



*National report*

# Bulgaria

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## Introduction

Social economy is a way of challenging societies. In general, it is an answer to the alienation and non-satisfaction of needs by the traditional private sector or the public sector in times of socioeconomic crisis (Frank Moulaert and Oana Ailenei, 2005). Simply, the high rates of unemployment in the past decades and the loss of protection of the welfare system explains clearly the growing interest in the social economy and the importance to search solutions for the creation of new job positions, of setting up worker-owned co-operatives, and the furtherance of entrepreneur answers (Mellor et al. 1988).

Under this perspective, SERCo approach has the willingness to prove the importance to develop social economy initiatives to foster the economic promotion of Roma communities. In fact, Roma's history has been featured by an adaptation to different countries and a survival attitude in different societies. For this reason, entrepreneurship seems a common behaviour of Roma culture.

However, usually entrepreneurship policies and social economy initiatives do not take into consideration targeting Roma communities in particular. Low-income classes usually face difficulties when creating new entrepreneurial initiatives and, unfortunately, entrepreneurial projects easily born in high-income classes or wealthy environments (Kantis, 2008). According to the Report on Social Entrepreneurship (GEM, 2011), most of those who start social entrepreneurship ventures have post-compulsory education or are graduates, so individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to engage in social entrepreneurial activity. At this point and having in consideration that people aged 25-34 and 34-44 have highest propensity of being involved in Social Entrepreneurship activities (GEM, 2011), entrepreneurship policies and political encouragement of social economy should be focused on those young people with less social opportunities and, even more, on those who traditionally have their economy based on self-employment initiatives. Therefore, exploring



how entrepreneurship and social economy can promote Roma community inclusion is basically a strategy that ought to be certainly considered.

## Aim of the report

The aim of this report is to offer a first glance about the meaning of social economy phenomena, some benefits that social economy can offer to Roma society and, last but not least, a state of art of social entrepreneurship resources in each partner's country.

Basically, the main part of the report goes into the particular national situation. The idea is to map the public policies and public actions, which directly impact to social economy in each country; the relevant stakeholders within the social economy sector; which may help partners to realize about the strategies and the allies of entrepreneurial processes; the social entities that are working to foster Roma-led entrepreneurial initiatives; and the stakeholders' perception about the impact that social economy might suppose to Roma communities.

## proposed methodology

In order to achieve a completed report, not only do the consortium has decided to include data from other studies or institutions, but also it decided to include gathered opinions from policy makers, Roma leaders, Roma organizations and Social Economy actors at each national context. Consortium members actually did some interviews to analyse their content and to reflect on the potential impact of social economy within Roma communities.

Moreover, SERCo partners agreed to work on the same methodology to produce similar reports. To achieve such intention, consortium has developed a sort of questionnaires and interview guidelines to provide national reports with the same structure and shape. The process has been led by Amalipe (Bulgaria), Fundació Pere Closa (Spain) and TMAF (Bulgaria).

In general, the result has been six national reports (Greece, Bulgaria, Spain, Belgium, Italy and Romania) which have the same common part but differ in the national section. Each report is available in English and in its national language.

In furtherance on this, national reports appear as a first step to design a sort of guidelines for Roma social entrepreneurship in a second project stage. This guidelines will be transferred to Roma mediators with the idea to start different Roma-led start-ups with groups of 4/5 Roma people.

## framework of social economy

According to the report *Social Economy and Roma communities, challenges and opportunities* co-financed by European Social Fund (2012), “at European level there are no consensus over a definition of social economy”.

Basically, social Economy concept has had lots of meanings. For instance, the Euro-centered perspective, which is based on the Francophone approach (XIX century), generally understands social economy as *the study of all efforts made to improve the condition of the people* (Gide at Moulaert and Ailenei, 2005: 2040).

As Moulaert and Ailenei (2005) specifies in their article “Social Economy, Third Sector and Solidarity Relations: A Conceptual Synthesis from history to Present”, social economy represents an Hybrid Typology that refers to a wide forms of initiatives and organization which shows that the economy is not limited to the market but includes principles of redistribution and reciprocity.

Moreover, social economy can be divided by the third sector, which refers to a sector distinct from private sector and the state; the solidarity economy, which refers to voluntary and reciprocity basis that promotes cooperative initiatives; and finally, the social economy not as a whole but more restricted into the economy of co-operatives.

