identified need.

Target Audience

At least 30 representatives from EU PAs staff (directors, officials, staff with decision-making roles, and executives) in 3 countries (Greece, Italy and Romania). Minimum 10 representatives from each country.

Participants should represent diverse hierarchical levels, including directors, managers, and frontline staff, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the existing skill gaps.

Recruitment Strategy

- Identify relevant stakeholders through AMR and partner networks.
- Send official invitations detailing objectives, agenda, and expected outcomes.
- Ensure representation from multiple administrative levels and departments.
- Schedule sessions at times convenient for public administration staff.

Structure of Focus Groups

- **Duration:** 90 minutes
- **Format:** online
- **Moderator:** A trained facilitator with experience in public administration
- **Recording & Documentation:** Audio recording (with consent) and note-taking by an assistant

Discussion Guide

- **Introduction (10 min):**
 - Welcome participants
 - Explain objectives and confidentiality
 - Outline the session structure
 - **Icebreaker question:** What does social innovation mean to you in the context of your work?
- **Exploring Social Innovation Needs (30 min):**
 - What are the primary challenges in implementing innovation within public administrations?
 - Can you share an example of a successful social innovation initiative in your administration?

- How is innovation currently encouraged or hindered in your workplace?
- **Skills Gap Validation (30 min):**
 - What skills, internally and externally, are needed to enable the innovation process? How can a public institution nurture these?
 - What are the implications for human capital management?
 - Are there any particular areas where you feel training is lacking?
 - How comfortable do you feel with digital tools and technologies related to innovation?
 - Have you received any formal training on social innovation? If yes, was it useful?
 - What types of professional development opportunities would be most beneficial to you?
 - What specific competencies do you believe should be prioritized in a training program tailored to social innovation in public administrations?
 - How do gaps in innovation-related skills impact your ability to implement new initiatives effectively?
- **Identifying Training Gaps (30 min):**
 - What specific knowledge or competencies do you believe are missing within your team?
 - How do these gaps impact daily operations and decision-making?
 - What would an ideal training program on social innovation look like for you?
 - What format and duration would be most effective for professional development in this area?
 - How can training be structured to facilitate immediate practical application in your work environment?
- **Closing & Feedback (20 min):**
 - Summarize key takeaways
 - Gather final thoughts and suggestions

- Explain the next steps and how input will be used to create a structured report identifying key skill gaps and training needs.

Data Analysis

- Transcribe recordings and analyze responses for recurring themes.
- Compare findings across the three countries to identify common trends and regional differences.
- Use insights to refine the training curriculum and certification framework.
- Structure findings into a detailed report that provides a strategic basis for tailoring an effective professional training program.

Guidelines for conducting Focus Groups

1. Pre-Session Preparation

- Confirm attendance and send reminders.
- Prepare a clear script and questions.
- Set up recording equipment and ensure technical support.

2. Facilitator best practices

- Create an open and non-judgmental environment.
- Encourage participation from all attendees.
- Probe deeper when necessary but avoid leading questions.
- Keep the discussion on track while allowing flexibility.

3. Documentation and Reporting

- Take detailed notes on key discussion points.
- Summarize main findings and patterns.
- Submit a structured report highlighting insights relevant to training development, ensuring that the training curriculum is customized to address the most pressing skill gaps.

2. Online questionnaire form

ONLINE FORM - RESEARCH ON THE SKILLS GAP IN SOCIAL INNOVATION

The **INSPIRE PA** project aims to enhance the capacity of public administrations to implement **social innovation practices** by developing a **certified training curriculum** for Public Administration employees in Italy, Greece, and Romania. Through mapping best practices, training 60 public servants, and creating a transnational network, the project seeks to foster **policy innovation**, strengthen collaboration between administrations and civil society, and ensure the long-term **replicability** of its outcomes across the EU.

