



Assessment of Development Opportunities for Social Economy Enterprises in Eastern Wielkopolska

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Note: In this document, the term ‘social enterprise’ is used according to the definition under Polish Law. The term ‘social economy enterprise’ is used to refer to those enterprises in the social economy that operate on a commercial or quasi-commercial basis, irrespective of legal form (including cooperatives and social enterprises). The term ‘social economy entity’ is used to refer to all organisations in the social economy, including those operating on a voluntary or non-profit basis.

Disclaimer

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Introduction

Currently, three types of support (pathways) to be co-financed from the Just Transition Fund are foreseen for affected ZE PAK workers:

- An employment / upskilling and reskilling pathway
- An entrepreneurship / self-employment pathway
- A social economy pathway (employment in new and existing co-operatives and social enterprises)

The first two pathways are 'typical' labour market policies to support workers faced with redundancy, while the third is a relatively novel approach. Thus, this paper considers potential opportunities for the development of new and existing social economy enterprises (primarily co-operatives) in Eastern Wielkopolska which can offer employment for affected ZE PAK workers.

By exploring a range of potential development opportunities for social economy enterprises, the paper aims to stimulate consideration of these enterprises as sources of local jobs and development and encourage the identification of other opportunities for their growth amongst two groups:

- ZE PAK workers seeking alternative employment options.
- Local government and local / regional actors which can support the development of and/or purchase services from social economy enterprises.

The paper is not definitive nor prescriptive, rather it's a foundation for START engagement and will inform the content of the forthcoming workshop (involving the two groups noted). It aims to provide top-level, thought-provoking perspectives based on a synthesis of existing materials and data.

The paper starts by noting key characteristics of the ZE PAK workforce and then identifies several determinants that can shape the nature and scale of social economy enterprise development opportunities in Eastern Wielkopolska. Subsequently, the paper briefly describes the contours of the social economy in Poland and potential relevant opportunities for development (including initial findings from international experiences). Building on this, the paper identifies several indicative opportunities for the development of new and existing local co-operatives or social enterprises, informed by a SWOT analysis and set of selection criteria, which can offer employment for ZE PAK workers.

Key ZE PAK workforce characteristics

While some displaced ZE PAK workers may be able to move to nearly equivalent full-time work (e.g., there is a high local demand for mechanics and maintenance workers) many others may only be able to secure lower quality jobs (lower wage, lower job status or into part-time and casual work) and there may be those that find themselves locked out of the labour force altogether. Typically, the most vulnerable are older workers and those with lower skills.

Most ZE PAK workers are mid-age or older (nearly 80% of male and female ZE PAK workers are aged over 41 years). Moreover, the share of workers with a tertiary education and foundational skills is lower than the national average. Even so, ZE PAK workers have a generally better level of education (secondary and vocational) than other residents in their communities. Thus, their removal from the labour market will represent the loss of a significant asset to the local economy.

Other notable characteristics of the ZE PAK workers relate to a reluctance to relocate or commute (nearly 90% would not take a job that is a fifty-minute drive away) and relatively high wage expectations and an associated desire for salaried work and job security over individual self-employment.

As regards their career development, they are, overall, willing to undertake professional training, including older workers. Over 60% would be willing to reskill and acquire new competencies when looking for another job. Nearly two thirds are interested in training for hard competences i.e., specialised knowledge and technical skills, and nearly half would like to develop soft skills (communications, problem solving etc.).

In terms of future sectoral career preference, the most attractive sector is renewable energy (RE). The preference for RE is particularly strong among higher-educated workers and younger workers, in line with recent trends and changes of attitudes and preference towards greener energy sources. Miners have a negative attitude to working in RE but are more likely to accept employment in construction. Other professional groups consider employment in administration, RE, and industrial processing as attractive. Agriculture is the least attractive option, especially among younger workers (41 years of age and below) and those with higher skills.

Energy transition in Eastern Wielkopolska also affects women, who are often professionally inactive members of the families of employees of the ZE PAK and related industries. In addition, unemployment among women is higher than among men, and therefore the transition may further exacerbate the level of unemployment among women. Women account for 9% of the ZE PAK group's workforce. They are characterized by a significantly higher share of workers over 50 years old (54% compared to 35% among men). The percentage of women with higher education is 2.5 times higher than among men (56% of female employees have a higher education). In terms of future employment preferences, women are even more sensitive to extended travel times and are less willing to relocate compared to male workers. They are less likely to accept retraining and upskilling.

