



## National Report: Social Entrepreneurship in Roma Communities

# CESIE - Italy

## Project information

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## Executive Summary

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

The main part of the report covers the particular national situations. The idea is to map the public policies and actions, which directly impact on 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 have on Roma communities.



## 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

**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



## 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). The high rates of unemployment in the past decades and the loss of protection of the welfare system clearly explain the growing interest in social economy and the importance to look for solutions to create new job opportunities, of setting up worker-owned co-operatives, and the furtherance of entrepreneur answers (Mellor et al. 1988).

Under this perspective, SERCo approach intends to show the importance of developing social economy initiatives to improve the economic situation 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, entrepreneurship policies and social economy initiatives usually do not target 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 activities. 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 focus on 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 the inclusion of Roma communities is a strategy that ought to be considered.

## Proposed methodology

In order to achieve a completed report, the consortium has decided to include data from other studies or institutions, and the opinions from policy makers, Roma leaders, Roma organizations and social economy actors at each national context. Consortium members did some interviews to analyse their content and to reflect on the potential impact of social economy on Roma communities.

Moreover, SERCo partners agreed to work on the same methodology to produce similar reports. To achieve this, partners developed a questionnaire and interview guidelines to ensure national reports followed the same structure and shape. The process has been led by Amalipe (Bulgaria), Fundació Pere Closa (Spain) and TMAF (Bulgaria).

This has resulted in 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 7 languages: English, Greek, Bulgarian, Spanish, French, Italian and Romanian.

These national reports will help designing guidelines for Roma social entrepreneurship later in the project. The guidelines will be transferred to Roma mediators with the idea to start different Roma-led start-ups with groups of 4 to 5 Roma.

## 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”.

There are different definitions of social economy. For instance, the Euro-centred 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) specify 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 form 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 the 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.

Moreover, social economy is a good tool to promote the common good and mostly people’s self-worth 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 the times, motivated by an intent to promote more democratic societies in which women’s roles are considered to be the social motor, and social equality and sustainable development are principle aims (Lévesque, 2001).

There are indeed many 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 may offer new labour market opportunities to Roma community, developing new skills and training capacities to those who are more vulnerable, promoting community improvements in the fields of health, education, employment and housing, and promoting capacity building and engaged citizenry.

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

Italy's economic structure relies mainly on the services sector which accounts for almost three quarters of total GDP and employs around 65% of the country's total employed people. And on manufacturing which is the most important sub-sector within the industry sector. The country's manufacturing is specialized in high-quality goods and is mainly run by small- and medium-sized enterprises. Most of them are family-owned enterprises.

Italy suffers from political instability, economic stagnation and lack of structural reforms. The country is divided into a highly-industrialized and developed northern part and a less-developed, more agriculture-dependent southern part. As a result, unemployment in the north is lower and per capita income is higher compared to the south. The Italian unemployment rate reached the 11.4% of the labour force in 2015<sup>1</sup>. This rate is particularly important for the range 15-24 years reaching the 35.3% in 2015 and the unemployment is more a long-term unemployment. The female unemployment rate is also higher than men's for both EU and Italy.

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Considering all these characteristics of the Italian economy, the social economy in this country has a relevant role to play. In Italy there is not an institutional recognition of this sector and its components, it's defined as the "third sector" (*Terzo settore*), employed 9.7% of the labour market force and represented 3.4% of the GDP in 2015. Its main actors are the cooperative movement whose social role is recognised in the Constitution, the associations and foundations or non-profit organisations in general. The different organisations are organised in national or local networks and federations to promote the social economy and the cooperative entrepreneurship. For example in Sicily the Forum of the third sector units around 40 representative organisations as such as cooperatives, associations and other NGOs working on the promotion of social inclusion, social cooperation allowing a local cooperation and the sharing of tools and good practices.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.istat.it/en/labour>



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

In Italy we can point out several initiatives at European, national and local level which directly impact to social economy.

In particular, at European level we can identify the programme Interreg IVC and the Social Business Initiative. INTERREG IVC programme provides funding for interregional cooperation across Europe. It helps regions sharing solutions and supports sustainable regional development. Furthermore, the Social Business Initiative – Action plan supports the development of social enterprises, key stakeholders in the social economy and social innovation in close partnership with stakeholders in the sector. In fact it contains 11 priority measures, organised around three themes: making it easier for social enterprises to obtain funding, increasing the visibility of social entrepreneurship and making the legal environment friendlier for social enterprises.

