

# The Social Enterprise - Viable Mechanism of Social Integration for Romanian Vulnerable Groups

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## Abstract

*The social economy organizations and especially the work insertion social enterprises prove to be viable instruments for revitalizing the local economies undergoing difficulties. Due to the limited capacity of the communities in the underprivileged areas to generate income and the inability to activate endogenous development processes and create jobs, social economy is regarded as a component of the community development process.*

*The article handles the issue of social economy organizations, focusing on the social insertion enterprises as the main mechanisms for increasing the employment within vulnerable persons. Starting from the analysis of the social economy contribution to the implementation of the European social policy, the author reviews the social insertion means, forms and models of vulnerable persons currently existing on national and international level. The research entailed the use of an indirect observation by analyzing the specialized Romanian and foreign literature and by analyzing various official documents available at various non-governmental organizations and European research institutes and networks, interested and involved in the wide and various range of problems related to the management of social enterprises.*

**Keywords:** *Social enterprises, social economy, social inclusion, vulnerable groups, work insertion social enterprises, local development*

**JEL classification:** I30, J01, L31

## 1. Introduction

During the past two decades, Romania underwent a period of profound transformations, which radically altered the general social development profile and which determined a shift in the overall vision of social sustainment methods of the social sector; thus the issue of reformulating the defining coordinates of social protection was acutely raised.

The social economy entities can prove their utility especially in small communities, where the success of the intervention is tightly connected with the

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attitude and behaviour related changes and the connections between the local community members are strong. Constantinescu (2013) states the first local development initiatives (local initiatives for creating jobs) were designed as concerted actions attempting to solve on local level the social issues from the underdeveloped communities; the problems of such communities were rarely included in the agenda of central authorities or were inefficiently handled by them.

The local interventions mainly targeted the identification of the needs which could not be satisfied by the local policies on central level or by the local business environment, due to the reduced profitability and conversion thereof into economic activities. Bilkhorzer (2009) considers that such interventions generate jobs for vulnerable persons and for the community members as a whole, sets income and local resources and finally contributes to the development of the underprivileged community. The targeted communities are the poorer ones, with a reduced financial power, mainly located in the rural area and often from mono-industrialized regions, with increased unemployment rates or other forms of social marginalization.

Stănilă (2012) considers that social enterprises are important players in the social innovation process due to the products and services carried-out, but especially due to the effects thereof on the entire local development process. Borzaga and Tortia (2009) analyze the social economy effects on the local development process and argue that they are due to the specific features of the social economy entities, which provide net advantages compared to the other players contributing to the development of the local economy; the authors enumerate: the social purpose, the limited profit distribution, the democratic governing, the efficient decision-making process, the managerial autonomy etc.

The social mission and aim of the social enterprises renders them unable to direct their activity mainly on obtaining profit. In some cases, it is difficult to keep the balance between the economic and social activity. Social enterprises may have multiple social purposes: social integration, labour integration, providing support services to exceed the marginalization cases, increasing the human or social capital within the community, the manufacture of goods and provision of services, advocacy, etc., all of these contributing directly or indirectly to the local community development.

## **2. Social economy role and contribution in the EU Social Policy**

In spite of the integration into the European Union, currently in Romania we cannot discuss the clarity of the vision related to a social model or the pragmatism of the social development coordinates. The financing schemes directed towards the social protection of underprivileged categories of the population on the labour market, as well as the existing social services networks (health, education, social security, social assistance) may be virtually reunited under the emblem of a single social model.

The social systems from the EU states significantly differ regarding the structure and volume of the social expenses or the features of the target groups and assisted persons, of the income transfers, etc. Nevertheless, the European social model distinguishes the coexistence of four groups of countries, according to Bertola et al (2001). The Northern countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and the Netherlands) register the highest GDP weights of social expenses, based on the citizenship principle and to support them these countries demand relatively high public taxation and use a wide range of active social instruments and policies. The Anglo-Saxon states, such as Great Britain and Ireland adopted a model according to which social transfers are mainly directed towards the employed population who generate relatively small income; the system is supplemented by relatively developed social security services. The continental countries, such as Austria, Belgium, Germany or Luxembourg have adopted a model extensively based on social security's schemes, financed by the contributions paid by the employed persons, while Mediterranean states such as Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal generated models based on social security systems, within which the granted benefits are widely segmented, according to the status of the contributor categories they are addressed to.