To summarise, although future career preferences demonstrate the limits to generalising about ZE PAK workers, nearly all have a profound sense of belonging to their communities and are committed to finding alternate employment locally. Moreover, they display a notable desire for relatively well salaried, stable employment in a workplace that values collective endeavour. Given current local labour market conditions and the age and skills profile of many of the workers, attaining this outcome may prove problematic for a significant cohort. However, the workforce's higher educational levels compared with local standards, general willingness to learn new skills and openness to working in alternate sectors indicate that the workforce remains an important local economic asset which exhibits a flexible disposition. Given the disconnect between the noted aspirations and characteristics of the ZE PAK workforce and the current opportunities in the local labour market, the creation and expansion of social economy enterprises offer a means to address this mismatch.

Local Determinants for Social Economy Enterprise Development - “Headlines”

A range of drivers that can shape the nature and scale of social economy enterprise development in Eastern Wielkopolska are briefly described below. These descriptions are not definitive nor detailed given a desire to avoid “data overload” and a wish to encourage stakeholder dialogue and reflection.

Geography

The area has locational features that can influence the development of social economy enterprises, including:

- A central location with good transport links for selling goods & services to regional markets
- Significant agriculture activity and a notable rural environment
- Former mining sites requiring repurposing (which can offer new opportunities e.g., tourism)

Socio-economic conditions

Demography is a good measure of the current and future vitality of an area. Currently, Eastern Wielkopolska has an ageing population caused by a low birth rate, exacerbated by the exit of young people and families driven by limited economic opportunities. This ageing of the population is reflected in the significant number of enterprises in health and care services in the Konin area.

Although Konin's unemployment rate was 6% of the working-age population in 2022 compared to 3% for Wielkopolska, there are notable labour market shortages, in sectors such as construction, engineering, manufacturing, and social care and services.

The Eastern Wielkopolska region is characterised by a below-average level of GDP (77.5% of the Polish national average, and 71% of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship average), increasing poverty and decreasing individual and collective wealth. The increasing national anxiety about financial security and changing consumption habits (such as increases in food, health and care expenditures and decreases in leisure, culture and sports expenditures) will likely be mirrored in the area.

Regarding attitudes to employment, given its economic history, there is a desire for salaried work and job security over self-employment. This entrepreneurial outlook may explain why services, although growing, account for 38% of local employment, compared with a national average of 53%.

Decarbonisation and greening of the economy

Eastern Wielkopolska has a commendable international and national profile for its efforts to decarbonise its economy and communities. The Strategy for Climate Neutrality of Eastern Wielkopolska by 2040 contains measures to increase energy efficiency, the use of renewable energy sources and hydrogen (with a particular focus on green hydrogen) and clean mobility (EV, cycling etc.). The area has ambitious targets for increasing the share of renewables in total energy consumption and increasing energy efficiency which make it an exemplar for the rest of Poland. Eastern Wielkopolska aims to implement measures that by 2030 will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by over 55% (compared to national target of 30%), increase the share of renewable energy in total consumption to over 32% (compared to national target of 23%), and increase energy efficiency by 32.5% (compared to national target of 23%).

The scale of demand for retrofitting and energy efficiency is significant given the nature and age of the housing stock (61% of which was built between 1956 and 1988), associated legacy heating systems and low energy efficiency (e.g., 33,000 buildings require thermal upgrade).

The subregion plans to actively promote dissemination of circular economy solutions in the local economy. This will include reduction of resource and material intensity of production processes in enterprises, creation of repair points and preparation of products for re-use, and introduction of circular economy solutions in the municipal waste management, agriculture and construction sectors.

Sectoral strengths and opportunities

Employment in Eastern Wielkopolska is characterized by a high share of workers in agriculture and a low share in services. Agriculture accounts for one-third of employment in Eastern Wielkopolska compared to 18 percent nationally; services accounts for 38 percent compared to 53 percent at the national level and industry accounts for 29 percent of workers (over two thirds are in construction).

Within industry, the construction and industrial processing sectors, especially the furniture, metal, and food industries, have also exhibited strong job growth in the region.

