

A PROFILE OF THE SOCIAL ECONOMY: LEGAL REGULATION AND STATISTICAL ASPECTS

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Abstract

This study examines the social economy in Romania after it was regulated by law. The results of the investigation are based on the analyses of the content of the law, several reports and of the Single Register of Social Enterprises, with emphasis on quantitative data. The evolution of the following indicators is presented: the legislative profile of the social economy, the numerical distribution of social enterprises (volume of the social economy) and the spatial (regional) distribution and employees of the social economy (numerical distribution of persons belonging to vulnerable groups). The period investigated is from 2015 (the year of legislative regulation) to 2024. The article contributes to the enrichment of specialized studies in the field, suggesting new research perspective.

Keywords

Social economy, law of social economy, dynamics of social economy, social enterprises, impact.

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1. Introduction

Social economy, both as a concept and as a legislative regulation, is relatively recent in Romania. Even if, in essence, some economic units have functioned in the past on the basis of the rules that can be framed in what we now call the *social economy*, the concept of social economy has been used in Romania since 2002 (in the context of the Anti-Poverty Plan and the Promotion of Social Inclusion) being considered as incompletely defined and the specific principles and values too little known (Stănescu *et al.*, 2013). Subsequently, in 2015, the concept of social economy and social enterprises are defined by legislation (Lambriu & Petrescu, 2019).

The approach undertaken in this study starts from a few questions: What is the social economy and how has it evolved in Romania? How has it been addressed in public policies? What kind of economic or social units constitute the social economy sector? What impact does it have on a social and economic level? In order to provide answer to these questions, in the first phase, an incursion into the specialized literature is made and in the second, observation related to the content of the regulating the social economy are recorded. The last phase includes a statistical presentation of registered social economy units. As a result of this approach, we will be able to have an overview of the size of the social economy sector and its evolution in Romanian space.

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2. Social economy: Some theoretical considerations

The social economy is one of the topics that has raised the interest of many social actors, from entrepreneurs and associations that advocate for social integration, to analysts and researchers of social life or public policy makers. The realization of the inability of current economies to eliminate poverty, homelessness, hunger, etc. is followed by the paradigm shift: the social economy, with its emphasis on social and human aspects, is seen as a means of solving these problems (Restakis, 2006; Gunn, 2004), social economy organizations providing jobs for vulnerable people exposed to poverty (Arpinte *et al.*, 2010); the role of the state and the market in providing well-being, the failure of the economy in the face of the challenge of covering all the needs of society is underlined (Cace *et al.*, 2018).

The approach from the perspective of the social economy took shape as result of the political, economic and social debates launched towards the end of the eighteenth century, initially developed by utopian socialists (Restakis, 2006). Defourny and Develtere (1999) point out that the origins of the phenomenon go back to ancient times, being an expression of associations in the form of fraternities, guilds, benevolent funds, merchants' associations, corporations, etc., in Europe as well as in China and pre-colonial Africa and America. In France, the term social economy has been used since the first third of the 19th century. The authors point out that at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, in many countries, laws regulating the operation of cooperatives, mutual societies and non-profit organizations appeared, thus constituting the modern social economy.

Restakis (2006) following the historical path of the definition of the social economy, shows that there have been changes in the definitions, speaking of a definition of *the old social economy*, focused on economic structures - cooperatives, mutual societies and non-profit organizations - guided by the democratic principle “one member, one vote” (constructing the alternative social enterprises model) and a definition of *the new social economy*, activity-oriented social economy in which individuals and the enterprise are linked through democratic governance, profit-sharing model, surplus reinvestment model, with the aim of covering wider community objectives. Subsequently, the following definition was outlined, operable today:

“The social economy includes all economic activities conducted by enterprises, primarily co-operatives, associations and mutual benefit societies, whose ethics convey the following principles: 1. Placing service to its members or to the community ahead of profit; 2. Autonomous management; 3. A democratic decision-making process; 4. The primacy of people and work over capital in the distribution of revenues” (Defourny & Develtere, 1999; Restakis, 2006).

In the sphere of ideologies, Defourny and Develtere (1999) show that the social economy is a result of a mix of ideological currents: the current of *associationist socialism* (including the utopian ideas of Owen, King, Fourier, Sant-Simon and Proudhon – supporters of production cooperatives - and the international workers` movements), the *social-Christian* current (through initiatives among the clergy and Christian communities) and *liberal thought* (rejecting state intervention, promoting economic freedom, the principle of mutual aid and the creation of mutual aid societies or the current supported by C. Gide called *solidarism*. In addition, Restakis (2006) considered that two currents of thought were taking shape: one, continuing F. Le Play`s vision, in which the social

economy (seen as a niche, as a parallel market, but still dependent on the state) functioned separately from the economic market constituted by capitalist and state enterprises and second, in which the social economy takes the form of the civil economy, as an integral part of the economy, in which the state, the commercial sector and the social economy work together.

