

# THE ROMA: INCLUSION THROUGH SOCIAL ECONOMY

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**Abstract:** This article intends to lay out the main social integration opportunities for the Roma by means of the social economy forms as well as the present situation of implementing these initiatives in Romania. The integration of the Roma by forms of social Economy may be an obvious opportunity for these communities. The Social Economy (SE) has the capacity to evolve the social cohesion and to promote the active citizenship, to activate the local nets and the communitarian ones too as well as local social support. The high level of unemployment in the Roma communities shows to a low level of school attending or because of a low professional training for getting a good wages. From this point of view the social economy comes with insertion solutions on the work market by professional training programs and offers for places of work. Altogether, the social economy may support the Roma crafts that are on the verge of being forgotten but are looked for on the commercial market. The testing of the knowledge and availability of the socio-economical actors to realize projects underlined the fact that the ONGs have some problems concerning the Roma that have SE projects. These refer to the economical dimension, the support of some projects and a precarious informing of the ONG's leaders that are involved in the SE activities\*.

**Key words:** social economy (SE), social integration, Roma communities, unemployment, structural funds.

## 1. Introduction

In Europe live about 12 million Roma and their main features are that usually live in difficult conditions and often are discriminated against. Their discrimination due to

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\* Abbreviations: SE - Social Economy; CAPs - Agricultural Production Cooperative; IASs - State Agriculare Entreprises; VMG - Guaranteed Minimum Income AJOFM - County Agency for Employment; EU - European Union; A.G.V. - Activities Generating Incomes; ESF - European Social Fund; ANR - National Agency for the Roma; NGO/ONG - Non-Governmental Organization.

stereotypes and prejudices about the Roma, the community Roma being often considered marginal, traditional and difficult to integrate (Surdu L., 2010, pg. 57) . The Roma population is confronting with a few general problems about the unemployment and the low participation on the formal work market, low education level and the lack of qualification, a big number of family members that has a direct impact over the standards of living, bad living conditions, the communities concentration in disadvantaged areas, bags of poverty in some cases, a big number of persons that get social assistance (with a big impact over the image of the larger communities) they lack legal papers (with an impact over the social integration, the access to social services and on the work market).

Social economy offers solutions to reduce social exclusion by increasing employment rate for vulnerable persons and by creating mechanisms to help these people (Arpinte, D.; Cace, S.; Cojocaru, Ș., 2010, p. 66). Thus the Roma integration using the forms of social economy would be an obvious opportunity for Roma communities.

### ***The social involvements of the social economy and its importance in the social Roma inclusion***

In spite of the active measurements of social integration promoted by consistent politics, the Roma situation stays still a delicate one with social integration problems. There are more, stereotypes of the majority population against the Roma population as it doesn't wish to work and depends on the social assistance which creates negative attitudes of some of the majority community members. The low education level is among the main ones as an obstacle in their insertion on the work market, in an economy where the unqualified work places are less and less and the work offer is almost none in some areas and based on services. So, one of the major problems of the Roma is the lack of work places on the background of a low education capital, and the social economy may have a major part in the Roma integration on the work market.

There has to be underlined the importance of the cultural values of the Roma with an accent on the family and the interfamilial solidarity nets that may have an important part in promoting the social economy inside the communities by activating these self help nets already existent. Also, the existence of some closed communities and leaders of the communities, of some Roma ONGs that activated locally or inside the community they evolved previous projects or had advantages in strengthening the community and promoted the social activism specifically to the social economy.

A characteristic of the social economy is its capacity of evolving social cohesion and to promote the active citizenship just because the activities of the social economy have local roots, activates local, communitarian roots and local social support, activates local leaders and also supports local resources.

There is very important from this point of view the power of the social economy to help the local communities to evolve and to fall on the nets and local resources. Creating jobs is at a local level, depending on the needs and necessary services. From this point of view, the social economy is a viable alternative in the evolution of some communities with social problems such as some compact Roma communities: the lack of the work places, the lack of some services inside the community, the lack of the entrepreneurial and decision initiatives. The social economy promotes not only the integration on the work market but also a series of social values and responds to the communitarian needs. The local needs in many of the Roma communities do not refer only to the lack of a work place but there are also problems concerning the integration and the lack of services inside the community: for children caring, educational, sanitary, social assistance.