Stanciu (2007) explains the difference between the North-European social protection systems and the ones from the South of the continent: the northern ones are extremely efficient in reducing economic and social polarization, while the southern ones are weaker in this respect. The northern systems grant social benefits especially to the active eligible persons, and the ones in the southern part of the continent especially to retired persons and other underprivileged persons. The Anglo-Saxon system is distinguished by its efficiency in reducing economic polarization within the active population and less within retired persons.

The social economy entities' mission is to provide social services, no matter their legal form. Ziomas (2012) considers that in the context of the community social policy, the role of the social economy and its specific entities is to serve the social purposes and objectives, through the development of the economic initiatives and activities involving the manufacture and distribution of mainly social products and services. Cozărescu (2012) states that in Romania, the social economy sector initially developed as a major intervention field through financing projects from structural funds and subsequently it consolidated as a relevant conceptual model in the social integration of vulnerable groups. The social economy provides solutions for the social exclusion reduction by increasing the occupancy rate of vulnerable persons and by creating means and mechanisms for the active integration thereof in society. The main objective of the social economy entities is to fulfill the social mission and not to generate profit as in the case of classic enterprises from the private sector.

The operation of the social economy organizations is supported by a set of values and principles which are differentiating them from the traditional private organizations or the public organizations. Ziomas (2012) argues the nature and content of the principles, stating that these types of initiatives are collective by

default and thus they can function as a business, but they are governed by the solidarity-based entrepreneurial spirit. The social economy entities have the dominant purpose of providing services to the members of their communities, predominantly and absolutely distinctive to following the profit; these initiatives represent socially oriented businesses or organizations. Another basic principle is that the social economy entities take advantage of an independent management system, which means that the organization management cannot be directly or indirectly exercised by any authority, public or local government agency or business in the profit-generating private sector, even if these organizations may participate to the initiative.

Social economy entities are governed by the principle of people and social services priority against the capital, in the (re)distribution process of the surplus resulting from the organization activities. As a matter of fact, a study realised within the Networks of Social Economy Incubators (Asociația Europa pentru Dezvoltare Umană, 2011) indicates that the most appropriate term to define the social businesses profit is “overplus”, for the purpose of making a clear distinction regarding its destination: in case of social businesses, the investors do not obtain dividends, but they recover only the initial investment.

### **3. Vulnerable groups, social exclusion and models for social inclusion**

The “vulnerable groups” concept derives from the universal principles of human rights and targets population segments confronted with discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. Equality in applying and complying with human rights is an ideal, reason for which the human rights supporters and promoters introduced the term vulnerable groups and drew the attention on the need to grant special attention to these social categories, which are more exposed to the discrimination risk than the other members of society (Reichert, 2006).

The importance and relevance of studying specific issues of vulnerable groups was noticed since 2000, when the European Council in Lisbon approached the social exclusion issue and adopted a coherent package of policies in the social field and practical economic policies for stimulating the employment of this social category (Lambriu, 2010). The European Commission (2010a) considers that the promotion of social inclusion involves efforts so that all individuals, including the vulnerable social categories, to be able to pay an active part on the labour market and to take advantage of equal chances to social welfare. In the “Europe 2020 Strategy” for an intelligent, durable growth favourable to inclusion, the European Commission (2010b) notes that an inclusion favourable growth involves the provision of the citizens' autonomy by investments in the development of competencies, fighting against poverty and modernization of the labour markets for the purpose of building a solidary society.

The public debates on the social policy and social welfare in general, are focused on issues related to the problems and protection methods of vulnerable groups (risk groups, underprivileged groups, socially marginalized groups). The

vulnerable groups are delimited by comparison with most population as having difficult life conditions (precarious accommodation or lack of a home, unemployment, low education level, lack of income), undoubtedly leading to the reduction of social welfare, to a commensurable extent, which is still unknown due to the lack of a phenomenon assessment system. According to Hoogeveen (2005), the vulnerability regards the risks which may lead to a level of social welfare under the minimum threshold considered to be acceptable by the society and which in time, determines the occurrence of the social marginalization phenomena.

In the Romanian legislation, vulnerable groups cover a wide range of socio-demographical categories and social issues, but in defining the vulnerability status, the employment situation represents the most relevant criterion. Social economy and the social economy entities are often regarded as a solution for the integration on the labour market of underprivileged persons, the case of the social insertion enterprises being the most eloquent in this respect (Arpinte et al, 2010).