Going beyond the descriptive varieties and the efforts to establish the boundaries of the social economy (a task that is still in progress, due to the diversity of activities and organization involved, as well as the stated mission), we refer to the terminology developed to designate the social economy (terms taken from various studies): *economy of solidarity* (developed in France and Latin America countries), *the alternative economy* (with roots in France) and *the popular economy* (present in South America countries) (Cace, 2010). Other terms for this sector are: *non-profit sector* (Restakis, 2006), *third sector* (Gunn, 2004) or *social business* and *social entrepreneurship* (Yunus, 2010).

Seen as a real alternative to the model of capitalism, which is considered dominant (Jeantet & Poulnot, 2007), the social economy sector has developed, both in terms of the numbers of enterprises and the capacity to employ and reach vulnerable groups. Thus, in Brazil, the solidarity economy includes a total of 14,954 enterprises (44% of which are located in the northeast, the poorest part of the country and 64% of the total is in agriculture) employing 1,251,882 people (65% men and 35% women) (Singer, 2007). Canada has a social economy based on 23,487 non-profit organizations (incorporated under the British Columbia Companies Act) plus 593 organizations incorporated in other regions but active in British Columbia; there are also 9,918 charitable organizations, 566 private foundations and 485 public foundations; the cooperative area is represented by 594 cooperatives (of which 274 are housing cooperatives), 54 credit unions; the population's inclusion in cooperatives is high: one in three people is a member of a credit union (Restakis, 2006).

Gradually, at the public level, the issue of the social economy came to the attention of government structures and not only, amid the concern to solve problems related to employment, proposals for improving legislation, exploring European practices to support the social economy and strategic assumption (Stănescu *et al.*, 2013). With regard to unitary actions to support the social economy undertaken at European level, an action plan was outlined, from which Borzaga *et al.* (2020) expected a set of measures to support the social economy, including: structured interaction between all parties involved to support the employment of workers, the construction of public policies to support small and traditional enterprises of the social economy and the support of dialogue with institutions stimulating training and education on the specifics of the social economy, raising awareness of the role of the social economy in social innovation, promoting and supporting their development, measures for financial support, as well as recognition of the role played in the green economy, cultural recognition of the An Ethical Dimension. A year later, the European Commission (2021) published the document *Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy*, which aims to stimulate the social and economic transformative power of the social economy.

At the level of European countries, the social economy has attracted public attention and official reports present its status. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) present in a report an international perspective on the social and solidarity economy (social economy ecosystem), presenting the social economy sector in figures. Thus, Austria registered 127,400 social economy entities - most of them being associations (49.3% are involved in social services including training

and employment). In 2020, women accounted for 70% of the workforce in 2020 and the gross value added was EUR 10.3 billion (OECD, 2024). In Belgium, in 2020, the social economy is based on 17066 entities in which 583,209 people are employed. More than half of the social economy units are small-sized, with fewer than 10 employees. Women represent 73.8% of the total number of employees in the social economy structures (OECD, 2024). Among the former communist countries, we mention Bulgaria, which in 2020 had 8,619 entities registered for nearly 1% national employment, being also mostly small enterprises (most in the fields of agriculture, forestry and fishing (OECD, 2024), Slovenia with 27,414 SSE entities in 2020, the majority (84.4%) being associations; 1,272 people are employed in social economy units (OECD, 2024) or Czechia, with 238 registered social enterprises that offered 5,106 jobs for people with social and health disadvantages in 2022 (OECD, 2024).

Estimated at a volume of 2.8 million social economy units in Europe and with a job market of over 13 million jobs (with a share of 6.3% in the total number of jobs in European Union), they are a source of innovation and solutions for social inclusion and economic development, with the role and place of social enterprises being recognized (Achiței, 2021).

In Romania, according to the OECD report mentioned above, in 2022 were 2,816 registered social enterprises, out of which 213 insertion social enterprises. As there is a specific law that requires registration as a social economy unit, receiving a certificate, the statistical record allows the measurement of this sector. Thus, of the 2,816 social enterprises, 89.3% are legal persons under private law (Limited Liability Companies), 9.7% are associations and 1.1% other types (such as: cooperatives; foundations; federations; employees' mutual aid houses and unions of legal entities) (OECD, 2024).