Essentially is the main characteristic of the social economy: its good reaction at the problem of the insertion of the disadvantaged or socially excluded persons on the work market. This characteristic is even more important in the places where the isolation and social exclusion are accentuated. From this point of view the social economy goes in the same direction with the European Union's targets: to improve the occupation of the work force for the active population, the occupation of the work force by the vulnerable groups: poor women, mono-parental families, Roma, disabled persons, ex imprisoned persons or from the centers, to promote the entrepreneurial spirit and the local initiative, to evolve the services as close as possible to the citizen and the community.

The social economy concept refers to the social peace and the lowering of the discrepancies and tensions between the social classes. There are a few definitions of the social economy that come from the political part and refer to the way the social economy brings the people together in associative organization based on free association and voluntary association and commitment that gravitates around a common purpose (Westland H, 2003). The solidarity inside the local community, the taking care of the children, old persons, to reduce the suffering of your own kind, to enrich the free time activities, opportunities for a place of work near home, all are social values involved in the social economy's services potential.

Before the imposing of the market, the economical relations of the communities were subordinated to the social part. The market's revolution switched the situation; the economical relations became superior to the social ones. Although the market dominates the modern society, the other principle, the social one didn't disappear and is empowered by the social economy. It is seen as a third way. If the state, the modern public sector is based on the redistribution principle, the social economy may be considered a concept based on the reciprocity principle: a change between the social actors with mutual advantages on both sides. From some points of view, the social economy has common points with the state sector. While the state has laws

and a system of official sanctions, the activities of the social economy are based on the generality of the interests and values in the unofficial way. The public system is based on taxes and imperative and official debts. The social economy is based on subscriptions and voluntary adhesions although in some limits the social pressure may work as an unofficial coercion form. While the market economy and the public sector have as a basis in a primary way the material and the individual human capital, the social economy counts at a high degree on the social capital that takes the form of mutual social relation between the individuals, organizations. The mutuality implies nets in the social economy in a considerable way more horizontal by nature than the nets from the economical part, in the same time, the activities of the other types of economy may have ES elements: the social objectives of the corporations, such as, the volunteering, different forms of social capital, but these elements do not constitute the primary base of their production.

We may say as follows that the social economy holds the segment from the production section or the services' offer of the society that is guided in a primary way by the mutual principle, it is based on types of social capital that take the form of the mutual social nets, it is independent organizationally by the state's power (Westlund H, 2003). Another examples of some other values that may also belong to the social economy: cultural diversity, social solidarity and integration, the protection of the rights, to mobilize the marginal groups, opportunities for places of work, social innovation.

Social economy promotes the equal opportunities and family life conciliation with the work market, by a flexible schedule adapted to the needs. The flexibility of the schedule is an important trump for the families with a high birth rate. It is known that the traditional pattern of the Roma households is the one of big families, where the woman, most of the times, isn't working as she has to stay home to take care of the children. A flexible work schedule and the evolution of the caring services of the children inside the community by social economy units would be an advantage for the integration on the work market of the women from the vulnerable families, Roma and non-Roma.

The support of the economical activities with a disappearance risk is another characteristic of the social economy. The social economy may support the Roma crafts that are looked for on the market and are about to extinguish. From this point of view a lot of the traditional crafts of the Roma could be revived successfully through SE units: workshop shoveled silversmith, kaldarar, ceaunar, rachitar, bricklayer, etc.

The redistribution/reinvestment of the local profit specific to the social economy generates local evolution leading to the socio-economical evolution of the communities on a medium and long term. The creation of a social and financial

capital at the local level is beneficial for the gathering of local expertise, to strengthen the local community. Seen from a economic-historical point of view one of the main fundaments of the social economy is the reciprocity and the local solidarity (Westlund H, 2003). The social economy appeared also as a result of some social movements as a social exchange factor, as an affirmation of the social solidarity by economical activities.

Some other characteristics of the social economy that have to be underlined for the social support are: the precedence of the individual and social objectives against the capital; the protection and implementation of the principles' solidarity and responsibility; the coincidence of he interests of the general interest members; a democratic control of the members; the voluntary and open membership; individual management and independence from the authorities; to mobilize the financial surpluses with the purpose of an supporting evolution of the members' interests and of the general interest (Report on Social Economy in EU, 2009, pg. 13).