Bostani and Grosu (2010) detect the context of the current economic crisis, whose consequences overlap the vulnerability issues of the socially marginalized categories and generate tensions and conflicts due to the increase in the population poverty, the possibility of losing jobs, the occurrence of financial problems etc. The vulnerability in the integration on the labour market may be associated with regional or economic factors, with the patterns of the local labour market or with the particularities of the private sector and of course, with the individual or social characteristics. The vulnerable groups on the labour market are classified according to the social or individual variables, such as: ethnic group, gender, disability, age, residence environment, etc. According to M.M.F.P.S. (2010) the main groups in Romania which are traditionally found in one of the vulnerability situations on the labour market are youngsters, women, roma ethnic groups, disabled persons, immigrants, persons close to the age of retirement, persons from the rural areas.

The major challenge for the following years is represented by reaching the objectives related to the inclusive economy. For this purpose, the European bodies drafted ten guidelines supporting the Member States in the development of national policies and based on which the progress in the field will be monitored; within them, 10<sup>th</sup> guideline relates to the promotion of social inclusion and the fight against poverty. But the implementation of the social community policy involves the creation of a durable major political consensus related to the approach / adequate strategic models for fighting against social marginalization and the consolidation of the social inclusion of vulnerable groups.

Social inclusion often appears as an instrument for transforming the habits of the society, the moral qualities and values, the social and professional ones, but also as a mechanism to acquire behavioral abilities and qualities correlated with the entrepreneurial culture (Jianu and Bâra, 2013) Social inclusion is in fact an ideological and political concept, which either characterizes a set of experimental social practices converging towards the fight against social inclusion or establishes an unclear intervention field. Levitas (2004) analyzes the occurrence reasons of the social marginalization phenomenon as well as the dimensions and implications of

the social inclusion processes, establishing a few benchmarks to argue the importance and relevance of social inclusion policies, especially in the case of vulnerable persons. As a matter of fact, the specialty literature provides several social inclusion models and mechanisms of the vulnerable groups.

Sima (2003) explains four assisted employment models which can be successfully used for the social-professional integration of various vulnerable categories, but which are mainly used in case of persons with special needs: the individual model, the work place division model, the enclave model and the model of labour in a mobile group. The application of the individual model involves the existence of a person, of a job and of an employment specialist. The work hours are variable, according to the employee and the specialist's intervention also seems variable, according to the needs, being reduced to 2 contacts per month.

The work place division model involves the existence of two persons in assisted employment, having a supervisor and a work place in common. The (full-time or part-time) job can be divided between two vulnerable persons and the assistance can be reduced as in the case of the individual model. The enclave model considers several assisted persons, but no more than 8, located together at a small distance in a work place integrated in the community. In this model, the social-professional integration chances are smaller. The implementation of the mobile group labour requires the organization of mobile teams, which usually have 4-5 persons belonging to a vulnerable group, which work outside a center or stable office and the activity of each team is supervised by 1-2 employment specialists.

The specialized American literature presents a socio-professional integration model destined to certain categories of vulnerable groups which facilitate the transition from school to an active life. The transitional employment model was mainly used for the professional orientation of psychiatrically disabled persons. In its European version, the model is has the form of transition from school to the work place and targets a wider range of vulnerable groups; the model is frequently used by the school units, for the purpose of providing a facile transition of disabled youngsters between the media (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2006). Various labour climates are established with the employment specialists, but there are tested for short periods of time (up to 3 months). The transition process towards the work place is carried out with the active and continuous involvement and participation of the vulnerable person, with the implication of his/her family, with the coordination between all responsible services and a tight cooperation with the management of the organization which makes the job available. This model should increase the person's chances to find a sustainable job, stimulate the autonomy, motivation, self-perception and self-trust of the vulnerable person.

#### **4. Work insertion social enterprises and its role in social inclusion of vulnerable groups**

The term of social enterprise is relatively recent used in various countries. The social enterprise is incorporated under various legal forms: it can be an association (in France, Belgium and Finland) or a cooperative (especially in Italy, where a law was adopted for “special cooperatives” in 1991). In other European states, social enterprises exist in various legal forms, from the “ideel” Swedish associations to the British version of “friendly society”, to companies with a classic basic capital and somewhere in the middle of the scale, the Spanish approach with “sociedad anónima laboral”.

Pârvu, Ungureanu and Hagi (2009) investigated the issue of social enterprises in Europe, compared to the ones in the United States of America; the authors concluded that in the European space, except for Great Britain, the social enterprise regards a cooperative or social association established for the purpose of providing employment or specific welfare services using participative methods, unlike the ones in the United States where the social enterprises' sphere includes any type of non-profit activity involving the generation of income. Ziomas (2012) indicates that in some European countries the law was especially amended to simulate economic initiatives with a social objective: In Greece for example, “a limited liability social cooperative” (for persons with mental illnesses) was regulated by law in 1999 and it was amended in 2011 to facilitate the incorporation of “social cooperative companies”.