Following the studies that analyse the social economy in Romania, we observe that in 2010 Romanian sociologists noted the non-existence of the concept in Romanian studies, despite the existence of some activities with characteristics of the social economy - for example cooperatives that have been operating since the communist period (but following the model of socialist enterprises) (Arpinte *et al.*, 2010). Arpinte *et al.* (2010) point out that Romania (whose cooperative sector was greatly reduced in the period 1990-2000) had a low potential for the social economy, with little support from public institutions for social economy structures (cooperatives, NGOs, mutual aid organizations) and little interest in increasing employment among vulnerable groups; in addition to the crisis faced by craft and consumer cooperatives, the lack of a strategy or concrete measures for social economy organizations and the lack of a specific legislative framework. They were pessimistic about a positive future for the social economy sector in the absence of facilities or support from public institutions.

This state of affairs was accompanied by the analysis of the field at European level, in order to argue the need to reconfigure the social economy in Romania. The study conducted by a team of Romanian researchers present in detail the constituents of the social economy: cooperatives, mutual organizations, foundations and associations, social enterprises and refers to European approach, presenting at the same time, practice models from Italy, Spain, France, Sweden, United Kingdom, Finland and Poland. Having become an objective of European social policy, the social economy has been monitored and encouraged by outlining legislative regulations and mechanisms of support - including financing and business support, measures to increase cooperation (Cace, 2010).

Eight years after the two studies mentioned above, in the context of accession to the European Union, in Romania the concern of decision-makers for expanding the notion

of social economy and the promoting social enterprises has increased. After the accession (produced in 2007) the non-governmental associations supported the idea of social entrepreneurship and militated for the institutionalization of social enterprises. The result was the issuance of Law no. 219/2015 which defined the social economy sector, included social enterprises in this sector and configured their relationship with vulnerable groups to increase their employment (European Commission, 2019).

Delimiting its place in the social and economic activities, largely as a result of taking advantage of funding opportunities through the Sectoral Operational Program - Human Resources Development (which aimed to establish 830 social economy units), in 2014 the number of 346 social economy units was reached, creating 12,377 jobs for people from vulnerable groups (Mitrea, 2021). The moment of institutionalization of the social economy attests the official/public recognition of the field and at the same time, the consideration of social and solidarity economy actors “as a fully-fledged socio-economic actors involved in a large spectrum of activities and functioning with internal democratic governance systems” (Barna & Rebeleanu, 2024).

The current Romanian approach in the field of social economy includes two categories of social actors: (1) associations, foundations, cooperatives, credit unions, to which are added (2) social enterprises certified by Law no. 2019/2015 on the social economy (Barna & Rebeleanu, 2024; RISE, 2024). If we refer to the monitoring of the evolution of the social economy in Romania, we bring to the attention those carried out at the level of the European Commission (2019) in three calendar periods: 2014, 2016 and 2018-2019, to which we add the official reports and communications of the Agencies for Employment. In addition, an updated record can be extracted from the Single Register of Social Enterprises (managed by the public authority National Agency for Employment). Other sources are: The Social Economy Observatory which publishes studies on the impact of the social economy and the Romanian Social Economy Barometer with the role of providing an up-to-date radiography of the social economy sector in Romania, both being products of the non-governmental organization Alături de Voi [Close to You] (Iftimoaie, 2021).

After a first public policy approach to define the social economy and social enterprises, a second one was expected, namely a strategy for the development of social economy entities (Cace *et al.*, 2018), which did not materialize at the end of 2024. However, the National Commission for Social Economy was established to promote and support the social economy (Alături de Voi, 2024), expecting involvement in this regard as well. The social economy ecosystem is in the process of consolidation and development, involving public and private structures such as: central and local government, researchers and education institution, social enterprises, non-governmental organization or networks and coalition from community (European Commission, 2019).

3. Methodology of research

Starting from theoretical findings presented so far, the purpose of the research is to show the evolution of the social economy in Romania after the issuance of the normative act regulating this field in Romania and to explore the size of the sector (especially the volume of the social enterprises) in the period 2015-2024. The approach undertaken is theoretical, based on a fundamental approach for understanding evolution of the phenomenon, but also analytical. The following objectives are pursued in order to achieve this goal: (1) presentation of the characteristic of the social economy field (as established by legal acts regulating the social economy) and the criteria on the basis of

which the social enterprise status is obtained; (2) the presentation, from the statistical perspective, of the evolution of the social economy in Romania in the period 2015-2024, in order to highlight the dynamics of this sector.