One of he approach points of the social economy is the theory of the solidarity economy. This refers to the relation of his social economy with the social needs and the groups of social risk. There is an accent on the non-monetary exchange component that the social economy implies. The solidarity economy matches three poles; it is an hybrid between the market (the selling of goods and services), non-market (subsidies and donations) and the non-monetary economies (volunteering). The forms of the solidarity economy are for sure also form of the *SE*. (Report on Social Economy in EU, 2009, pg. 12)

The social utility of the social economy is hard to be measured by indicators. The social economy facilitates the accessibility of the services from the point of view: geographic, social, financial, and cultural and has the ability to adapt the services to the local services. On the other hand, the social economy offers stability in the cyclical economies and also for the communities.

The capacities to generate new opportunities for the society, of long lasting evolution are done by promoting the principle: we put the people on the first place and not the financial capital.

The social cohesion is as it follows one of the social economy's objectives: the integration by work of the disadvantaged groups, the raise of the democratic culture, by the raise of the social participation. By accentuating the social participation level there is offered a capacity of expression and negotiations of the social groups previously excluded from this process and from the process of the local application of the public politics. The most numerous communities of Roma have a represented in the local councils, sometimes doubled by the communitarian facilitator or a local active leader by means of the local Roma NGOs. A social local enterprise that would have as employees Roma persons from the community would raise their visibility in the community and the capacity of implying in the local decisions.

In conclusion, we can say that the social economy is directly implied in the local and regional evolution. The arguments are: the activation of the endogenous evolution processes in the rural areas, the reactivation of the areas with industrial decline, the rehabilitation of the urban marginal areas, the reinvestment of the financial capital in the same geographical area, the mobilization of the human capital, the activation of the local existent resources: of the community's agents with the best level of knowledge and the best position to take initiatives, the creation and extension of entrepreneurial culture. The most important effect of the social economy still remains a bigger number of work places which leads to the compensation of the crisis unemployment, contributes to the orientation of the jobs from the black economy to the official one, a better local stability level. One of the more often discussed problems remains the structural tendency of the *SE* organisms to see their specifically characteristics attenuated: either they become traditional companies for profit in the case of the strongly involved companies from the market and so, they become coordinated by a governmental organization or even dependant on such an organism (particularly from the financial point of view). The phenomenon is known as isomorphism. (Report on Social Economy in EU, 2009) From the micro economical point of view, the main problems of the *SE* units remain on a side the difficulties they have to procure financial capital for financing their investments and activities and on the other part the tensions to keep employed the human resources.

## ***2. The social politics addressed to the Roma***

### *A The Roma situation on the work market*

For a better understanding of the way social economy may involve in the Roma problems solving, we have to describe more clearly the larger framework of the present situation's state of things about the Roma occupational level as well as the main social policies measurements and their power in the solving of the actual situation.

Social economy is a solution for the Roma emigration by the multiple advantages it offers and were underlined in the previous chapter, but there has to be learnt out from the larger context of the pluses and the minuses of the measurements addressed to the Roma for the integration on the work market and social integration applied till present

The reactivation of the communitarian resources of inter-relationship and solidarity that characterize the Roma especially in the compact communities, the close relations with the extended family, the promoting of some local leaders, the reintroduction of some traditional jobs that are asked on the market and where there are involved the extinguished families in close relationships of coordination and work by the division of the work in the family but also the training at the workplace of some of the Roma that

know to practice well a job but they do not have any formal qualification for this these are some of the points that weren't well taken advantage of by the existent policies, but they could be start elements for he social economy enterprises.

The Roma situation on the work market remains a problem in spite of the active initiated measurements. We are going on a historical evolutionary path of the problem of Roma employment; we may say that the communist period brought a strengthening of the Roma situation by a wider access to education and their integration on the market work. The support of he scholar attendance in the same period contributed to the raise of the inter-generational social contribution and the raise of the educational capital of the Roma. A part of the Roma got a qualification at the work place and took benefit of the work experience.

At the 1989 moment, the marginal position on the work market of the employed Roma determined a very vulnerable position for them the moment the enterprises and CAPs were shut down. Moreover, some disposed areas, without any complete work offer for the entire population transformed in governess bags with miserable living conditions, the Roma being one of the social groups that was the most affected.

The Roma capacity, most of them with a reduced educational capital, of professional reconversion went toward some other economical fields and their number was small. Because of the falling industry and of the liquidation of the organized forms of agricultural works functioning, the Roma were left behind a form of employment. On the other hand, the crisis of the work places was felt massively by a big part of the employed population previously to compensates, factories or CAPs/IASs. The majority of the population called to forms of surviving such as the subsistence agriculture from the ones that were in the rural areas, the anticipated retirement or reconversion and the movement towards the services field. The rural Roma were the most exposed to the fall in extreme properness, because the work offer in the rural areas was drastically dominated and the subsistence agriculture and the animals' feeding in the households specifically to the large community don't characterized most of the Roma.