The Eastern Wielkopolska Territorial Just Transition Plan identified development opportunities based on industrial tradition, tourism (partly linked to the restoration of brown field sites and cycling), cultural and agricultural / food potential, as well as favourable conditions for the development of alternative energy sources.

The area's Smart Specialisation strategy also noted health, sustainable food production and logistics as sectors with notable growth potential.

As observed, there are a significant number of local enterprises in health and care services. This number has the potential to grow as childcare and family-oriented services have a role in slowing / reversing the outward migration of young families and workers. In addition, the ageing population will increase demand for care services and services to support their inclusion and participation.

Public and Third Sector drivers of change

The combination of declining local government budgets, an increasing demand for public and community goods and services, and public sector reform creates commercial opportunities for new and existing social economy enterprises, including in areas such as energy efficiency, care, leisure and culture.

Moreover, these opportunities are being prioritised in government strategies (e.g., Strategy for Climate Neutrality of Eastern Wielkopolska, Social Strategy for Wielkopolska) and through instruments to support social economy enterprise development.

For example, the Social Economy Pathway to be supported by the Just Transition Fund will not only support affected workers but will also have a dual purpose of promoting energy efficiency for energy-poor families. Notably, the Association for Social Co-operatives aims to promote new and existing co-operative enterprises by focusing on the adaptation of residential buildings to increase energy efficiency. The proposed project will complement existing national and local government programmes aimed at subsidising the cost of energy transition e.g., the municipal programme “STOP SMOG”.

In addition, Konin’s city strategy promotes initiatives to promote senior population engagement, such as senior-oriented training and social integration clubs and activities. Within other local public policy documents there is reference to the development of the “third age” economy sector and the de-institutionalisation of care services for seniors, including tele-informatics to support elderly care.

In January 2021, a new Public Procurement Act was adopted which facilitates access to public procurement for social economy entities (SEE). For local government, delivery of public contracts by SEE allows them to support important social goals that these entities pursue; for example, professional and social integration of people at risk of social exclusion, creating local jobs or meeting the needs of residents by providing various types of social services. Moreover, the majority of SEEs operate locally, so as public procurement contractors they spend money locally and employ residents of local communities contributing to community wealth building. Another benefit for local governments is that small orders (below 130,000 PLN) can be granted directly or in a much simpler way than open competitions for offers under the Act on Public Benefit Activity. To increase the chance of contract execution by SEE, local government can use social clauses. Such clauses are, however, voluntary and their use needs to be encouraged.

Eastern Wielkopolska plans to increase the potential and competitiveness of SEE and their importance in the process of social and professional reintegration. Foreseen activities include: development of support services for SEE to improve the quality of their products and services and increase their sales, promote their inclusion in the implementation of social services, encourage local governments in procurement of products and services provided by the SEE by promoting the use of social clauses in public procurement.

Community Wealth Building: A new approach to local development and inclusive ownership

Eastern Wielkopolska is experiencing profound economic transformation when it already has below-average GDP and decreasing collective and individual prosperity (i.e., increasing relative poverty). Thus, sustaining and optimising local wealth should be an aim for social economy enterprise development. In this regard, the relatively new Community Wealth Building (CWB) model can be emulated to create and harness wealth in affected local communities via the promotion of inclusive and democratic enterprises; fair work; local financing; just use of local assets; and progressive procurement practices. Moreover, CWB’s focus on the economic leverage and procurement practices of local ‘anchor’ organisations (such as local governments, health providers, educational establishments, or large local employers) to tackle systematic challenges and inequalities in communities can be harnessed to promote social economy enterprise development.

The CWB approach seeks to transform local economic systems to enable communities to have a stake in and benefit from the wealth a local economy generates. It has been demonstrated that CWB can deliver social economy enterprise growth, more and better jobs, valuable community-owned services and assets, local resilient supply chains, and net zero ambitions.

National and International experience and lessons

The Social Economy in Poland

In Poland, the social economy relates to economic activities undertaken to achieve social goals, usually for the benefit of the local community, where profit is not an end in itself but is a means to achieving social impact. The Polish policy and legal frameworks adopt a broad definition of social economy entities and, by international standards, a rather narrow definition of social enterprises.

