



Erasmus +, KA220-HED - Cooperation partnerships in higher education

**DigiFUNCollab - Developing digital-Self-learning Courses in Social Entrepreneurship
for the future of collaboration between University and Community**

Project Number: 2023-1-IT02-KA220-HED-00015873

SYNTHESIS REPORT ON SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP WITH A FOCUS ON THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR IN ITALY, GERMANY, ROMANIA, AND SLOVENIA

WP2-A5

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All partners

September 2024



SoWiBeFo
Verein für sozialwissenschaftliche
Beratung und Forschung e.V.



Mednarodna fakulteta
za družbene in poslovne študije
**International School
for Social and Business Studies**
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**Co-funded by
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1 Introduction

1.1 Context and Purpose of the Report

Social entrepreneurship has become an increasingly important tool for addressing complex societal challenges, particularly in the European context, where countries face varying degrees of socio-economic development, social inequality, environmental concerns, and political dynamics. Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia provide distinct examples of how social entrepreneurship can contribute to these efforts, shaped by their unique historical, cultural, and economic contexts. The evolution of social entrepreneurship in these nations is influenced by local traditions of civic engagement and economic systems and broader European policies, such as the Social Business Initiative and the European Social Fund. These factors are pivotal in how each country recognises, supports, and regulates social enterprises.

This report forms a key component of an Erasmus+ project focused on fostering the development of social entrepreneurship in higher education institutions (HEIs) across these four countries. The project seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in social entrepreneurship through collaboration among educators, researchers, policymakers, and social entrepreneurs. Higher education is a powerful driver for social innovation, and this initiative aims to empower HEIs to contribute to the formation of social entrepreneurs who can create sustainable solutions for pressing social issues. This requires a holistic approach that includes identifying the critical competencies for success in social entrepreneurship, examining the ecosystems that facilitate or hinder social enterprises, and offering actionable policy recommendations to strengthen the sector.

1.1.1 Diverse Pathways of Social Entrepreneurship

The pathways through which social entrepreneurship has developed in each country vary widely. Italy, for instance, has a long history of social cooperatives, where organisations combine social missions with entrepreneurial activities. This tradition has helped establish Italy as one of the leading European countries in terms of social entrepreneurship, with strong legal frameworks and widespread recognition of social enterprises. Germany, similarly, boasts a robust tradition of civic engagement, although the legal recognition of social enterprises as distinct entities is relatively new. Instead, Germany's approach is more closely aligned with concepts like social innovation and enterprises for the common good.

Romania and Slovenia present different dynamics, as both countries have more recently adopted the concept of social entrepreneurship, partly driven by their integration into the European Union and





access to EU funding mechanisms. In Romania, social entrepreneurship is often viewed through the lens of work integration social enterprises (WISEs), which focus on employing marginalised groups. Slovenia has followed a similar path, where European Social Fund projects have supported establishing and developing social enterprises. However, the broader ecosystem is still growing regarding legal frameworks, public awareness, and financial support.

This report examines these distinct trajectories to highlight the interplay between local contexts and transnational policies. It explores how different social entrepreneurship models are implemented and how higher education institutions can be vital in standardising and advancing social entrepreneurship education.

1.1.2 Defining Social Entrepreneurship: Legal and Operational Frameworks

A key objective of the report is to provide a comparative analysis of the definitions and legal frameworks of social entrepreneurship in Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia. While the term "social enterprise" is widely used across Europe, its precise meaning and the legal structures that support it differ significantly from country to country. For example, Italy's legal framework for social cooperatives dates back to the 1990s, providing early recognition of social enterprises as distinct legal entities that pursue economic and social goals. In contrast, Germany only recently developed a national strategy for social enterprises, emphasising social innovation and enterprises for the common good, though without specific legal definitions for social enterprises.

In Romania and Slovenia, European Union regulations have shaped the legal recognition of social enterprises, particularly the Social Business Initiative (2011). Both countries have enacted laws that define social enterprises. Still, these definitions often focus narrowly on specific types of enterprises, such as WISEs, limiting broader recognition of other forms of social entrepreneurship. This report will explore how these legal frameworks impact the operational capacities of social enterprises, from securing funding and gaining public recognition to building partnerships with government agencies and private sector actors.