Moreover, at national level we can identify the Italy's National Strategy for Roma integration, which defines the roadmap for public policies in the area of the social inclusion of the Roma communities. The strategy recognises the importance of developing local action plans reflecting the needs of individual communities. It relies on the co-operation of all stakeholders involved in the process of Roma inclusion. Apart from it, we can also identify the *Promozione e sviluppo del terzo settore* (Promotion and development of the third sector), which was initiated by the Ministry of labour and social policies. It plans an active and conscious participation of the third sector organisations, a transparency and simplification of procedures, an identification of good practices, the promotion and support of the capacity of the third sector to stimulate a greater involvement of the civil society.

At local level, Italy councils and local governments implement the Piano di Azione per la Coesione (Action plan for Cohesion) that refers to actions for the development of the social inclusion at local levels. It includes the promotion of the social enterprise, of the third sector and fight against poverty. Moreover, the Jeremie Programme which was funded by the Sicily Region, the ethical bank and the FEI, promote social inclusion and local development funding to small social enterprises and cooperative entrepreneurship at a local level.

## Main stakeholders that promote social economy

In relation to the main stakeholders that may provide social entrepreneurs with services to development social economy initiatives, it is possible to identify several public administrations, NGO's and a Financial Cooperative Institute.

Firstly, the [Ministerio del lavoro e delle Politiche sociali](#) (Ministry of labour and social policies) is a public body which includes legislation, information diffusion and funds providing for the development of social economy projects. Moreover, the [Consiglio nazionale dell'economia e del lavoro](#) (National council of the economy and labour) acts as an advisory institution of the Italian Government on economic and social legislation.

Secondly, in the field of NGO's, The [Forum del Terzo Settore](#) (Third sector Forum) is an institution that represents national and local organisations of the social economy and promotes social economy's activities. It has a political representation in the Government and in the public institutions, coordinates and supports national and local social economy networks.

Moreover, another stakeholder is the [Associazione generale cooperative italiane](#) (Italian general association of the cooperatives). It tries to promote the promotion of the interests of the cooperative sector, work management and awareness on cooperation and economic alternatives at national context.

In the group of the NGO's we can also identify [Legacoop](#). It is an organization that promotes projects development in social economy and cooperative entrepreneurship. Another organization is [Confcooperative](#) which focuses its activity on the promotion of interests of the cooperative sector, work management and support. Last but not the least, [Unicoop Sicilia](#) is an association that Supports the development of strategies encouraging cooperation and promotion of laws and regulations of cooperative interests. It also provides professional support in the development of cooperative enterprises and support to local institutions and policy makers.

Finally, the [Popolare Banca Etica](#) (Ethical Bank) provides social initiatives with ethical finance and microcredits and network for ethical banking.

### Social economy entities which are working to develop Social entrepreneurship in Roma communities

Moreover, there are some social entities which offer support to create entrepreneurial initiatives within Roma communities.

For instance, the [A.I.Z.O Rom e Sinti Onlus](#) is an NGO that offers grants of financial support to provide professional training for Roma in order to enter the labour market or re-start school

Also the [Credito Cooperativo](#) is an ethical finance institute that provides microcredits for the development of social entrepreneurship. Likewise, the [Region of Sicilia through the programme](#) “Microcredits for Sicilian families” offers support to local entrepreneurship.

Moreover, the [Unicredit Fondation](#) offers subsidies and financial support for the creation of social enterprises and cooperatives. It works with Roma mediators to develop entrepreneurship in Roma communities.

Finally, the [Cooperativa Zajedna](#) offers microcredits to supports Roma women entrepreneurship

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

In 2015, the Council of Europe estimated at approximately 140,000 Roma living in Italy which represented 0.23% of the total population. According to the study of Strati F.2 seven out of the twenty Italian regions might account for 80% of the total Roma population (in the Centre (Lazio), in the North (Lombardia, Piemonte, Emilia Romagna and Veneto,) and in the South (Calabria and Campania)). The different groups of Roma have rich and old culture and story. Music and craft take an important place in their daily life. The culture is mostly unwritten but it remained unified and inside the family.

Half of the Italian Roma population is mostly young and aged less than 16 and only 0.3% are over 60. The population of Roma living in camps live in overcrowded, poor conditions, without adequate access to water and electricity. They are also excluded from social housing, applicants having to prove that they had been lawfully evicted from private rented accommodation, an impossible task for Roma living in or forcibly evicted from camps. This also conducts to issues for Roma to attend an educational process in national institutions.