According to a recent study (Cace S. et at. al, 2010) realized at a national level in the Roma communities only 15, 4% of the Roma declare themselves employed. From these, 43, 6% do not have a given qualification by the attendance of a school (high school, apprentice school, etc.). In the same time, most part of them (39, 6%) that practice traditional jobs deal with the waste collecting (scrap, bottles, etc). The properness risk to the Roma is six times bigger than to the majority population and almost half of them are looking for a work place<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.mmuncii.ro/pub/imagemanager/images/file/RapoarteStudii/301210Raport%20%20cercetare\\_ES.pdf](http://www.mmuncii.ro/pub/imagemanager/images/file/RapoarteStudii/301210Raport%20%20cercetare_ES.pdf).

Low levels of education that Roma are generally directly related to a low level of employment, occupations devalued in society and, consequently, reduced income (Surdu, L., 2010, p. 61).

The reduced educational capital in comparison with the majority of the population stays a relevant reason of the actual situation of the Roma occupation. Most of the Roma do not have the sufficient education to access the qualified work places existent on the formal market, and the number of the unqualified work places is limited, those being also badly paid. In the conditions in which most of the Roma women are home maids and there is a big number of children for a family, the man being in the most of the cases the only financial sustaining of the family, the income that he can get for an unqualified place of work is insufficient for the maintenance of the family and for a decent living. The entrance of the Roma on the work market according to the same cited study is made more early than to the Romans and there is an inequality of the access to his education between the Roma girls and boys, especially to the traditional relatives.

The data of the same study shows that there could be talked in some cases of a low motivation for integration on the work market of the Roma in the conditions of a modest wages offer equivalent to the unqualified work that supports actually the "work on the black market" and the combination of the income sources from social benefices (VMG) with the informal news, obtained from the daily or seasoning work regime. The day payment work may be sometimes advantageous for a person that doesn't have any legal certification. So, a part of the Roma that works on the black market and find regularly something to work are interested by the offer for integration programs of AJOFM, that holds reattributed work places with a minimum economy salary, on the formal market. The work on he black market offer to some Roma the possibility to benefit concomitantly of social help, a fact that rouse opposite reactions in some of the communities from the authorities' part or from the majority community.

### ***Politics addressed to the social integration of the Roma*** ██████████

Beginning with the 1990 year there were used different strategies of social policy addressed to the Roma integration. The preparing process for he EU integration and the adopting of the National Strategy for the Roma's situation improvement (in 2001) had an important part in clarifying the priorities of the social policies and for the financing in the field.

An essential problem of the last years is represented by the role that the EU and the Member States play in the Roma integration. The promoting measures from the sphere of the four important mentioned fields in all the strategically documents (education, health, inhabitance and occupancy) are exclusively in the responsibility of the Member States. But, there is actually needed a better coordination between the



EU (with the different strategies and initiatives accepted by its members) and the Member States on this subject. If not so, we will go on to assist to a game of responsibility's placement between the main actors (EU, the Member States, the local authorities, the civil society), and this thing is very obvious in the case of the anti-Roma attitude as concerning the Roma that leave in other EU countries.

The steps for a more active involvement of the European Union in solving the Roma problems were successful at the end of the year 2010 when there was established a Task Force in the field. The first report<sup>1</sup> of this group of experts underlines on the basis of a study about the experiences of all the EU member states a few success factors for the Roma integration.

- The efficient coordination of the politics for the Roma at a national, local and regional level;
- The supportive programs with multi-annual budget essential for obtaining visible results on long term;
- The participation and effective interviewing of the Roma in the evolution and implementation process for their policies;
- The creation of data and keys for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the politics for the Roma.

In April 2011, the European Commission adopted a communication referring to the national strategies for the Roma. It is obvious that the elaboration of some common plans for the Roma integration at the level of the member states is a difficult mission, the member states having different models of social policies and social assistance systems that are different.

This document was followed by critics addressed to the Commission by a series of known NGOs that address to the Roma. The main critic's referred to a consultation process that wasn't that detailed as well as the lack of the notes referring to discrimination and anti-Roma as an important problem in the way of the Roma inclusion.