Over and above, social economy is a good tool to promote the common good and principally the self-worth of people who are involved in such initiatives. Broadly speaking, the social economy idiosyncrasy is far away from materialism but close to cooperation and solidarity positions. In fact, experience has shown that the intention of social entrepreneurs is most of times motivated by an attitude to promote more democratic societies by which women roles are basic for the social motor, and social equality and sustainable development are principle aims (Lévesque, 2001).

There are indeed lots of social initiatives about: production, commercialization, consumption and financing which income is re-invested in the community through a democratic logic as the promotion of equality and the human respect. Likewise, work co-operatives and collective services are based on new organizational forms that are focused on principles of redistribution and reciprocity to establish a collective well-being and recreate social bonds between the people within their communities (Lipietz, 2003).

For this reason, it is important to consider social economy and social entrepreneurship as a way of young Roma motivation that can contribute to contemplate new economically benefits for their communities and neighbourhoods. All in all, the impulse of social economy in Roma communities may put the Roma inclusion on the desk by offering new labour market opportunities, developing new skills and training capacities to those who are more vulnerable, promoting community improvements in the fields of health, education, labour and housing, and last but not the least, promoting capacity building and engaged citizenry.

## Bulgaria: *National context and the Roma community inclusion*

One of the major critics towards Roma integration processes in Bulgaria points out that apart from the restructured and systematized policies recently (mainly due to pressure from international organizations and the European Commission) the financing of these efforts comes mainly through the instruments of the European structural and investment funds (basically, the European Social Fund) and the EEA and Norway grants. Scarce financing is provided by the state budget and in most of the cases it is a co-financing to major grants provided by the above mentioned financial mechanisms. This influences the measures supported in the policy actions. Due to the high priority given to employment, especially by the European Commission and the European Social Fund regulations social entrepreneurship is one of the topics given priority in the field of employment regarding marginalized and excluded groups. ("Promoting social entrepreneurship and vocational integration in social enterprises and the social and solidarity economy in order to facilitate access to employment"). As a result this gets into the scope of Roma integration policies and has been promoted during recent years.

## Public policies and political actions which directly impact to social economy

Following the implementation of Europe 2020 Strategy each Member State is supposed to identify key fields for development for achieving the joint objectives of the Strategy. According to the National Program for Reform Bulgaria 2020<sup>1</sup> (updated 2015) part of this is modernizing the labor market and introducing active employment measures for people belonging to vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, social economy seems to be left aside from the core focus of interest.

The first official documents treating specifically social entrepreneurship in Bulgaria has been adopted in 2011: the National concept for social economy. Although it explicitly points this sector as a priority, neither the National concept, nor the Plan for its implementation has clear vision how it should be developed. In addition, within the legislation framework Bulgaria has not defined yet the term "social enterprise". Since 2012, the National Statistical Institute in Bulgaria has started collecting data about social enterprises. In 2013 criteria for self-identification as a social enterprise has been developed.<sup>2</sup>

According to data from the NSI for 2012, 4872 social enterprises had been defined as social. In 2013 the number of enterprises has been reduced to 3612.<sup>3</sup> None of this mentions Roma

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[file:///D:/UserData/Pavleta/Documents/D/Letti\\_archive/BCNL%20projects/projects%202015/BCAF/documents/BG/ NPR\\_2015.pdf .pdf](file:///D:/UserData/Pavleta/Documents/D/Letti_archive/BCNL%20projects/projects%202015/BCAF/documents/BG/ NPR_2015.pdf .pdf)

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, Sofia. Social Entrepreneurship as an opportunity for discouraged young people. 2016; p.14; Bulgarian Center for Non-profit Low asnd Charity Support Foundation in Bulgaria. Roadmap "Promoting and developing social entrepreneurship in Bulgaria" 2015 – 2020.