Under Polish Law, social economy entities (i.e., entities pursuing social economic activities) include inter alia:

- Social cooperatives, which primarily work towards social and professional reintegration of their members and employees are mostly made up of people at risk of marginalization (e.g., due to unemployment, disability, mental illness), and who have difficulties in finding a job. The main activities of social cooperatives are accommodation and food services (22.0%), administrative and support services (19.7%), human health and social work (14.7%) and manufacturing (11.3%).¹
- Worker cooperatives, which are voluntary associations of persons that run a joint enterprise in the interests of its members and based on their personal work. The cooperative may also carry out social, educational, and cultural activities for the benefit of its members and the environment in which they live. The main sectors of activity for workers cooperatives are manufacturing (27.6%), real estate activities (15.0%), and wholesale and retail trade (13.6%).²
- Cooperatives for the disabled and the blind.
- Other cooperatives (e.g., agricultural production cooperatives).
- Social and professional reintegration units, and occupational therapy workshops and occupational activity centres (e.g., social integration centres (CIS), social integration clubs (KIS), vocational activity establishments (ZAZ), occupational therapy workshops (WTZ)).³

- Non-governmental organisations and similar entities (e.g., associations, foundations, non-profit companies, church entities, local government associations, farmer's housewives' associations).⁴
- Other entities engaged in public benefit activities and volunteer work.⁵

Within the overall scope of the social economy, the solidarity dimension of SSE gives specific focus to entities and activities with a primary goal of professional activation and social integration, including people at risk of social exclusion, and the social and professional rehabilitation of people with disabilities. In practice, entities within the solidarity dimension of the social economy include social and worker cooperatives, cooperatives for the disabled and the blind, and sheltered workshops and reintegration units. The status of social enterprise, which does not reflect any specific legal form, is conferred by the voivodeship to entities pursuing solidarity objectives that meet certain conditions. Namely, a social enterprise must conduct business or a paid public benefit activity that:

- professionally activates difficult-to-employ people,
- does not privatise profit or balance sheet surplus,
- is managed in a participatory manner,
- employs socially excluded people (with a minimum of 3 persons on a ½-time basis, and constituting at least 30% of total employees).

1. Data for 2021, source: <https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/social-economy/social-economy-third-sector/social-economy-entities-in-2021-preliminary-data,17,1.html>

2. Ibid.

3. Social integration centres and social integration clubs operating pursuant to the Act of 13 June 2003 on social employment, and occupational therapy workshops

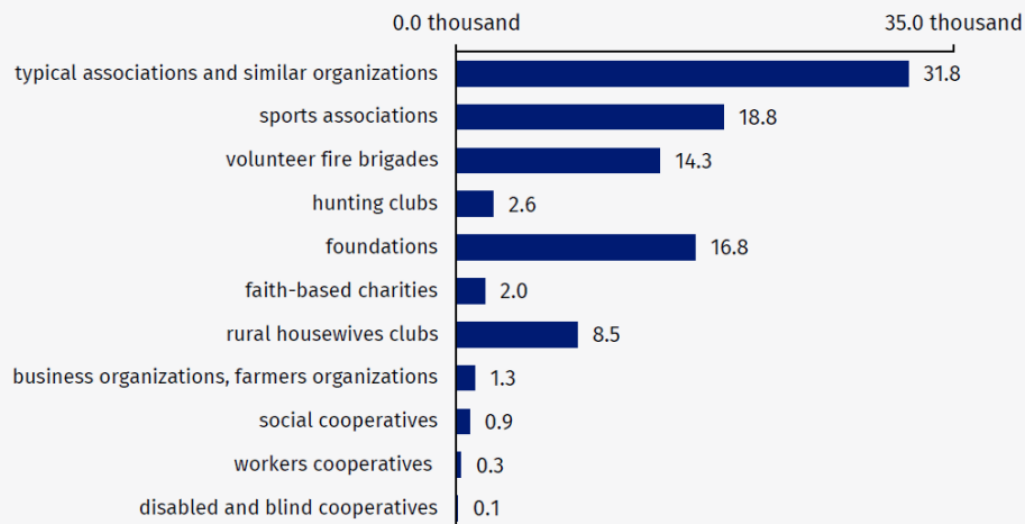
and occupational activity centres operating on the basis of the Act of 27 August 1997 on vocational and social rehabilitation and employment of disabled persons.