WP 2, T 2.3 Skills gap validation report: involves conducting a **comprehensive EU-wide research and report** on the **skills gap in social innovation** within public administrations, using **questionnaires at the EU level and focus groups in Italy, Greece, and Romania** to identify training needs and develop a **certified curriculum for Social Innovation Officers**.

The **Skills Gap Validation (T2.3)** aims to identify and confirm the **competency gaps and training needs** in public administrations across the European Union. This research is **pan-European**, involving both **focus groups in three countries (Greece, Italy, and Romania)** and **an online survey conducted at the EU level**. The findings will help **tailor the training program** for public administration staff, ensuring that the curriculum for Social Innovation Officers aligns with actual needs.

Social innovation involves the ability of public administration to **develop and implement new solutions** to address social challenges, foster cross-sector collaboration, and adapt institutional strategies for **positive and sustainable impact**. A **Social Innovation Officer** plays a key role in this process, requiring skills in **change management, strategic thinking, cross-sector collaboration, technology adoption, and citizen engagement**.

◆ Please **read each statement** and rate it from **1 to 5**, where:

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

This questionnaire evaluates:

- ✓ Current social innovation practices in your institution.
- ✓ Public administration's openness to adopting new governance and collaboration models.
- ✓ Training needs and competencies required for a Social Innovation Officer.
- ✓ Institutional support for developing innovation skills in public administration.

◆ **Responses are anonymous**, and your identity will not be used in data analysis.

◆ Please answer **honestly** to ensure an accurate and useful assessment of innovation capacity.

The research will **collect insights from public administration officials**, highlighting critical skills shortages and areas for professional development.

By proceeding with the completion of this questionnaire, you acknowledge and consent to participation.

The form will collect responses until April 14, 2025.

💡 **Thank you for your time and contribution to strengthening social innovation in public administration!**

Demographic and contextual data

1. In which country do you work?

2. What is your gender?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Non-binary / Third gender
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other:

3. Age in completed years:

(If you select "Other," please specify)

- ☐ 18-25
- ☐ 26-30
- ☐ 31-36
- ☐ 37-45
- ☐ 46-50
- ☐ 51-56
- ☐ 57-65
- ☐ Over 65 years

4. Background environment

- ☐ Urban
- ☐ Rural

5. The institution you are part of

This information will NOT be used in the analysis and will NOT be published; it will only be used internally.

6. Position held:

If you select "Other," please specify

- ☐ Public Servant
- ☐ Manager/Director
- ☐ Politician/Decision-Maker
- ☐ Public Policy Expert
- ☐ Other:

7. Main field of activity:***(If you select "Other," please specify)***

- ☐ Administrative
- ☐ Technical
- ☐ Financial
- ☐ Legal
- ☐ Human Resources
- ☐ Public Policy
- ☐ Project Management
- ☐ Procurement and Public Contracts
- ☐ Communication and Public Relations
- ☐ Urban Planning and Infrastructure
- ☐ Social Services and Welfare
- ☐ Education and Training
- ☐ Healthcare and Public Health
- ☐ Environmental Policy and Sustainability
- ☐ IT and Digital Services
- ☐ Transport and Mobility
- ☐ Energy and Utilities
- ☐ Research and Innovation
- ☐ Security and Defense
- ☐ Culture and Heritage
- ☐ Tourism and Economic Development
- ☐ Other

8. Years of service in the institution.**9. Education level:*****(If you select "Other," please specify)***

- ☐ Primary education
- ☐ Secondary education (high school diploma or equivalent)
- ☐ Vocational education and training (VET diploma or equivalent)
- ☐ Bachelor's degree (or equivalent)