1.1.3 Supporting Ecosystems: Education, Networks, and Funding

The sustainability and growth of social enterprises depend heavily on the ecosystems that support them, including access to education, funding, and networks. These ecosystems vary in strength and structure in the four countries analysed. Italy, with its well-established tradition of cooperatives, has created an environment where social enterprises benefit from governmental support and a strong network of civic organisations. Italian universities' educational programs also significantly promote social entrepreneurship, offering specialised courses and degrees.

Although "social enterprise" may not be as widely used in Germany, a strong network of welfare



organisations and foundations supports the sector. Educational institutions, particularly through initiatives like the Social Entrepreneurship Academy, provide important resources for aspiring social entrepreneurs. However, there remains a gap in the formal recognition of social enterprises and the integration of social entrepreneurship into national educational policies.

Romania and Slovenia face different challenges, particularly regarding funding and public awareness. In both countries, social entrepreneurship has largely developed through EU-funded projects, but the broader public and governmental recognition of social enterprises remains limited. The report will examine higher education's role in fostering social entrepreneurship and creating more supportive ecosystems in these countries. Developing strong support networks—whether through incubators, accelerators, or partnerships with civil society—will also be explored as crucial elements in building resilient social enterprises.

1.1.4 Strategic Insights: Trends, Opportunities, and Challenges

By bringing together the experiences of Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia, this report aims to identify key trends in social entrepreneurship and highlight opportunities and challenges. One major trend is the increasing recognition of social entrepreneurship as a viable career path for students and young professionals, particularly in light of growing interest in social impact, sustainability, and ethical business practices. This is reflected in the expanding number of educational programs dedicated to social entrepreneurship in each of the four countries and the rise of incubators, accelerators, and social enterprise networks that support new ventures.

However, significant challenges also need to be addressed. For instance, the lack of a unified legal definition of social entrepreneurship across Europe can create barriers for social entrepreneurs seeking to operate in different countries. Moreover, the reliance on project-based funding, particularly from EU sources, raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of many social enterprises. There is also a need for greater collaboration between governments, universities, and the private sector to ensure that social enterprises can access the resources they need to scale their impact.

1.1.5 Building a Roadmap for the Future

In summary, this synthesis report aims to provide a detailed analysis of social entrepreneurship in higher education across Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia. By comparing the diverse pathways that social entrepreneurship has taken in each of these countries, the report will offer valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and social entrepreneurs. It will also outline a roadmap for strengthening the role of higher education in fostering social entrepreneurship, recommending ways to integrate social entrepreneurship into formal curricula, improve legal frameworks, and develop more supportive ecosystems for social enterprises. Through these efforts,



the report hopes to contribute to the growth of a vibrant and sustainable social entrepreneurship sector in Europe, capable of addressing society's complex challenges today.

1.2 The Scope and Objectives of the Report

This report aims to thoroughly analyse the social entrepreneurship landscape in Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia, emphasising how higher education institutions contribute to nurturing future social entrepreneurs. The scope of the analysis encompasses:

1. A comparative definition of social entrepreneurship across the four countries.
2. A review of the social entrepreneurship ecosystems, including legal frameworks, governmental support, and the role of civil society.
3. The identification of inspiring practices and case studies in social entrepreneurship education.
4. A critical comparison of the competencies required by social entrepreneurs in the participating countries.
5. A strategic analysis of opportunities and challenges through SWOT analysis, focusing on policy recommendations.

1.3 Methodology

This report employs a comprehensive methodological approach, utilising qualitative and quantitative techniques to provide a well-rounded understanding of social entrepreneurship in Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia. Key data sources include national reports prepared by project partners, focus group discussions, and consultations with stakeholders and experts in the field.

National reports from universities, research centres, and social entrepreneurship organisations offered insights into each country's legal, economic, and social frameworks shaping social enterprises. Focus groups of educators, policymakers, social entrepreneurs, and NGO representatives explored the skills required for social entrepreneurship and highlighted gaps in current education and training programs. Stakeholder consultations with government officials, social enterprise leaders, and EU experts further illuminated policy and funding environments.

This multi-stakeholder approach ensures that the findings combine academic and practical perspectives and are relevant to each country's specific needs. By comparing the contexts of the four nations, the report identifies cross-border lessons to enhance social entrepreneurship education and support systems throughout Europe.