Pearce (2009) confines the social enterprises range using six features which, in his opinion, are fundamental for social enterprises: social purpose or purposes; reaching the social goals by the involvement, at least partially in the commercial activities on the market; failure to distribute the profit between individuals, holding assets and goods for the benefit of the community, the democratic involvement of the clients; independent organization liable towards the clients / voters and the entire community.

A similar definition is also provided by the European research network regarding the establishment of social enterprises in Europe (EMES), which explains the ideal type of social enterprise by the aggregate fulfillment of nine criteria, classified into two dimensions: the economic dimension - continuous production and/or trading activity, increased autonomy degree, significant economic risk level, minimum quantity of paid work; the social dimension - the initiative derives from a group of citizens, the decision power of its members is not correlated with owning the capital, the representation and participation of clients, the limited distribution of profit and the existence of benefits for the community. Defourney (2004) considers that the nine criteria (4 economic and 5 social) must not be considered as conditions to be strictly complied with by an entity to receive the social enterprise qualification, but that must be approached as defining elements of an “ideal type” allowing the classification of an entity in the social enterprise sphere. An empirical study realised by Orhei, Vinke și Nandram (2014)

revealed that Romanian social enterprises meet the EMES economic criteria to a very large extent and the social criteria to a lesser extent.

Kerlin (2010) defines the social enterprises by using the non-governmental and market methods for social issues and considers that they are often a business-like income source for several organizations and socially oriented activities. The definition of Ridley-Duff and Bull (2011) represents a complex dual vision for defining the concept: on the one hand it considered the concept explanation through the appearance of trans-sectorial models (public sector, private sector and non-governmental sector), from whose perspective the social enterprise is regarded as an organization with an unique consolidation character of economic regeneration capacities, allowing the state to assign the public services provision; on the other hand, social enterprises are defined by awarding the activity status (not by the organization status), being re-conceptualized as a results of the social entrepreneurship process.

The social enterprise concept is not identical with the social economy one, and reflect a new type of organization incorporated under the social economy sector. Defourney (2004) analyzes the conceptual delimitations between the two notions, concluding that the social enterprise regards the newly created entity as a result of a social entrepreneurship process and which includes some elements from the past experiences of the tertiary sector; this new institutional form can be described as a private business with a social purpose, which reflect the new social orientation of the entrepreneurial activities. Considering the two possible essential tasks, the social enterprises have either the form of social enterprises for the employment of underprivileged persons on the labour market (as in the case of work insertion social enterprises), or of social enterprises whose main purpose is the production and provision of social services for a certain community or a certain group of persons (in case of typical social enterprises), or of social enterprises combining the two forms.

The work insertion social enterprise is a form of social enterprise with an explicit role in the internal professional integration (within its own organization) or external integration (on the labour market) of the persons encountering persistent difficulties on employment; Constantinescu (2013) states that the main definition criterion of the work insertion social enterprises is the fact that they must recruit and maintain in operation a certain number of vulnerable persons, calculated as percentage from the total number of employees.

According to the specialty literature (Fundafția Alături de Voi, 2011; Spear, 2013) there is a wide range of social economy entities which are part of the work insertion social enterprises; in Europe, the following were regulated as social insertion enterprises: social cooperatives (in 1991 in Italy, in 1996 in Portugal, in 1999 in Greece, in 2006 in Poland, Belgium and Luxemburg), typical social enterprises (in 2004 in Finland, in 2005 in Italy, in 2007 in Spain, etc.), social cooperative enterprises (in 2011 in Greece), social finality companies (in 1996 in Belgium) and community interest companies (in 2005 in Great Britain). In Romania there are social economy entities referred to as protected units, which

provide the insertion on the labour market of the persons with disabilities and which are authorized, according to the law, only if at least 30% of the total number of employees with individual labour contract are disabled persons.

In spite of the various activities and interest fields of social enterprises (social services on local level, home-assistance services, waste collection and recycling, customs and crafts, local cultural development, promotion of the rural tourism etc.) several joint elements can be identified for the social economy entities, no matter the legal organization and operation form. First of all, the purpose of their existence is to satisfy the social need; secondly their entire objective is the production of goods or provision of social services, usually with a territorial delimitation. Thirdly the social economy entities are intensely focused on creating jobs for vulnerable persons, which provides the eligibility to be declared work insertion social enterprises.