<sup>3</sup> National concept for social economy; Investment priority 4 from the Human Resources Development OP

as a target group while most of the efforts focus either on people with disabilities or NEETS<sup>4</sup>. The major areas of support of the social enterprises in Bulgaria are:

1. Providing jobs within the social enterprise or consulting for finding job for people from vulnerable groups (e.g. people with disabilities, women victims of violence, etc);
2. Providing social services;
3. Providing training and educational services;<sup>5</sup>

**Major national documents in the field:**

- Europe 2020: National Program for reform (updated 2015)<sup>6</sup>
- National concept for social economy, 2011<sup>7</sup>
- Action plan for implementation of the Strategy for social economy 2014 – 2015<sup>8</sup> assigned to a working group in the Ministry of labor and social policy
- National strategy for reduction of poverty and fostering social inclusion
- Human resources development Operational program 2014 – 2020

Regarding financing two operational programs envisage financial support for social entrepreneurship for the period 2014 – 2020: Human resources development Operational Program and Competitiveness Operational program. Up to September 2013 one hundred and sixty four social enterprises were either created or existing enterprises supported by the HRD OP during the first programming period providing new jobs for 3681 persons.<sup>9</sup> However the big question mark is to what extent this financial support would shift from piloting and short term financial support to promoting sustainable results.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of Roma integration social economy has not paid special attention to the issue so far. Increasing entrepreneurship culture among Roma has been mentioned in the Action plan for the implementation of the National Roma Integration strategy (NRIS) within the employment field and due to that scarce actions all over the country has been taken.

<sup>4</sup> Young people who are not in education, employment or training

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF, Sofia. Social Entrepreneurship as an opportunity for discouraged young people. 2016; pp.19-22

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.minfin.bg/bg/page/867>

<sup>7</sup>

<http://seconomy.mlsp.government.bg/page.php?search=%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%86%D0%B5%D0%BF%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F>

<sup>8</sup> [http://seconomy.mlsp.government.bg/upload/docs/2014-02//RESENIE\\_NA\\_MS\\_N\\_43.pdf](http://seconomy.mlsp.government.bg/upload/docs/2014-02//RESENIE_NA_MS_N_43.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Human Resources Development OP 2014 - 2020

<sup>10</sup> Bulgarian Center for Non-profit Low asnd Charity Support Foundation in Bulgaria. Roadmap “Promoting and developing social entrepreneurship in Bulgaria” 2015 – 2020



Nevertheless, they are limited mainly to theory trainings provided by the local labor offices without a more strategic input. Therefore, the report for the implementation of the NRIS published by the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues (NCCEII) about 2015<sup>11</sup> points out that during the period of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005 – 2015) just 1565 persons have been motivated and included in trainings for starting and managing their own business. This is far behind the indicator planned (11 500 persons). Just 6 persons were included in such measures during 2015. The usual excuse in this situation is that “Not fulfilling of the activity is due to the lack of motivation and active attitude on behalf of the unemployed persons for including them in start-up trainings, lack of start-up financial resource, lack of skills for developing projects.”<sup>12</sup> None of the reports finds any failure on behalf of the NCCEII or any other governmental structure.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://nccedi.government.bg/page.php?category=73&id=2532>

<sup>12</sup> Administrative Monitoring Report for 2015 for the Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy in Bulgaria 2012 – 2020, available at <http://nccedi.government.bg/page.php?category=73&id=2532>, p.39



## Main stakeholders that promote social economy

As mentioned above on behalf of governmental institutions the **Ministry of labor and social policy** is the major stakeholder responsible about promoting social economy, to a great extent due to the pressure from the European Union and with the instruments of the European social fund through Human Resources Development Operational Program.

**The National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues** is the other major stakeholder responsible about Roma integration policies. Since it is obliged to promote social economy as one of the measures included in the Employment field in the National Roma Integration Strategy in Bulgaria this appeared also to be one of the aspects monitored in the Roma Integration policy. Nevertheless, as pointed above, the reports submitted by the regional councils on ethnic and integration issues either inform about motivation training in the labor offices, or report the lack of such due to the lack of money.