In conclusion, the diverse methodologies provide a rich, multi-dimensional understanding of social entrepreneurship, ensuring that the findings inform academic research and policy development.



1.4 Key Findings

1.4.1 Significance of Social Entrepreneurship in Higher Education

Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a crucial mechanism for addressing some of the most pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges globally in recent years. By combining entrepreneurial approaches with a mission to generate positive societal impact, social entrepreneurship bridges the gap between profit-driven enterprises and charitable organisations. In this context, higher education institutions (HEIs) play a pivotal role in preparing the next generation of social entrepreneurs. Universities are uniquely positioned to foster both the skills and the mindset required for students to pursue social entrepreneurship, making them drivers of innovation and agents of social change.

Social entrepreneurship is a platform for developing entrepreneurial skills such as business acumen, financial management, and innovation within the higher education landscape. It nurtures a strong sense of social responsibility and ethical leadership. As students engage with real-world social problems, they are encouraged to think critically about the systemic causes of inequality, poverty, and environmental degradation and to design innovative solutions that address these issues sustainably. Integrating social entrepreneurship into higher education curricula enhances students' capacity to act as change agents, equipping them with the knowledge and tools to create lasting social impact.

Universities foster these skills through various methods, including formal education programs, specialised courses, extracurricular activities, research initiatives, and partnerships with social enterprises and non-profit organisations. By offering interdisciplinary programs that combine business, social sciences, and environmental studies, universities help students understand the multifaceted nature of social challenges. Moreover, hands-on learning opportunities such as internships, incubators, and social enterprise labs provide students with the practical experience to implement their ideas and translate theory into action.

The significance of social entrepreneurship in higher education is especially apparent when examining the different approaches taken by countries like Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia. Social entrepreneurship has deep roots in the cooperative movement and non-profit organisations in Italy, which have been vital in addressing social welfare needs for decades. Italian universities, particularly those focusing on the social economy, offer specialised programs in social entrepreneurship, equipping students with the knowledge and skills to lead social enterprises that balance financial sustainability with a social mission. The historical tradition of cooperatives in Italy serves as a foundation for many of the country's social entrepreneurship initiatives, making it one of the most established ecosystems in Europe.



In contrast, Romania and Slovenia are relatively new to the concept of social entrepreneurship, with the field being primarily driven by European Union policies and funding mechanisms, such as the European Social Fund and the Social Business Initiative. These EU initiatives have provided significant financial and technical support to build social enterprises in these countries, but higher education institutions are still in the early stages of incorporating social entrepreneurship into their curricula. Developing dedicated courses, research programs, and university support structures is crucial for embedding social entrepreneurship more firmly within the Romanian and Slovenian higher education systems. By doing so, universities in these countries can play a critical role in promoting the growth of the social economy and empowering students to develop sustainable social enterprises.

With its long tradition of civic engagement and a strong welfare system, Germany takes a somewhat different approach to social entrepreneurship, emphasising social innovation as a key element. Although Germany lacks a specific legal framework for social enterprises, the country's focus on social innovation provides fertile ground for developing social entrepreneurial ventures. German universities and research institutes have been at the forefront of promoting social entrepreneurship through interdisciplinary programs and partnerships with social innovators. The Social Entrepreneurship Academy, for example, allows students to develop their entrepreneurial skills while focusing on creating innovative solutions to societal challenges. Despite the absence of a unified legal definition, the strong culture of civic engagement in Germany allows social enterprises to thrive, with universities acting as key enablers of this ecosystem.

By embedding social entrepreneurship into the higher education system, these countries are cultivating a new generation of socially conscious innovators equipped to tackle complex societal challenges. The combination of theoretical knowledge, practical experience, and multi-stakeholder collaboration helps students understand the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of the issues they seek to address. Moreover, through exposure to real-world problems, students are empowered to think critically and creatively, fostering an entrepreneurial spirit driven by the desire to generate social impact.