The document is centered on the same four big priorities: education, health, inhabitance and occupation. It refers to some of the general ideas about the evolution in these fields following that on their account the member states to elaborate national strategies for the Roma inclusion.

There is mentioned in the paper the importance of their access to the work market but also the possibility to have initiatives/instruments to raise the Roma implication in the personal economical activities. From this point of view, the revival of some

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<sup>1</sup> <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleaseAction.do?reference=MEMO/10/701&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>.

traditional jobs could be a solution. The main recommendations for the member states in the evolution of the national strategies for the Roma are:

- To establish some realistic purposes for the Roma integration;
- The identification of those urban and rural regions with a great degree of social and economical lacks;
- To allocate sufficient financial resources from the state budget;
- To create good methods of monitoring and evaluation of the created programmed impact;
- The continuous discussions with the civil Roma society for the creation and implementation of programs;
- The designation of a national contact point for implementing the strategy for the Roma.

Another initiative that has to be mentioned is the Inclusion Decade for the Roma 2005-2015. This is a governments' initiative (12 governments in present, including the Romanian one), of the national and international organizations and of the civil Roma society. The purpose is to accelerate the inclusion process for the Roma and to monitor in an transparent way the progress that each country has done. For this initiative, each state created an action plan, with well fixed purposes and clear indices for measuring the progress.

There was adopted at a national level in 2001 a National Strategy to ameliorate the Roma situation<sup>1</sup> which lasted for 10 years. The main mentioned fields were: administration and communitarian evolution, houses, social security, health, economy, public justice and order, the child's protection, education, culture and cults, communication and civically participation.

The economical chapter held as an objective the financing of the activities that create incomes and of the small family businesses<sup>2</sup>. The studies show that, although there were created special structures and were created also local plans for action, these were very little used by the local authorities and the gaps in comparison with the majority population stayed to be very big. The lack of the funds and of the specialists was felt.

The Roma National Agency prepares in present an inclusion strategy for the Roma for the years 2011 – 2020. Presently, there is a version that is to be debated<sup>3</sup>. The strategy begins with a series of general principles as the distinctly division one,

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.anr.gov.ro/docs/Politici/Hotarare\\_nr430.pdf](http://www.anr.gov.ro/docs/Politici/Hotarare_nr430.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> *The Conclusions of an Evaluation of the Strategy Made by the Communitary Evolution Agency "Together" in the year 2009*: [http://www.Agentiaimpreuna.ro/files/publicatii/10-RAPORT\\_tipar-p-ro.pdf](http://www.Agentiaimpreuna.ro/files/publicatii/10-RAPORT_tipar-p-ro.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> [www.anr.gov.ro](http://www.anr.gov.ro).

interdistinctly cooperation, of the subsidiary, of the chances equality etc. Then there is formed the general objective: "to write in the public, local and central agenda this subject as a priority for some real measures to lead till the end of 2020 to the socio-economical and cultural inclusion of the Roma minorities." As in many other fields of the social life we strike again against the responsibilities' decentralization, and the local authorities confront frequently with insufficient financial resources for the delegated responsibilities. This way, the structured funds are among the most real financial solutions, as long as the local authorities have the disposal and capacity to activate them.

There follows inside the strategy a series of objectives on the four main objectives of intervention (occupation, education, health and living) and a measures' plan. The first objective from the "Roma Inclusion on the Work Market" chapter is "the promoting of entrepreneurship in the local communities, with a meaningful population percentage that is from the Roma minorities as a solution for the activation of the local partners and to find the solutions for the complex problems of the local communities including the Roma ones, their participation on the work market and particularly, to integrate socially the Roma minorities." Another relevant objective for the social economy is "the identification of some mechanisms by which the employers to be interested, including possible facilities at the local level for the employers that employ Roma, especially of the Roma that have families with a lot of children and lack the subsistence means."

### ***3. The social economy and the Roma communities' evolution***

In the major concerns related to employment policies, the European Union considers that the social economy as an effective means in the integration of the vulnerable (Zamfir, E.; Fitzek, S., 2010, p. 8).

The social economy may become a viable instrument for the NGOs or the private entrepreneurs in the evolution of the Roma communities. The necessary expertise is existent at present only by the help of a few local leaders and local NGOs that have already created programmed addressed to the Roma, they know the communities, the local needs, what resources may be activated and hold the know how in the projects' creation. Anyway, there has to be underlined the fact that, although there are ideas and accumulated experience, many of the Roma NGOs have reduced administrative and financial capacities and have to be supported in the evolution of social economy projects and possibly of social economy forms.