**Bulgarian Center for Non-profit Law.** The Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law (BCNL) was founded in July 2001. BCNL's mission is to provide support for the drafting and implementation of legislation and policies aiming to advance civil society, civil participation and good governance in Bulgaria. Their main goals include: support for the development and establishment of a favorable legal and policy environment conducive to an independent civil society, including Bulgarian NGOs; facilitate an improved cooperation between the state and the NGOs and the actual and active civil participation in decision making processes. For more than 10 years a focus in their work has been promoting social economy and especially legislation changes for fostering social entrepreneurship as a tool for alleviating the situation of vulnerable communities such as Roma. One of the projects run by BCNL is "Strengthening of Social Enterprise in Bulgaria Forum" which is 10-month long project of Bulgarian Charities Aid Foundation in partnership with Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law. The project aims to strengthen the recently established Social Enterprise Forum in order to become the voice of the sector and to influence the necessary policies and programs. The partners will attract for members of the Forum the most innovative and sustainable social enterprises, supporting organizations, companies and individuals. The most important results of the project are the opportunity to design the growth of the sector (Road map of the social enterprises) to measure the development (Index of social entrepreneurship) and to encourage coalitions for advocacy campaigns.

Furthermore, BCNL has identified several types of stakeholders regarding social entrepreneurship, as well as several good practices.

**Association "New Road" Hajredin** is a Roma organization which develops social enterprise "Bee" within permissible by law additional economic activities. The mission of the company is to create opportunities and conditions for Roma, long-term unemployed and people with disabilities to acquire work habits and skills in beekeeping as thus helping them to realize their own way to integrate and socialization in the society. Revenues from the sale of honey and bee products are reinvested in social activities of the association. Within the activities they provide training in beekeeping for the target group and support them to start their own business after that.

## Social economy entities working for social entrepreneurship in Roma communities

According to the National Social Economy Concept support to the social economy sector in Bulgaria will come from a variety of public financial sources, such as:

- Grant schemes for the establishment and development of social enterprises and social platforms;
- Tax relief in the form of extending the existing provisions for corporate businesses to social enterprises, as well as introducing new provisions especially for social enterprises;
- State subsidies admissible under the so-called Block Exemption Regulations for State Aid;
- Access to credit and social funds;
- Defining additional specific criteria in favour of social economy enterprises when they participate in public procurement procedures, and
- Encouraging donations in favour of the social economy through tax relief for donors.

In addition, EU funding under the OPs Human Resources Development and Competitiveness for the period 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 are also contributing to the development of social enterprises in Bulgaria. Under Priority 5 on social inclusion and promotion of social economy of OP Human Resources Development, financial support has been provided among others to NGOs, specialised enterprises and cooperatives of people with disabilities, social and health service providers, municipalities, etc. In general, the scope of this OP is broader in comparison to OP Competitiveness.

Under OP Competitiveness 22 beneficiaries representing cooperatives of people with disabilities were supported under a scheme for technological modernisation for a total of BGN 5 million in 2007-2013. During the new programming period (2014-2020) a similar scheme is planned under the OP Innovation and Competitiveness which will cover not only cooperatives of disabled people but also other applicants provided that they fulfil the condition that they are registered as commercial entities.

Opportunities for financing social enterprises in Bulgaria also exist under the Horizon Programme,<sup>16</sup> the programme COSME of DG Enterprise and Industry,<sup>17</sup> and the new Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. Overall, there is limited public support targeting social enterprises in Bulgaria, with a lot of the support coming from the EU.

## Opportunities and challenges in the development of Roma communities through Social Economy

At present Roma are the most vulnerable groups in the field of employment. This situation is additionally worsened by the crisis in mainstream economy. The aspects of Roma social exclusion are numerous and recognized: low level of education and qualification, extremely low employment rate, significantly disadvantaged health and social status, disastrous living conditions, wide-spread segregation and discrimination, strong anti-Roma stereotypes and hatred, etc. As pointed above all these phenomena form sustainable exclusion pattern that is difficult to be broken.

Two important factors stay behind and maintain the exclusion patterns in the rural areas: namely, the extreme poverty and the absence of democratic traditions. Both of them define and preserve the exclusion making the rural societies more exclusive compared to the urban ones. They relate to the rural population as a whole. Among the rural Roma communities these factors have additional strong negative impact that makes impossible to break the vicious circle or social exclusion since:

- the poverty and lack of democratic traditions are completed with the absence of social structures within the local Roma communities. The mainstream social structures (such as cultural centers, pensioners clubs, etc.) usually do not include Roma. The community based services could be a way to support establishing community social structures but the mainstream services are significantly less developed and seldom in the rural areas, they rarely reach the Roma communities. That is why developing community based services for fostering the activation of Roma and establishing inner-community structures is a must; This already sets a safe ground for building social economy as a tool for developing Roma community.