Universities also play a critical role in building the broader ecosystem for social entrepreneurship by serving as hubs for innovation, research, and collaboration. They facilitate connections between students, academics, social enterprises, government bodies, and the private sector, creating a supportive network that encourages the growth of social ventures. Through research initiatives, universities contribute to developing new theories and models of social entrepreneurship while also providing evidence-based insights that inform policy development. University-led incubators and accelerators also offer aspiring social entrepreneurs the mentorship, resources, and funding needed to bring their ideas to life.

In conclusion, the significance of social entrepreneurship in higher education cannot be overstated. As the demand for innovative, sustainable solutions to global challenges grows, higher education



institutions are uniquely positioned to equip students with the skills, knowledge, and mindset needed to lead this change. By fostering social entrepreneurship, universities prepare students for successful careers and empower them to become leaders in the social economy, capable of driving meaningful and lasting impact in their communities and beyond.

1.4.2 Challenges in Defining Social Entrepreneurship

One of the fundamental challenges in advancing social entrepreneurship across Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia is the absence of a universally accepted definition of the term. Social entrepreneurship is fluid and varies significantly from country to country, shaped by local histories, economic structures, and socio-political contexts. This definitional ambiguity creates difficulties in understanding what constitutes a social enterprise and establishing the legal and operational frameworks necessary to support them. As a result, social enterprises' recognition, development, and growth are often inconsistent, impacting their ability to access resources, secure funding, and build legitimacy.

In Italy, the concept of social entrepreneurship has deep roots in the cooperative movement, and social enterprises have had legal recognition since 1991. Italian social enterprises are typically defined by their pursuit of economic and social goals, and they often operate as cooperatives or non-profit organisations that serve the public good. This long history has allowed Italy to develop a relatively straightforward and comprehensive legal framework for social enterprises, providing them with substantial support from government institutions and civil society. However, even in Italy, debates persist regarding the scope of social entrepreneurship and how to classify enterprises that blend social missions with profit-driven activities. The Italian model largely revolves around social cooperatives, which may limit the inclusion of other socially oriented businesses.

In contrast, Germany presents a more complex scenario. While social enterprises are recognised as key contributors to the welfare state, they are not legally defined as a separate enterprise category. Instead, they are often integrated into broader frameworks of welfare organisations or social innovation initiatives. This lack of a specific legal framework for social enterprises can hinder their ability to receive formal recognition or specific governmental support. Instead, social entrepreneurship in Germany is frequently viewed through the lens of "social innovation," emphasising solving social problems through innovative solutions rather than focusing on the legal status of the enterprise itself. This broad interpretation can make distinguishing social enterprises from other organisations in the non-profit or social economy sectors challenging, leading to varying degrees of visibility and support.

Romania and Slovenia, on the other hand, are still in the early stages of developing their definitions and legal frameworks for social entrepreneurship. The concept has gained traction in both countries primarily through European Union policies and funding mechanisms, such as the European Social Fund and the Social Business Initiative. Romania adopted a legal definition of social enterprises in





2015 with the Law on Social Economy, while Slovenia followed suit with the Social Entrepreneurship Act in 2011. However, in both cases, these definitions are relatively narrow and focus mainly on specific types of social enterprises, particularly those that promote work integration for marginalised groups. This limited scope can exclude other forms of social entrepreneurship that focus on environmental sustainability, education, or healthcare, thereby restricting the broader development of the social enterprise sector.

Moreover, the challenges of defining social entrepreneurship extend beyond legal frameworks. Operational definitions, which determine how social enterprises are perceived and supported in practice, also vary widely across the four countries. For instance, in Italy, the strong tradition of civic engagement and cooperative structures allows social enterprises to operate with high legitimacy and public support. In Germany, however, the operational focus on social innovation rather than enterprise status means that many social entrepreneurs must navigate multiple legal forms and frameworks to operate effectively. This lack of a unified operational definition can create barriers for social enterprises when seeking funding or partnerships, as stakeholders may not fully recognise or understand their social mission.

In Romania and Slovenia, the operational definitions of social entrepreneurship are still evolving. The reliance on EU funding has shaped much of the operational landscape, with many social enterprises in these countries functioning as project-based organisations rather than long-term, sustainable businesses. This dependence on external funding can make it difficult for social enterprises to scale their operations or develop long-term strategies for growth. Additionally, the narrow legal definitions in both countries mean that many enterprises that engage in socially beneficial activities may not qualify as social enterprises under national laws, limiting their access to the support and recognition needed to thrive.

