

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: DRIVER FOR SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMIES

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Introduction and Background

Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a crucial socio-economic phenomenon, offering innovative and sustainable solutions to contemporary challenges such as social inequalities and climate change. Distinct from traditional, profit-maximizing entrepreneurship, it prioritizes generating social and environmental value. While well-established in the European Union, contributing significantly to GDP and employment, in the Republic of Moldova, the sector is in an early development stage. This study aims to analyze the role of social entrepreneurship as a pillar for sustainable and inclusive development, diagnose the current situation in Moldova, identify key gaps, and formulate policy recommendations.

Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative and descriptive approach, reviewing theoretical literature on social entrepreneurship definitions from scholars like J. Gregory Dees, Joseph Schumpeter, and EU regulatory frameworks. It incorporates comparative analysis of European cases (e.g., EU Social Economy Action Plan) and Moldova's fragmented legal landscape, supplemented by statistical data from sources like the European Social Enterprise Monitor (ESEM), Eurobarometer, and local reports from EU4Moldova and UNDP. Data synthesis identifies gaps and opportunities through secondary sources, without primary empirical collection.

Results

The research highlights that social entrepreneurship in Moldova is still “in its infancy” and is characterized by small initiatives (approximately 100-150), predominantly in areas such as: agriculture, crafts, rural tourism and social services. Such initiatives are mainly structured as NGOs or limited liability companies, employing 3-10 people per enterprise, mostly women and young people from rural areas. While, at the EU level, the social economy represents approximately 6.5% of GDP and employs over 40 million people [1], with 75% of Europeans recognizing its societal importance and supporting dedicated policies[2]. For the development of this sector in the Republic of Moldova, major development gaps have been identified: 1) the absence of a comprehensive legal framework that would define and support social enterprises[3]; 2) the lack of systematic statistical data[4]; 3) limited business management skills among initiators; 4) strong dependence on external grant funding; and 5) low awareness among policymakers and the public. Instead, key opportunities include alignment with EU policies, continued donor support, growing market interest in local and ethical products, and the demonstrated resilience of local social entrepreneurs.

Conclusions and Implications

Social entrepreneurship represents a strategic tool for fostering resilient, equitable, and inclusive economies. For the Republic of Moldova to harness its full potential, a systemic shift is imperative. This requires the adoption of a clear and stimulating legal framework (inspired by EU models), the development of a support ecosystem (financing, training, incubation), and the explicit inclusion of the social economy in national development strategies. Such measures would enable social entrepreneurship to become a genuine engine for the country's sustainable and inclusive growth.

Keywords: *social entrepreneurship, social impact, inclusion, sustainable economy*

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