The Centre d'Economie Sociale within the University of Liege carried out a study in 2001-2004 on 150 social insertion enterprises in 11 community states, for the purpose of identifying labour integration models of the persons in difficulty. Davister et al (2004) concluded that on European level, there are four operational models of work insertion social enterprises, according to the socio-professional integration method of vulnerable persons. The integration model by providing temporary jobs assumes that the work insertion social enterprises provide professional training on the job, for the purpose of a subsequent integration of the vulnerable persons on the labour market (the case of "entreprises de travail temporaire d'insertion" in France). The temporary employment seems to be the predominant model of the social insertion enterprises in Europe and has the purpose of increasing the employment chances of persons with a risk of exclusion from the labour market.

In case of integration through temporarily subsidized permanent jobs, the work insertion social enterprises reserve within their own organization a certain number of jobs established for vulnerable persons. The jobs are temporarily funded for the purpose of compensating the reduced capacity of the workers and they are granted directly (wage subsidies) and/or indirectly (taxes on income and contributions to the social health, unemployment contributions) and cease once the workers reach an acceptable level of productivity on the opened labour market; the organizations aim to pay their staff entirely from the income generated on the market and not from subsidies. This insertion model of vulnerable groups aims to create self-sustainable jobs on the long-term, similar to the ones existing on the free labour market; the stable jobs model is mostly found in Germany ("soziale betriebe") and Great Britain ("social firms").

The employment through permanently subsidized jobs, involves the creation of permanent jobs by the insertion enterprise within its own organization structure for the persons belonging to vulnerable groups. The jobs are completely subsidized during the entire employment period, in the form of sheltered units within social economy entities (such as "emprego protegido" in Portugal, "sheltered employment" in Ireland or "entreprises de travail" adopted in Belgium),

The socialization model using productive activities target the social inclusion of vulnerable persons which show severe social integration problems, such as the alcohol or drug addicts, former convicts, etc.). These work insertion social enterprises do not aim to increase the productivity level of the workers, nor the professional integration on the free labour market, but the increase of the sociability level and reintegration into the society. The re-socialization through productive activities is carried out using informal and semi-formal actions, social contact, rule obedience, a new lifestyle, occupational therapy, developed in an organizational environment (such as “centres d’adaptation a la vie active” in France, “entreprises sociale d’insertion actives dans la recuperation et le recyclage” in Belgium or “centros ocupacionales” in Spain).

## 5. Conclusions

The contributions brought to the community by the social enterprises may consist in increasing the trust between members and institutions, establishment of stronger relationships between members, establishment of networks with the other communities or stimulating the innovation to solve social issues and the introduction of such innovations into the current activity of the responsible local authorities or increasing the employment especially among the persons from vulnerable groups. The social enterprise is no news to the academic and research environment or international practice consists in using the private sector specific mechanisms for the purpose of satisfying social needs. The fact that the social enterprise is currently regarded as a reliable alternative for satisfying the social needs, but especially in providing the socio-professional inclusion of the vulnerable persons indicates a certain degree of novelty.

In the current context of financial difficulties the public sector is confronted with, the social enterprise may become an essential player in the development of the public sector in general and especially of the local communities where they are located. The social enterprise finds its utility and necessity in the private sector, by adjusting the mission of the private organization to satisfying the current social needs, but also in the non-profit sector, by adopting business methods for the organization sustainability. Thus, social enterprises are organizations established and developed at the borderline between the public, private and non-profit sectors.

The relationship between the vulnerable groups and social economy entities is governed by the social inclusion and has two perspectives. On the one hand, vulnerable persons may have the quality of employee, on the other hand they can get actively involved, becoming social entrepreneurs and gaining the quality of employer. The order of the two insertion options on the labour market is not random; if the first scenario is more common, the second indicates a series of particularities. The employment of vulnerable groups in general, but especially in the social economy entities, can be encouraged through the financial support from the state, by creating significant fiscal facilities, but also by informing and raising

the awareness among the employers regarding the labour potential of the vulnerable people and the real possibility of its capitalization.

The main features which differentiate the social enterprises from any other category of organizations regard the non-profit orientation, the combination within the same mission of the economic and social objectives, the balanced control of the social enterprise by the beneficiaries, employees and local community as main business partners which acquire social benefits. The coexistence of three major functions simultaneously fulfilled by this type of organization definitely differentiates the social enterprises from other organizations in the public, private or non-governmental sector: the production and supply function of public goods and services (mainly of social nature), the labour integration function of various categories of vulnerable groups and the contribution function to the local sustainable development (of the local economy and of the community in its entirety).

The effort to combine the social objectives with the classical entrepreneurial activity allows the social enterprise to establish a stable balance, which cannot be reached or consolidated by the profit-oriented private organization or by the non-profit-oriented non-governmental organizations.

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