This report delves into these definitional challenges, offering a comparative analysis of the legal and operational definitions of social enterprises in Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia. By highlighting the differences in how social entrepreneurship is understood and regulated across these countries, the report seeks to provide insights into the implications of these variations for social enterprise development. For instance, the presence or absence of a clear legal definition can significantly impact a social enterprise's ability to receive tax incentives, government grants, or public recognition. Similarly, operational definitions influence how social enterprises are perceived by civil society, investors, and consumers, which in turn affects their ability to secure funding, form partnerships, and achieve their social missions.

Ultimately, all four countries must grapple with the challenge of defining social entrepreneurship consistently and comprehensively as they seek to build supportive ecosystems for social enterprises. The lack of a common framework makes it difficult to compare social enterprise models across countries or develop cross-border policies that support the sector's growth. Moreover, the absence of a universally accepted definition can create barriers for social entrepreneurs who wish to expand



their operations internationally or collaborate with partners in other countries.

In conclusion, the definitional challenges of social entrepreneurship are both a reflection of and a barrier to its growth as a recognised and supported sector. This report's comparative analysis of the legal and operational frameworks in Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia provides critical insights into how these differences shape the development of social enterprises and the support they receive from government institutions and civil society. By addressing these challenges, policymakers and stakeholders can work toward creating more inclusive and supportive environments that recognise the full potential of social entrepreneurship to drive innovation and social change.

1.4.3 Social Entrepreneurship Ecosystems

Developing a robust and supportive ecosystem is critical to the growth and sustainability of social enterprises. A well-functioning ecosystem helps social enterprises survive and enables them to thrive, scale their operations, and maximise their social impact. Key components of a successful social entrepreneurship ecosystem include a solid legal framework, access to diverse funding sources, networks of support and collaboration, and a vibrant educational infrastructure that fosters the next generation of social entrepreneurs. The existence, strength, and coordination of these elements can significantly influence the success of social enterprises and their ability to contribute meaningfully to society.

Across Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia, the structure and maturity of social entrepreneurship ecosystems vary widely, reflecting different levels of governmental support, historical precedents, public awareness, and civic engagement. Each country demonstrates unique characteristics that shape how social enterprises operate and grow, highlighting the importance of contextual understanding in supporting the development of these ecosystems.

Italy represents one of Europe's most mature and well-established ecosystems for social entrepreneurship. The country has a long-standing tradition of social enterprises, particularly in the form of social cooperatives, which are legally recognised and embedded within the Italian welfare system. Since the early 1990s, Italy has had a comprehensive legal framework that formally recognises social enterprises, granting them access to various benefits, including tax exemptions and funding opportunities. At the national and regional levels, the Italian government plays an active role in supporting social enterprises, offering grants, subsidies, and resources for capacity building.

This legal and governmental support is further complemented by a strong network of civic organisations, cooperatives, and foundations that provide social enterprise mentorship, training, and financial support. These networks help social entrepreneurs navigate the complexities of running socially driven businesses while maintaining financial sustainability. Moreover, Italy's well-





developed educational infrastructure includes numerous higher education institutions offering specialised programs and courses in social entrepreneurship, further enhancing the country's ability to produce skilled social entrepreneurs capable of addressing societal challenges innovatively.

While Germany lacks a specific legal definition for social enterprises, its ecosystem is nonetheless robust, largely due to its strong tradition of civic engagement and its emphasis on social innovation. Social enterprises in Germany often operate within the broader framework of welfare organisations, which have deep historical roots in the country. These organisations, foundations, and social innovation networks provide critical support to social enterprises, particularly regarding access to funding, mentorship, and collaboration.

The German ecosystem for social entrepreneurship is heavily focused on innovation, with many social enterprises aligning their missions with emerging social challenges such as climate change, migration, and digital inclusion. While there is no unified legal framework for social enterprises, this has not impeded the growth of the sector. Instead, social enterprises in Germany leverage existing structures within the welfare state and participate in broader social innovation initiatives. The federal and regional governments also play a role in offering funding programs and initiatives that support social enterprises, particularly in areas related to sustainability and social cohesion.