- social exclusion of rural Roma is linked not only with the high unemployment (widespread also among the majority of rural population in Eastern Europe) but also with the low level of education, vocational training and the quality / existence of services provided. It needs complex approach of intervention that focuses on all these areas. Therefore, social entrepreneurship when designed to support the development of Roma community and alleviate the situation of Roma, in rural areas should be diverse and broader as perspective.

The main actors and resources that may promote social economy within Roma communities are the European Social Fund and European Agricultural fund for Rural Development through the Human Resources Development Operational Program and the Rural Development Program, Roma and pro-Roma NGOs, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy; local municipalities and Local Action Groups, and so on.

## Problems and solutions to the implementation of social economy projects within Roma communities

The information included in this section derives from the 4 interviews carried out in Bulgaria in June 2016. The interviewees included one representative from the City Council in Haskovo town (Mr Sunay Aliev), a Roma leader (Mr Zarko Chankov) and 2 representatives of NGO-s (one from the Equal Access and Mr Emil Atanasov – Chairman of the Solidarity Foundation).

**1. How would you define the three main issues in the field of social economy regarding Roma? Please explain what the main reasons to these difficulties are, according to you.**

**LA**

Roma people have been always outside the plans of the institutions and this is why they have been given less opportunities to develop professionally. They have been always hired in low professional jobs. At the same time they were not given the chance to develop their own traditional professions. They lost basis. Now in the high technical and computers standards of the economy they do not have chance to realize themselves. Very few of them could move forward but this is not the case with most of the Roma. So if I have to count three problems this would be: the lack of access to good education and qualification; their social exclusion and the high requirements in the economy which makes Roma noncompetitive.

**Roma leader**

Roma are not part of the social economy started by others and at the same time they are not given the possibility to start it themselves. So there is a lack of policy to encourage Roma to start their own business in something they know and could do. In many cases if they want to start something new for them they do not have the capacity. In many cases to start your own business you need a starting capital something Roma do not have.

**Equal access**

Roma do not have the necessary education level to enter the contemporary social economy. They could initiate something based on their old traditional crafts, but this is more to popularize their own culture and specific professions rather than develop or join social economy. Sometimes some Roma have the skills to start something but they are refused bank loans based on their ethnicity or socio-economic status, they are not involved in programs provided by the state and they are not invited to join somebody else's initiative for business.

**Solidarity foundation**

Unemployment among Roma is very high. Social economy would be one way for these people to get out of the circle of poverty. But to start your own business there is need of solid amount of money, there is need of professional skills and knowledge how to run business. Here I am talking for people who start their own business. For the people who will work in the business but not in management position still need knowledge and skills. There

is high level of exclusion and Roma do not have access to the instruments for social economy.

- 2. To what extent these problems are due to external factors of the Roma community (as such as general state of the economy, labour market, etc.)? To what extent they dependent of internal factors (as such as group specifics, level of education, traditional crafts, tradition in specific professions, and so on)?**

**LA**

As I said I think most problems for Roma if not all are coming from external factors. They occupy the lowest level in the economy and labor something which does not allow them to go higher and further. Their low education and skills they are not competitive in the labor market and economy needs more and more educated and professionally prepared people. They don't have the capacity to maintain leaving with their traditional professions as they could produce few things a day and there are machines and industries which produce thousands of the same products. Some things like early marriages could prevent girls to be involved in eventual social entrepreneurship but this will change in the future.

#### **Roma leader**

There is no policy, they are not in equal position with other members of the society and they don't have the capacity to fight for their place in the labor market. Nobody wants to work with Roma or to support them. If there are such programs for supporting a new and small business, normally Roma do not have access to this information and opportunities. The programs are distributed amongst the close friends of the people in power. Roma do not have their representation at this level to make these programs available for the community.

#### **Equal access**

They are seen as not reliable for partnership due to their ethnicity, there is certain level of discrimination because they are excluded from the real process of social economy. From the other side Roma do not trust institutions and do not want to cooperate with them in the rare cases when institutions are ready to help them. I think the main problem is the lack of education and professional skills for Roma to be part of such process.