In Italy, the National Strategy for Roma Integration implemented by the public institutions in cooperation with all stakeholders involved in the process of Roma inclusion impacts on the four key areas of education, employment, healthcare and housing, as well as in the fight against discrimination and the use of funding. One of the top goals of Italy’s National Strategy for the Roma is to ensure education for all Roma children, to promote non-discriminatory access to education and to tackle the problem of leaving school early. The

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<sup>2</sup> Strati F. (report), *Promoting Social Inclusion of Roma - A Study of National Policies*, 2011, p6

MIUR expose that in 2011 some measures were planned to reduce early school leaving rate in Campania, Apulia, Calabria, and Sicily. A National project launched in 2013 involving 13 large municipalities, aimed at increasing school attendance of Roma children in primary and secondary schools. The strategy also states its intention to eliminate the housing of Roma people in “camps” and The Italian government promotes vocational training and job orientation fighting undeclared work, promoting self-employment but also promoting access to services.

In order to promote social economy, recycling is the economic activity the most widely practiced the by Roma metropolitan communities. Such activities which are generally carried out by the individual familial groups have, in some cases, structured itself in the form of social working cooperatives or associations that allow them to enter the labour market more easily. The experience of the organisations of the social economy in social entrepreneurship and their proximity with the local population allow them to provide the adequate tools to foster social inclusion and encourage the entrepreneurship within Roma community. The Italian labour market is working on the small enterprises and the social economy can help the Roma communities to enter this market with small entities based on family models and using their cultural specificities (as hand craft or music) to offer new products and services. On the financial aspect, the banks which provide microcredits can be a solution to help the Roma communities to start a professional activity and enter the labour market.

Moreover, being in contact with mediators who are actors of the social economy can help Roma people to became pro-active in the society and develop their entrepreneurship working on social inclusion and civic participation. The mediators have also the role to inform the people about the national disposals available to help them on the housing or health care being a solution to many problems related to the isolation in the camps.

The social economy offers support (through mediators and assistants), formal or non-formal tools complementary to the learning provided by the national educational insitutions and different forms of trainings adapted to the local needs of the population and more particularly to people excluded from the labour market to enter it gaining new skills. The organisations of the social economy provide social services and have a role in the accomplishment of certain social aims, potentially being useful instruments in combating social exclusion and encouraging local development especially in rural or disadvantaged areas and with disadvantaged people. They also play an important role towards the integration and the development of the women empowerment allowing them to follow trainings for example.

The non-profit organisations and the cooperative sector lead programs in cooperation with the local administrations for example to fight against school drop-out, work on social inclusion, etc. The national networking and the local synergy between the different actors is one of the strength for the implementation of efficient projects and measures.

This sector is really dynamic with a constant growth and contributes to build more sustainable enterprises and a socio-economic development model fluid and productive.

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

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The main problems related to the implementation of social economy within Roma communities can be identified within 2 levels:

#### External factors:

- General ratio of unemployment
- Prejudice; weak connection between Italian society and Roma
- Racism
- Lack official documents

#### Internal factors:

- Patriarchal family
- Jealousy between the Roma families, etc
- Youngsters are fragmented between the Italian lifestyle and the Roma traditions

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The experience of the organisations of the social economy in social entrepreneurship and their proximity with the local population allow them to provide the adequate tools to foster social inclusion and encourage the entrepreneurship within Roma community.

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## Final considerations

Summing up, developing social entrepreneurship in Roma communities of Italy, is a challenge not only to facilitate the inclusion of Roma in the Italian society, but also to promote their social inclusion and the development of a profitable enterprise, that would benefit the Italian community.

Some of the main aspects that should be highlighted are the following:

- Creating bridges between the communities and the institutions.
- Addressing the basic needs to Roma communities by the Public Administration (water, garbage etc.)
- Facilitating the Roma' access to the job market
- Providing trainings, starting from the very basics.
- Developing the interventions, not at a level of operators, but mostly in forming teams of lawyers and other experts, who can attend and influence the Consulate in Rome etc.

The key internal issues towards social entrepreneurship are cultural, and related to gender and family hierarchy (such as the role of woman within the community). They are due to discrimination and prejudice, or because of lack of real interventions from institutions. Moreover, the competitiveness orientation of the labour market and the lack of documents, the prejudice against Roma and their inadequate educative level expose Roma to different levels of social and entrepreneurial exclusion.

Potential solutions that are assessed are to enable the cultures to work together for a common goal to provide support from institutions and public administration, to put housing and job opportunities as priorities, to create interventions with experts ex. lawyers, who can attend and influence the councils in Rome.

Some best practices suggested are: training Roma in new technologies and computer skills, getting the associations working with Roma involved into the policy creation and manning house-building projects with Roma themselves.

Finally, setting-up and operating a social enterprise requires a specific set of organizational, communication, cooperation and management skills that are very often not developed in the Roma community or even worse can be contradictory to their culture and attitudes.



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