4. As referred to in art. 3 sec. 2 of the Act of 24 April 2003 on public benefit and volunteer work; except for: political parties, European political parties, trade unions and employers' organizations, professional self-governments, foundations established by political parties and European political foundations.

5. As referred to in art. 3 sec. 3 points 1, 2 and 4 of the Act of 24 April 2003 on public benefit activities and volunteer work.

Statistics Poland¹ estimates that there were 97.4 thousand social economy entities active in 2021, employing 209.1 thousand persons on the basis of an employment contract, of which 25.9 thousand persons (12.4%) belonging to groups at risk of social exclusion.² Of these entities, there were 96.1 thousand non-profit organizations and 1.3 thousand cooperatives.

Chart 1. Number of active social economy entities by type in 2021



More than half of persons belonging to groups at risk of social exclusion were employed in cooperatives (13.2 thousand persons; 51.0%), of which 32.6% in cooperatives for the disabled and blind, and 15.1% in social cooperatives. Such persons accounted for 75.7% of all those employed in disabled and blind cooperatives, and 61.1% of persons employed in social cooperatives.

There were an estimated 0.6 thousand social enterprises in 2021³, of which 47.1% were non-profit organizations and 52.9% were cooperatives. Social enterprises employed 5.8 thousand persons, of which, there were 3.4 thousand persons (58.0%) employed due to belonging to groups at risk of social exclusion. Collectively, around a quarter of social and workers cooperatives and cooperatives for the disabled and the blind have the status of a social enterprise⁴, while less than 1% of other (non-profit) social economy entities have this status⁵.

1. <https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/social-economy/social-economy-third-sector/social-economy-entities-in-2021-preliminary-data,17,1.html>

2. Statistics Poland provides the following definition: Persons at risk of social exclusion are persons who at the time of taking up employment in the entity belonged to one of the following groups: unemployed; persons under 30 or over 50 if they had the status of a job seeker; job seekers who are not employed or who do not perform any other gainful work; disabled persons; homeless; addicted to alcohol or drugs; persons with mental disorders; persons after penitentiary; refugees; persons subject to full-time social insurance for farmers, if their income is not more than the income from 6 conversion hectares; persons meeting the income criteria enabling the granting of cash benefits from social assistance; self-empowered persons.

3. <https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/social-economy/social-economy-third-sector/social-economy-entities-in-2021-preliminary-data,17,1.html>

4. https://stat.gov.pl/download/gfx/portalinformacyjny/en/defaultaktualnosci/3405/17/1/1/cooperatives_in_2021.xlsx

5. https://stat.gov.pl/download/gfx/portalinformacyjny/en/defaultaktualnosci/3405/17/1/1/activity_of_non-profit_organizations_in_2021.xlsx

Social economy opportunities for the redeployment of mining and power generation workers

In relation to the redeployment of workers from mining and power generation, analysis of the Polish situation⁶, together with international experiences of social economy development which are described in an accompanying report, indicate that promising opportunities for the development of social economy activities in Eastern Wielkopolska might include:

- Renewable energy supply: e.g., citizens and community-based energy projects that could create opportunities for redeployment of engineers and technicians from the mining and power sector;
- Manufacture of energy efficient appliances and systems: e.g., development, production and installation renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies that could create opportunities for electrical or mechanical engineers and production workers
- Thermo-modernisation and retrofit: e.g., building renovation and energy efficiency improvements that could create opportunities for workers in a range of activities, including construction, fabrication and installation.
- Land reclamation and infrastructure repurposing: e.g., reclamation of post-industrial and post-mining areas and repurposing of former industrial buildings and infrastructure for industrial, commercial, leisure and tourism, or community-based activities, together with carrying out adaptation works to climate change (including reconstruction of water resources), that could create inter alia opportunities for heavy equipment operators and site/civil engineers.
- Personal social services: e.g., provision of care services (e.g., including care for the elderly, children, people with disabilities, well-being and rehabilitation) responding to local demands and addressing gaps in available provision. social sources not adequately covered by public providers that could provide opportunities for those willing to retrain in care activities.
- Digital systems and services: e.g., development and operation of digital applications/tools and platforms for local business and public administrations, and provision of digital training

services that could provide opportunities for administrative and ICT staff, or people willing to retrain.