#### **Solidarity foundation**

Problems are mainly created from institutions, When they see someone wants to start business they rather try to create difficulties than to help him. Social economy is developed by people with serious political support, Roma do not have any, neither political not administrative. Roma do not have access to information. Roma are afraid to try something new and some communities who are known with their traditional professions still stick to them although they cannot earn much but there is nothing else they could start. Roma do not have quality education. They visit segregated schools where they don't learn anything.

**3. Can you suggest potential solutions to the problems identified above (please point if possible, at least one solution to each problem identified)?**

**LA**

A solid awareness raising campaign among Roma to send their children to school, adults to take vocational training and start education of how to run small business. This is how they could establish the basis for future and sustainable entrepreneurship.

**Roma leader**

The state should make available to Roma all programs and possibilities for starting small business. Diversity and anti-discrimination conditions should be adopted in the process of distribution of the possibilities to start business. Programs and campaigns preparing and informing Roma for these project of starting own business should be accessible for Roma.

**Equal access**

Roma should look for alias with other groups and communities who also want to develop social economy. They have to fight together for their rights and opportunities to start their own business. Roma should seek for ways to get better informed for such possibilities and for opportunities to increase their education and professional level in order to be equal participants in applying for possibilities to start own business.

**Solidarity foundation**

Roma together with the help of the institutions should make sure Roma are equal participants in the decision making process at least for question concerning Roma's problems. Roma should take the initiative to contact relevant authorities and learn of how to start their own business or to be hired in the business of someone else. Roma should send their children to good schools and try to overcome all discriminatory barriers to access good education.

**4. Do you know about any good practices regarding the implementation of social economy projects? Please, can you briefly share about them and/or provide additional information (publications available, websites, etc.)?**

**LA**

I don't know about good practices, I think Roma are very poor and not able to start any practice or if they eventually start they will be stopped by nationalist authorities. But if I learn about such practice will be happy to suggest to the municipality council to discuss what could be the possibilities to support and widespread such practice. This will be in benefit to the Roma but also in benefit to the state.

**Roma leader**



There are several attempts in our region of Roma who started business in agriculture and trade but they could not survive because they did not have the capacity to manage this business.

### **Equal access**

There are few cases where Roma have passed courses for tailors and hear dressers and after that they have started their own business. In some cases they have hired unemployed Roma from the community. There are few instances of people who have opened small shops. These initiatives have not developed very much but these people can make their living.

### **Solidarity foundation**

Not many examples. There is one Roma who works in agriculture and he is doing well this could be a good example to follow, there are two other people running small shops and cafes. Yes, there are few but here and there, there are not many cases so that we can talk about social economy. Many people left the country and migrated to Western Europe. The people who stay here are to involve in temporary jobs. But there are no examples of someone succeeded with old traditional crafts and professions. Nobody will buy their production.

## **Final considerations**

After taking into consideration all the relevant factors, stakeholders, key players, national strategies, agencies, and competent bodies' status of operation, it is possible to elevate the issue of social entrepreneurship and social economy to the level of primary consideration as a national instrument if at least 75% of the below outlined issues are paid special attention in terms of additional institutional support, organizational strengthening, and continuous sustainable effort in the direction of practical implementation and concrete, outcome-based strategy:

- ☐ Fostering grassroots organizations' development through proactive synergy between state and local-level authorities;
- ☐ Creating enough number of NGO networks that are capable to serve both as distributors (intermediate support organizations - ISOs) and direct beneficiaries of social grants;
- ☐ Providing for institutional development support to Roma NGOs that deal with the issue of social entrepreneurship;
- ☐ Implementing additional public policy decisions that would successfully achieve:
  - Roma communities social integration at local level;
  - Roma NGOs sustainable support;
  - Legislation initiatives to easy the status of Roma entrepreneurship at national level;