A first step that the data gathering from inside the project that has been done was the testing of the knowledge and of the field actors' availability to realize social economy projects addressed to the vulnerable groups. There are actually a few good

examples of best practice that are evolving as social economy projects where the Roma are implied. There can be done on the basis of the gathered data recommendations concerning the evolving directions that the entrepreneurs could support. As concerning the Roma integration, one of the possible sources of financing is the accessing of the structural funds. During 2010 there were done efforts to raise the number of the programmers' initiators addressed to the Roma for these funds. From this point of view, there was modified the regulation of The European Fund for Regional Evolution for the acceptance as eligible spending the ones for the social houses from the disadvantaged areas. The Social European Fund offers multiple opportunities of financing that may support the Roma communities.

Actually, we fight against a very low absorption capacity. The small Roma NGOs that work directly with the community, have a reduced administrative and financial capacity to access or to implement these kind of projects and they should be supported by facilities. On the other hand, many of the local authorities that could be partners or main beneficiaries of such projects do not have the experience, the capacity or the necessary budget to access these funds.

The Roma NGOs that have social economy projects and these could be activated for some social economy forms inside the communities in the future are confronted with some dangers. One of them is the ignorance of the economical dimension. The evolving of the entrepreneurial spirit in the Roma communities is affected also by a few problems. The capacity of evolving some social economy activities by the local leaders may be reduced. In the Roma communities there are persons with very little material resources and a very low educational level. As for these, it is hard to believe that these kinds of persons could lead a business. Of course, they may have very good ideas but there is needed support for these ideas to become something real. Very often, one of the intermediaries from inside the communities are the Roma NGOs that know how to write a proposition and to implement a project but, there is also needed a businessman experience also to start it and make it profitable and to hold it on in a competitive economical field. As conclusion, the local Roma capital must be activated: persons with an education over the lowest average, persons with businesses initiatives or that already have a success business inside the community

There is another important aspect about the Roma projects that doesn't make the donors and the beneficiaries very content and it is the sustainability of some of the projects. On the basis of the anterior experiences we may say that, the effects of many projects are limited and they finish the moment there isn't any financing. The social economy projects could become after their enclosure self – sustainable by the type of action they make and they may support with their earned incomes, by means of an economical activity types of social integration but, they have to be seen from the economical point of view: financial and human resources, an open market for

products or services, the training of the human resources because the educational capital is very low in most of the Roma communities.

Social economy doesn't have as purpose a profit for itself but also the support for the local communities. There are successful business people inside the Roma communities and their implication in such activities could be seen also as one of their responsibility for the community or as a form of help for the poor ones from that community without investing any money but experience. The involvement of these leaders could be stimulated.

The idea of involvement in an economical activity isn't new in the Roma communities just because it comes after a period of time when there were promoted the so named A.G.V.s (activities that generate incomes). So, there may very easily be done confusion between these and the social economy starting from the idea that the two terms define more or less the same type of activity. No matter the understanding degree existent in this moment, it is important for this type projects to observe the social economy's principles the way they will be defined by the law and the way they are understood at the EU level. It is also important to raise the Roma and non – Roma population's knowledge concerning the meaning of SE and its advantages.

Social economy represent a good opportunity to promote inside the Roma communities the concept of active citizenship. The direct involvement of the citizens not only in the activities that have also profit but also in the social evolution of the local community is a priority both for the EU and for the Romanian government who revised recently its criterions for granting the different types of social help for the family. So, the number of the social help types was reduced, there was established a maximum limit of social help that a family can benefit of, there were established punishments for the ones that don't accept a place of work, there were hardened the qualification criterions for the social help.

#### ***4. The social economy projects for the Roma and the available resources***

The social economy projects may represent a way of approaching the social problems in an integrated way (such as: a successful economical activity to ensure places of work and to support children education activities in the same time) and they may be a solution for the passing over the properness level.