- ☐ Master's degree (or equivalent)
- ☐ Doctorate (PhD or equivalent)
- ☐ Other

Awareness and Understanding of Social Innovation

10. How familiar are you with the concept of social innovation?

Strongly Disagree

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Strongly Agree

11. How knowledgeable are you about existing social innovation initiatives in public administration?

Strongly Disagree

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Strongly Agree

12. How important do you think social innovation is in shaping public policies?

Strongly Disagree

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Strongly Agree

Competencies and Skills Assessment

13. How would you rate your current skill level in the following areas regarding analytical and decision-making skills?

Skill	1 - Very Low; 5 - Very High
Critical thinking	
Problem-solving	
Information analysis and synthesis	
Decision-making	
Analytical thinking	
Financial literacy	
Financial management	
Critical thinking	
Problem-solving	
Information analysis and synthesis	
Decision-making	
Analytical thinking	
Financial literacy	
Financial management	

14. How would you rate your current skill level in the following areas regarding strategic thinking and innovation skills?

Skill	1 - Very Low; 5 - Very High
Creativity	
Goal setting	
Adaptability	
Planning and organization	

15. How would you rate your current skill level in the following areas regarding communication and relationship-building skills?

Skill	1 - Very Low; 5 - Very High
Collaboration	
Negotiation	
Interpersonal relationships	
Communication	

16. How would you rate your current skill level in the following areas regarding leadership and management skills?

Skill	1 - Very Low; 5 - Very High
Resilience	
Team and relationship management	
Strategic planning and organization	

17. How would you rate your current skill level in the following areas regarding observation and continuous Learning Skills?

Skill	1 - Very Low; 5 - Very High
Curiosity and openness to new methods and technologies	
Ability to learn from failures	
Monitoring and evaluating trends in social innovation	
Continuous self-improvement	

18. What are the most critical skills missing in current public administration training programs?

(If you select "Other," please specify)

- ☐ Analytical and Decision-Making Skills
- ☐ Strategic Thinking and Innovation Skills
- ☐ Communication and Relationship-Building Skills
- ☐ Leadership and Management Skills
- ☐ Observation and Continuous Learning Skills
- ☐ Other

Barriers to Social Innovation in Public Administration

19. What are the main obstacles preventing the adoption of social innovation in public administration?

(Select all that apply. If you select "Other," please specify)

- ☐ Lack of qualified personnel
- ☐ Lack of training opportunities
- ☐ Bureaucratic and institutional resistance
- ☐ Insufficient funding and resources
- ☐ Lack of collaboration between public and private sectors
- ☐ Lack of awareness or interest among policymakers
- ☐ Other

20. How frequently do you or your organization face challenges related to implementing social innovation?

Never

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Very often

Training Needs and Preferences**21. Which training formats would you prefer for learning about social innovation?*****(If you select "Other," please specify)***

- ☐ E-learning (self-paced online courses)
- ☐ Live online workshops
- ☐ In-person training sessions
- ☐ Peer-learning and networking events
- ☐ Case studies and best practices sharing
- ☐ Other

22. What topics would you like to be covered in future social innovation training programs?***(If you select "Other," please specify)***

- ☐ Social innovation theory
- ☐ Social transformation theory
- ☐ Tools and methodology in social innovation
- ☐ Impact assessment tools and methodologies
- ☐ Principles and practices of design for policy
- ☐ Economic strength and the financial variable in social innovation projects
- ☐ Labor, socioeconomic relations and social responsibility
- ☐ Urban and rural regeneration: policies, projects and the environment
- ☐ Orienting public procurement to support social innovation
- ☐ Other

23. Would you be willing to participate in future training programs on social innovation?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

Impact of Social Innovation on Public Administration

24. How beneficial do you think incorporating social innovation practices would be for public administration?

Not beneficial at all

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Highly beneficial

25. In what ways do you think social innovation could improve public service delivery and citizen engagement?

(Select all that apply. If you select "Other," please specify)

- ☐ More efficient and responsive public services
- ☐ Increased citizen participation in decision-making
- ☐ Improved collaboration with private and non-profit sectors
- ☐ Greater transparency and accountability
- ☐ Better use of digital and technological solutions
- ☐ Other

26. Do you have any suggestions for improving social innovation training in public administration?

27. Can you provide examples of best practices or case studies of social innovation in public administration from your country?



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