The method used is document analysis and the contents of three categories of the document were analysed: (1) the legislative document - Law no. 219/2015 on social economy; (2) two country reports, namely: a) Insights from social and solidarity economy data: An international perspective (Tabel 1. Accessing country fact sheets - Romania) (OECD, 2024), b) Barometer of Social Economy in Romania (RISE, 2024) and (3) database - Single Register of Social Enterprises [Registrul unic de evidență a întreprinderilor sociale].

The research items were established for which data was collected, namely: essential elements subject to legal regulation, types of economic units than can be classified in the social economy (economic structure and types of enterprises), the volume of the social economy (number of the social economy units) and the variation over time, the numerical distribution by regions, social categories - vulnerable groups.

4. Results

In 2015, a law was issued by which the Romanian state regulated the field of social economy. The law defines social economy as:

“all private activities of an economic and social nature, serving the general interest, the interests of a community and/or non-patrimonial personal interests, by increasing social inclusion and/or providing goods, rendering services and/or executing works” (according to Article 2/Law no. 219/2015 on social economy).

The normative act obliges those who have the private and solidary initiative to limit the distribution of profit or surplus to the associates or members. Therefore, the social economy is made up of all social enterprises defined in the law as follows:

“Social enterprise is any legal person governed by private law that carries out activities in the field of social economy and that holds a social enterprises certificate (according to Article 6, letter f of Law no. 219/2015 on social economy).

Consequently, the status of social enterprise is proven by obtaining a document issued by the authorities (attestation), which makes it possible to keep track of the units that fall within the social economy.

The following *economic structures* can be classified as social enterprises: cooperative societies, credit cooperatives, employees' mutual aid houses, pensioners' mutual benefit societies, agricultural cooperatives, associations and foundations, but also other types of legal entities which, by establishment and organization, comply with the principles of the social economy. It is necessary to mention that all the entities listed above are regulated by their own laws. In order to obtain the status of social enterprises, they obtain a certificate, which certifies the social purpose and the fact that they comply with the principles of the social economy. The certificate is issued by the county employment agencies.

Two types of enterprises are described in the legislation: (1) *social enterprises* (as defined above) and (2) *social insertion enterprises*, defined as social enterprises that have a *social brand*. The social brand is a form of certification which recognized the direct

contribution to the achievement of the general interest and/or the improvement of situation of vulnerable group. It is also intended the ensure visual identity.

The criteria applied to be considered a social enterprise are set out in the law, these being: a) acting for social purposes and/or in the interest of the community; b) allocating a minimum of 90% of the profit or surplus realized to achieve the social purpose of the unit; c) transferring the assets to another social enterprise in case of liquidation; d) applying the principle of social equity in the relationship with employees and administrators by ensuring fair remuneration levels - the maximum permissible differences being a ratio of 1 to 8.

In the case of social insertion enterprises, the following criteria shall apply: a) the employees or cooperative members must belong to the vulnerable group; b) the cumulative working time of the employees in the vulnerable group represents at least 30% of the total working time of the entire body of employees; c) the enterprise must have as its declared aim the fight against exclusion, discrimination and unemployment through the insertion of disadvantaged persons; e) to ensures accompanying measures for the vulnerable group of employees (vocational information and counselling, access to vocational training, guidance in the process of socio-professional integration, adaptation and accessibility of the workplace and other measures as necessary).

Once the social enterprises certificate is obtained, the registration is made in the Single Register of Social Enterprises, administrated by the National Employment Agency. The register is structured in section: A. Identification data of a legal person under private law; B. Social enterprises certificate; C. Social Brand; D. Technical and financial data; E. Offences and penalties.

Let's follow further, the evolution of the social economy field in Romania, with the application of the legislation described above. The indicators are the following: (1) the number of social enterprises registered annually (to see the numerical evolution over time); (2) the status of social enterprises in 2024, respectively the validity of the attestation (to identify the real size of the social economy sector); (3) the spatial distribution, by development regions (to see the prolific regions); (4) the number of employees or members coming from vulnerable groups (to identify the social impact and occupational coverage of the vulnerable labour force); (5) the type of vulnerability of the employees (to identify the vulnerable social categories benefiting).

Number of registered social enterprises

Following the data from the Single Register of Social Enterprises, it can be seen that new request for obtaining the social enterprise certificate have been registered annually (Table 1).