- Involvement of major Roma organizations at the level of national strategy concerning social entrepreneurship;
- Tools that would enable Roma communities to successfully network with partners throughout EU;
- Providing free consultation work to Roma organizations, NGOs, communities, and leaders to outline practical steps, draft concrete projects in the areas of social entrepreneurship;
- Finding the demarcation line and thus connecting concrete social entrepreneurship oriented projects with other programs and projects that would also foster Roma social and cultural integration (for example, in the areas of agriculture, cross-border cooperation, social care, cultural preservation and multi-cultural partnership, education, women integration, youth initiatives, etc.);
- Finding the best way towards a critical mass of Roma NGOs that could have the capacity to influence the legislator both at local and national level;
- Encouraging of independent Roma advocacy campaigns and media coverage of success stories considering social entrepreneurship programs and concrete local achievements;
- Providing for constant Roma participation in international and EU-level consultative bodies that outline the relevant strategies in the social area;
- Assuring monitoring and good governance practices both for national authorities and Roma organizations that are directly involved with grant distribution, grant absorption, and grant management;
- Provide constant training to Roma NGOs at local and national level and help Roma communities participate in more international trainings and experience exchange programs.

In addition, it is vital to assure better and swift coordination between The National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues and the respective Operational Programs Authorization Bodies in order to have at hand a flexible national instrument to further develop what has been achieved so far in the area of Roma integration and social entrepreneurship programs. Also, a keystone of such a process could be additional special attention by the Bulgarian Government, combined with supplementing measures and efforts to strengthen the function of The National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues; this would provide for tangible results when working with local or national Roma NGOs in practical implementation of social integration programs. It is to be said that the number of national strategies and programs is a bit surpassing the number of practical actions in the area that is subject of the present report, and this could possibly mean that there might be certain gaps in the organizational smoothness or, substantially, in the very process of decision making and management capacity concerning the instruments and

programs for social integration, Roma integration, and social entrepreneurship encouragement.

It should be outlined that the legislation and regulation framework is well laid, with concrete measures incorporated into the very body of the Operational Programs following the National Strategic Referent Framework. There are a number of active institutions and NGOs that have a long story of success and projects implemented with good care and practical, measurable outcomes. What is needed for the future is a swifter and more flexible, eased institutional approach to encourage communities and NGOs to be more proactive in taking the responsibility to carry out social entrepreneurship programs and be hand-in-hand with their respective communities in order to enlarge their target groups.

As a whole, the process has been well arranged in terms of legislative and instrument measures. It is evident, though, that the practical implementation framework needs concrete development in the direction of more successful stories, local and national impact, and publicly recognized achievement.

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## Project Description

**The project promotes social economy as an effective instrument for integrated development of the Roma communities by:**

- 1) analyzing the potential of applying social economy practices within Roma communities, from a social, economic and institutional point of view;
- 2) engaging policy-makers and civil servants and training Roma mediators for developing social enterprises; and



3) assisting Roma social business initiatives and promoting social economy within Roma communities and to the general public.

The SERCo partners recognize that social entrepreneurship can be a solution to the issues of Roma people, since it:

- helps resolving some of the existing needs of the community;
- facilitates the qualification on the job;
- uses local resources and allows the development of more entrepreneurs;
- supports traditional crafts;
- increases the qualification and education level;
- stimulates solidarity and lead to the improvement of the relationships between the members of the community;
- represents a self-help method;
- allows hiring people in vulnerable situations.

**The project's core deliverables are:**

- guidelines for Roma social entrepreneurship
- Mediators' training programme
- One-to-one mentoring for social enterprise development
- SERCO VLE for mutual learning
- Public roundtables & info days
- Network for Roma Social Economy

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#### **SERCO Consortium:**

- University of Piraeus Research Center, / [www.kep.unipi.gr](http://www.kep.unipi.gr) , Greece – SERCo Coordinator
- IDEA ROM ONLUS, [www.idearom.it](http://www.idearom.it) , Italy
- CESIE, [www.cesie.org](http://www.cesie.org), Italy
- The European Roma Information Office-ERIO , [www.erionet.eu](http://www.erionet.eu) , Belgium
- Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance “AMALIPE”, [www.amalipe.com](http://www.amalipe.com) , Bulgaria
- Fundacio Privada Pere Closa, [www.fundaciopereclosa.org](http://www.fundaciopereclosa.org) , Spain
- Tolerance and Mutual Aid Foundation (TMAF), Bulgaria
- Four Elements, [www.4-elements.org](http://www.4-elements.org) , Greece
- Association Promoting Social Inclusion PAKIV (ACPSI PAKIV), [www.pakiv.ro](http://www.pakiv.ro), Romania