- Platforms for independent professional and freelancer workers: e.g., setting up cooperative platforms to associate and support individual specialists (including self-employed and new start-up businesses of former miners and power workers) in areas such as repair work, assembly, casual and commission work

6. Bielecki, W., Erbel, J., Komuda, Ł., Szczerba, M., Zygmuntowski J.J. (2022) Spółdzielcza transformacja: Operacjonalizacja sprawiedliwej transformacji dla regionów węglowych w Polsce [Cooperative transformation: operationalisation of the just transition for coal regions in Poland] (link)

Identifying and prioritising potential opportunities for Social Economy Enterprises

Based on the previous synthesis of data and information, a concise SWOT analysis has been created to illuminate key local considerations to assist identification and prioritisation of opportunities for the creation and expansion of social economy enterprises.

Criteria for selection

To facilitate selections and prioritisation of opportunities a set of criteria has been identified:

- i. Addresses several dimensions of the SWOT analysis
- ii. Fit with skills of affected workers
- iii. Fit with aspirations and working culture of affected workers
- iv. Availability of funding and support and policy fit
- v. Demand and sustainability of opportunity
- vi. Level of displacement
- vii. Retains opportunity and wealth in local community

Eastern Wielkopolska: SWOT

Strengths

Agriculture / arable land
 Central location and connectivity
 Education, skills, attributes of ZE PAK workers
 External profile for green transition
 High levels of community belonging/ affiliation
 Local construction and industrial processing

Weaknesses

Aging population
 Brownfield sites / former industrial sites
 Entrepreneurial culture
 Housing stock and energy efficiency
 Out-migration of young families and people
 Service sector

Opportunities

Energy efficiency and retrofitting of buildings
 Circular economy
 Green mobility
 Growing national expenditure on food, health and care
 Public procurement and public sector reform
 Restoration of brownfield sites
 Social & care services e.g., for old and young
 Tourism (e.g., cycling)

Threats

Contracting tax base and public services
 Declining incomes and local wealth
 Demographic imbalance
 Digital exclusion
 Energy poverty
 Increase in vulnerable groups
 Loss of community cohesion / resilience

Assessment of potential opportunities

Based on the above SWOT and criteria, eight indicative opportunities for the creation and expansion of local co-operatives have been identified for further consideration and critique. As noted, this is not a definitive list, but has been generated with the intention of encouraging the identification and assessment of a more detailed and comprehensive list of opportunities.

Opportunity	Rationale for Selection
Brownfield site rehabilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses Weakness & Opportunity (e.g., tourism) Fit with skills of affected workers Fit with aspirations and working culture of affected workers Demand and sustainability of opportunity (in medium term) Low level of displacement (new activity) Retains opportunity and wealth in local community
Circular economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses Opportunity Fit with skills of affected workers Availability of funding and support and policy fit Demand and sustainability of opportunity Retains opportunity and wealth in local community
Digital systems, services and platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses Weakness, Threat Availability of funding and support and policy fit Demand and sustainability of opportunity Retains opportunity and wealth in local community
Greening of transport system (incl. charging points, e-bikes, cycling)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses Strength, Opportunity Fit with skills of affected workers Fit with aspirations and working culture of affected workers Availability of funding and support and policy fit Demand and sustainability of opportunity Level of displacement (new activity) Retains opportunity and wealth in local community
Higher value agriculture / food production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses Strength, Opportunity Demand and sustainability of opportunity Level of displacement (could be low) Retains opportunity and wealth in local community
Renewable energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses Strength, Opportunity, Threat Fit with skills of affected workers Fit with aspirations and working culture of affected workers Availability of funding and support and policy fit Demand and sustainability of opportunity Level of displacement (new activity) Retains opportunity and wealth in local community
Retrofitting and energy efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add's Strength, Weakness, Opp, Threat Fit with skills of affected workers Fit with aspirations and working culture of affected workers Availability of funding and support and policy fit Demand and sustainability of opportunity Retains opportunity and wealth in local community
Social care and social services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add's Strength, Weakness, Opp, Threat Availability of funding and support and policy fit Demand and sustainability of opportunity Retains opportunity and wealth in local community

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