Of the 2,932 units that have registered in the Single Register, 148 were already established (from 1990 to 2015, choosing after 2015 to register also as a social enterprise), the rest being established after 2016 (inclusive). It is difficult to assess which of the latter were set up for the sole purpose of being social economy units (with the aim of serving vulnerable populations) and which of the latter have taken steps to obtain a social enterprise certificate and access facilities or funds for the social economy sector, after having initially operated as a classic economic entity.

We note the upward dynamics of registrations in the case of non-governmental associations and commercial companies. The large increase in registration as social enterprises, stating with 2020 among non-governmental organizations and later in the case of commercial companies starting with 2021, is explained by the launch of the

Operational Program Human Capital which required applicants to have a social enterprise certificate among the condition for accessing funding (Barometrul..., 2024).

Table 1. Number of registered social enterprises – period 2016-2024

Units of social enterprises	Year								
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023*	2024*
	Number								
Associations	15	43	50	54	81	254	272	277	281
Cooperatives	0	6	7	7	8	9	9	9	9
Foundations	3	9	9	10	11	13	13	14	14
Legal persons under private law (e.g. Limited Liability Companies)	25	35	42	50	536	2,202	2,514	2,613	2,620
Federations	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Employees' mutual aid houses	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Unions of legal entities	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>99</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>128</i>	<i>644</i>	<i>2,486</i>	<i>2,816</i>	<i>2,921</i>	<i>2,932</i>

Table taken from OECD (2024) – Romania for period 2016-2022; *data obtained by the author by processing the record from the Single Register for Social Enterprises (data for 2024 are valid at the end of November)

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Status of social enterprises in 2024 (validity of the attestation)

The Single Register of Social Enterprises provides for four different attestation situations in which social enterprises can find themselves: with expired, withdrawn, suspended or valid attestation. The analysis of the status of social enterprises in 2024 (November), shows that out of the 2,932 registered units, 31 units are listed with expired attestation, 1,017 units have withdrawn attestation, 48 units have suspended attestation and 1,836 units are listed with valid attestations. A large proportion of the establishments whose certificates have been withdrawn had previously had a suspended certificate.

As a result, only 62.6% of the total social enterprises registered under Law no. 219/2015 on the social economy could operate legally, reflecting, moreover, the concern or ability of their administrators to ensure the continuity of the activity.

Spatial distribution of social enterprises - numerical situation by region of the country

Romania has eight development regions, which are taken into account when socio-economic assessments are made, as they have no administrative role. We opted for

the regional perspective because it overlaps with the approaches of national public strategies and European funders (which emphasize the development of regions). A numerical distribution of social enterprises registered in the Single Register of Social Enterprises is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of social enterprises by development regions

Development Region	Number of social enterprises
1. North-East Development Region	329
2. South-East Development Region	437
3. South-Muntenia Development Region	568
4. South-West Oltenia Development Region	330
5. West Development Region	124
6. North-West Development Region	453
7. Centre Development Region	679
8. Bucharest-Ilfov Development Region	12
Total	2,932



Data extracted from Single Register of Social Enterprises (author's processing)

Source: Romanian map: <https://www.mediafax.ro/politic/proiect-de-lege-romania-impartita-in-8-regiuni-unde-vor-fi-capitalele-regiunilor-10547169>

The fewest social enterprises were registered in the western region of the country and in the area of the capital and its surrounding (Ilfov County), in the other regions there was a high interest in the social economy. The highest number of units was registered in the central region, with 679 units. In the south of the country (region 3 and 4) 898 social enterprises were registered, showing a slightly higher interest than in the north of the country (region 6 and 1), where 782 social enterprises were registered.

Social impact and occupational coverage of vulnerable workers (number of employees or members form vulnerable groups)

In November 2024, out of the 2,932 registered companies, only 223 had a least one employee from a vulnerable group. In Table 3 shows the distribution of employees according to the type of vulnerability.

A number of 223 enterprises had employees from among vulnerable persons, having a very small share in the total registered enterprises, respectively 7,6%. Most enterprises (106) employed people who were at risk of losing ability to meet daily living need. Another 23 enterprises employed people receiving social assistance. Young people coming from the child protection system were employed by 18 social economy units and people with disabilities were targeted by a small number of social enterprises, respectively 14.