During the research, we talked with many NGOs for the Roma from the evolving included regions in the project, measuring the degree of knowledge and know how from the point of view of the social economy. At present, the analyzed Roma NGOs proved to have little knowledge in this field. The main source of information concerning the social economy is represented by different classes of study they

attended. The acceptance of the SE concept implies presently a consulting process and confrontation between different actors (represented of different forms of specifically organization of the social economy, NGOs represented, specialists, and governmental represented) that are active in this field or propose themselves to make SE activities. The involvement of the civil society generally, especially of the Roma NGOs in this process is necessary not from the perspective of “ the political correctness” but from one of some specifically characteristics for this group, of the social problems they are confronting with and of the believe that SE could offer a solution to all these.

Most of the Roma NGOs *wish to evolve SE activities*. Moreover, some NGOs applied for the financing of some SE projects through FSE. Being asked about the involvements of he social economy for the Roma communities the answers were far too general (such as: “*for a better life for all the persons*”), underlining the social economy as on a type of activity that may be useful to the vulnerable groups generally. There are a few exceptions. The reasons of the persons that do not wish to make social economy activities is both about the maintenance of their present profit as association or because of the misunderstanding of the social economy field.

Very little of the interviewed ones took part to formation classes in the field of the social economy, the participation to these classes being favorite the position of the NGOs represented holds in a public institution Roma expert, professor). There is a whole list of information about the field’s legislation.

Very little members of these NGOs managed to explain clearly the social economy concept. The general understanding is that of an economical activity in the use of the community. All the answers seem to accentuate the finality (the community’s evolution) and less the process, the creation and maintaining of a business. “*for me personally and not for the organization, ES represents the economy where many services are offered by NGOs that offer services for the community.*” (Represented of a Roma ONG)

The analysis of the qualitative data shows us a week evolution comparing with the needs of the ONG sector from the research area (except Bucharest). This represents a serious reason for worry firstly from the point of view of the Roma civil society capacity to implement these kinds of projects. In the same time, it also represents a clear signal for another need – that of a support method, for technical consultancy for the evolution of the NGOs’ capacity that wish to evolve these kinds of projects. The already existent help forms (the training of the human resources or little grants) function in the case of the small social economy projects. There are Roma NGOs that from different reasons such as the lack of human resources, of the experience or time choose to make little grants. There are organizations that do not afford to

employ people counting exclusively on voluntary work. To implement a social economy project that generally needs many human and financial resources, the local NGOs' capacity must be seriously strengthened.

The types of social initiatives specifically to the social economy frequently met are the waste collecting and the prizing of the traditional crafts.

If the statistical data concerning the active Roma population takes us clearly to the need of social economy projects, the field interviews show us the enthusiasm but also a small number of human resources prepared to start these kinds of projects.

Some of the Roma civil society represented or of the local authorities as well as the National Agency for the Roma have already realized the role that the social economy may take in the evolution of the Roma communities. From this point of view, as a result of the beginning of a series of projects in this field, there started to be seen a possibility for promoting the Roma population initiatives which is integral to the social economy sector. Because the fields and the intervention fields are very various we will offer as follows only a few examples of these kinds of projects that are successfully functional in present.

The Commentary Evolution Agency "Together" is one of the most powerful agents from the Roma NGOs in the SE projects' implementation. "Together" is an ONG created in 1999 with the purpose of keeping and showing the Roma personality, their acceptance as an ethnical minority, by research and diffusion activities, elaboration and implementation of the social policies in the Roma benefit.

By the portfolios of developed projects and the publications concerning the type of public policies, there may be said that the "Together" agency is one of the most important NGOs from Romania as concerning the Roma minority. For the executive director, the Agency is still in the exploring and documenting stage concerning the social economy. For the moment, "what is promoted as SE (...) doesn't really mean social economy but AGVs – activities that bring income." *Between AGVs and SE is a big difference. In Romania, the only activities of social economy type would be represented by the mutual support houses for the employees and retired persons as well as the craft cooperatives. Examples of social economy projects were met in Europe during some experience exchange such as a protected workshop for the locomotors disabled persons from Germany.* (President Together Agency)

Starting from this example, the "Together" Agency initiated a social economy project by means of which the ones that practice certain traditional crafts in the Roma communities, such as the wood workers, spoon makers, may create a cooperative of which products may find an exit on the modern market such as wicker furniture dressed with leather.

The National Agency for the Roma in partnership with some other organizations evolve the project "Together for a Better Society"<sup>1</sup>. The project is for the persons of Roma ethnic, the disabled persons and also for the persons with a guaranteed medium income. The purpose of the project is that of strengthening the inclusion on the work market of the persons that are part of these vulnerable groups and the promoting of the social inclusion by the evolution of the structures and the specifically activities for the social economy.