Table 3. Distribution of employees from vulnerable groups within employing social enterprises

		<i>Categories of vulnerable groups</i>						
		Persons of risk of losing the ability to meet their daily needs	Classification decision	Persons with disabilities	Persons in or coming from the child protection system	Persons from families receiving social assistance (Law 416/2001)	Recipients of family support allowance (Law 277/2010)	Not completed
Total registered social enterprises	2,932							
Not completed	2,199							
Number of employees/members of the vulnerable group	Number of social enterprises	<i>Number of social enterprises</i>						
1	83	30	1	8	2	4	4	11
2	92	53	1	2	11	13	1	10
3	23	8	-	2	3	5	1	7
4	9	8	-	-	1	-	-	-
5	7	3	-	-	-	-	-	4
6	3	1				1	-	1
7	2	2	-	1	-	-	-	-
9	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
11	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
16	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
20	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
		<i>Total social enterprises with employees/members from vulnerable group</i>						
	223	106	2	14	18	23	6	34
0	510							

Source: Single Register of Social Enterprises, author's processing

Social categories of population served by social economy

The registration of vulnerable social categories as employed persons (Table 3) included the following types of vulnerabilities: (1) the risk of losing the ability to meet daily living needs (characterized by a diverse social problematic: either they are homeless, or they come from rural areas or they are looking for a job, being registered at employment agencies, etc.); (2) coming from the child protection system (persons who have been in state care and education, in the absence of family support after the age of 18 are vulnerable to labour market competition); (3) economic vulnerability (including persons from families receiving social assistance according to the law on social assistance); (4) disability (including persons with disabilities, who hold a disability certificate and who are professionally oriented by specialized structures for assessment of abilities); (5) risk of families falling into poverty (recipients of family support allowance granted by law).

5. Discussions and conclusions

The social economy sector in Romania has development potential given the diversity of groups in vulnerable situation and a certain interest of entrepreneurs. This study found that some vulnerable social groups have not yet been included in social enterprises: for example, people with low levels of educational, the inactive workforce

looking for work and not fulfilling the retirement condition or people in rural areas. One of the aspects limiting access to employment in the social economy is the legal requirement to prove membership of a vulnerable group, which requires registration with a public social protection authority.

One aspect that could lead to the growth of the sector is the promotion of the concept, its inclusion in the speeches and public action of politicians or dignitaries, as well as an intensified information campaign by the Ministry of Labour. Last but not list, the existence of financial incentives for entrepreneurs or social enterprises would be accompanied by a long-lasting resilience on the economic market. The advantages of programs to support the social economy are multiple: on the one hand, the professionally inactive population would become active and as a result able to pay contributions to cover the risks of incapacity for work, sickness, avoid the risk of poverty and ensure conditions for a higher pension (increase quality of life); on the other hand, the lifespan of social enterprises would increase. The Barometer of Social Economy shows that social enterprises currently have a short lifespan of about 2-3 years and they are giving up this status due to the constraints of legal requirements in relation to limited support measures (RISE, 2024).

One of the positive aspects brought by the legislation is that, by establishing the Single Register of Social Enterprises, it was possible to measure this sector and vulnerable people with limited access to the labour market can find a job in such units.

We note that the social economy has grown into Romania and strongest growth was recorded in the period 2020-2022, due to the condition set by the Operational Program Human Capital (RISE, 2024). Two hypotheses can be drawn from this situation: (1) The solidarity economy in Romania is based rather on the interest of companies and non-governmental organizations to develop project in order to obtain financing and less on the solidarity-based conduct, the intrinsic desire to provide support to disadvantaged social groups; (2) for this sector to function and thus meet the needs of vulnerable groups and implicitly the needs of society, capital is needed (which the entrepreneurial population does not have), with non-reimbursable funds making up for this lack.

The increase interest of entrepreneurs in the social economy seems to have been due to the perception of social enterprises only as a business, a claim supported by the fact that a small number of people from vulnerable social categories were absorbed by companies that registered as social enterprises and the fact that some of them gave up their status as social establishment.

The present study covered only a small part of the social economy issues. Future research can be oriented towards comparing the social economy profiles of the other former communist countries in order to build a picture of the specific reactions of society to paradigm shifts, social changes and social needs of the various groups that make up society. Subsequently, a comparison can be made between countries that have experienced centralized (state) economies and those that have continued in a market economy, as far as the social economy sector is concerned. Qualitative studies among private entrepreneurs (employers) or non-state entrepreneurs (associations or foundations), but also among people belonging to vulnerable groups, would provide information on impact of the social economy, opinions on the implementation of legislation, satisfaction and dissatisfactions, etc.

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