*The precise measures targeted inside the project are:*

- *To create eight Regional Centers of Resources for the Social Economy – one for each evolving region from the country;*
- *To offer classes for the professional orientation for the persons that belong to these vulnerable groups;*
- *To facilitate the partnerships at the regional level;*
- *The elaboration of 80 projects in the field of the social economy;*
- *The creation of at least 600 new places of work in workshops, mini-factories or micro-firms;*
- *The professional qualification of 2000 persons belonging to the vulnerable categories. From these 1000 persons will be of Roma ethnic, 800 from the ones that make a living only from the guaranteed minimum income and 200 disabled persons.*

Another project<sup>2</sup> started by ANR proposes itself to raise the local evolving capacity at the national level: "the participation of the vulnerable groups in the social economy". The approach is the one of transforming the vulnerable persons in agents of the change.

The target group is formed by 20 000 persons from which 9 800 Roma ethnic, 7000 detention persons, 1 200 drug addicted that were included in a rehabilitation program. Another target group is represented by 370 specialists for the social inclusion (social workers, communitarian assistants, school and sanitary mediators, social economy specialists). There will also be trained 50 managers in social enterprises and there will be supported 50 social economy structures to stimulate the associations' involvement to generate income and to prepare human resources in this field.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.anr.gov.ro/docs/proiecte\\_actualizate/4729.pdf](http://www.anr.gov.ro/docs/proiecte_actualizate/4729.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.economiesociala.anr.gov.ro/rezultate.htm>.



The specifically objectives of the project are:

- *The support of the professional and entrepreneurial training;*
- *The evolving of the social services for the support of the vulnerable groups;*
- *The promoting at the local communities' level of some local evolving policies;*
- *The support of the training in the field of the social services for the support of the social inclusion for the specialists from the public or private organizations that support the vulnerable groups.*

The Alba PAEM foundation in partnership with some other organizations implements the project "The Roma Create Social Enterprises for Recycling of the ROMA RE Materials' Package"<sup>1</sup>. The project is functional in 5 regions of Romania for 3 years. The objective is the creation of an interregional support mechanism for the offering of integrated services to the Roma ethnic persons that intend to create social economy enterprises. The expected results are the creation of 10 social economy structures, the creation of five support structures in the social entrepreneurship and five social enterprises in the recycling field, 150 employed persons inside the social economy structures.

The project's beneficiaries are:

- *700 persons that will get conciliation;*
- *120 persons employed in 10 ES structures;*
- *350 persons trained in the social economy field and entrepreneurship.*

### ***Conclusions and recommendations***

Social economy may be a very useful instrument in the fight against properness in the Roma communities and for their integration on the work market. The Roma communities profile and the specifically characteristics of the social economy support this perspective: the Roma communities' specifically solidarity, the existence of some traditional crafts that can be revived. The investment in such projects is a long lasting one, the main dangers being about the financing on the medium and long term. The demand for such projects is big, most of the local organizations expressing not only their wish of evolving such a project but also having supporting ideas. But, not many of them have the necessary understanding of the social economy field and many of

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<sup>1</sup> [http://pakiv.ro/wp-content/uploads/2010/03proiectul\\_romii\\_creaza\\_intreprinderi.pdf](http://pakiv.ro/wp-content/uploads/2010/03proiectul_romii_creaza_intreprinderi.pdf).

them do not have the human and administrative resources to start such big projects. This is why there are necessary some recommendations:

- The spreading of the information about the social economy and of the principles that form its basis among the Roma leaders;
- The support of the local Roma organizations to attract projects;
- The continuous efforts of spreading the know how and of consolidation of the capacities of the civil Roma society and of the local authorities in this field;
- The preparing of the human resources both in the field of the communitarian resources as well as in the entrepreneurial one;
- The encouraging of the participation of the already existent entrepreneurs in the Roma communities. Their managerial experience is of a real use not only for the project but for the community in general;
- The creation of some structures to offer assistance in the field. The represented of the local community know well the opportunities and the local needs but they need support to start and implement correctly such a project.

The risks are mainly linked by sustainability, if from the beginning the social enterprise doesn't have an economical strong fundament the rest to bankrupt is big. The NGOs learned this from the experiences with the projects generating incomes. In spite of the inherent risks for any type of project, the SE projects represent a real opportunity for the socio-economical evolution of the Roma communities and the support of local organizations' sustainability that work in this field.

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