Moreover, Germany's academic institutions are increasingly offering programs and resources dedicated to social entrepreneurship. For example, the Social Entrepreneurship Academy in Munich provides education, incubation, and networking opportunities for aspiring social entrepreneurs, while other universities integrate social entrepreneurship into business and innovation curricula. These efforts ensure that the next generation of German social entrepreneurs has the skills and knowledge to address complex societal issues.

Social entrepreneurship is a relatively new concept in Romania and Slovenia, and the ecosystems in both countries are still developing. The growth of social enterprises in these nations has been largely driven by European Union policies and funding, particularly through the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Social Business Initiative. While Romania and Slovenia have enacted legal frameworks for social enterprises—Romania in 2015 with the Law on Social Economy and Slovenia in 2011 with the Social Entrepreneurship Act—these frameworks are still narrow in scope and primarily focused on work integration social enterprises (WISEs). As a result, other forms of social entrepreneurship, such as those addressing environmental or healthcare issues, may struggle to gain formal recognition or access to resources.

The social entrepreneurship ecosystem in both countries remains heavily dependent on project-based funding, particularly from EU sources. This reliance on external funding can create challenges for the long-term sustainability of social enterprises, as many struggle to secure continuous financial support after the conclusion of EU-funded projects. Additionally, public awareness and government support for social entrepreneurship are relatively limited in Romania

and Slovenia, which further constrains the development of a more vibrant ecosystem.

However, despite these challenges, there are promising signs of growth. Romania and Slovenia have seen a rise in social entrepreneurship education, with universities beginning to offer courses and programs that introduce students to the field. In Slovenia, for example, the University of Ljubljana and other institutions have developed courses focused on social entrepreneurship, helping to raise awareness and build capacity. Additionally, emerging networks of social enterprises, incubators, and accelerators are beginning to provide much-needed support in the form of mentorship, training, and resources.

This report will explore the key components of the social entrepreneurship ecosystems in Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia, offering insights into how these ecosystems can be strengthened to support social enterprises better. Key recommendations for improving these ecosystems include:

1. *Expanding Legal Recognition and Frameworks*: Countries like Germany, Romania, and Slovenia need more comprehensive legal frameworks that recognise the broader spectrum of social entrepreneurship and go beyond work integration social enterprises. Such frameworks would provide social enterprises with greater access to funding, tax incentives, and public recognition, fostering their growth and sustainability.
2. *Diversifying Funding Sources*: While EU funding has been instrumental in the growth of social enterprises, particularly in Romania and Slovenia, there is a need to diversify funding sources to ensure long-term sustainability. National and regional governments should explore new funding mechanisms, such as social impact bonds or public-private partnerships, to provide social enterprises with more stable and diversified financial support.
3. *Building Stronger Networks and Support Systems*: Collaboration and networking are critical to the success of social enterprises. Governments, universities, and civil society organisations should strengthen networks connecting social entrepreneurs with mentors, investors, and other key stakeholders. Incubators and accelerators specifically designed for social enterprises can provide vital support, helping them to scale and increase their impact.
4. *Enhancing Education and Capacity Building*: Universities play a key role in developing future social entrepreneurs. Expanding social entrepreneurship education across higher education institutions in all four countries is essential for cultivating the skills and mindset needed for social innovation. Additionally, offering ongoing professional development and capacity-building programs for existing social entrepreneurs will further strengthen the ecosystem.
5. *Raising Public Awareness and Governmental Engagement*: Romania and Slovenia, in particular, need to raise public awareness about the importance of social entrepreneurship. Governments should also actively support social enterprises through policy initiatives, funding programs, and public procurement strategies that prioritise social impact.

By addressing these challenges and opportunities, the participating countries can create more supportive and resilient ecosystems for social entrepreneurship. Through strengthened legal frameworks, diversified funding mechanisms, robust networks of support, and expanded



educational opportunities, social enterprises in Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia will be better positioned to contribute to meaningful social change.

1.5 Invitation to Continue Exploration

The introduction of this synthesis report sets the stage for a deeper exploration of social entrepreneurship in higher education in Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia. By analysing the critical components of social entrepreneurship, including definitions, ecosystems, and educational opportunities, this report aims to provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and social entrepreneurs alike. As you continue reading, you will discover detailed comparisons of how social entrepreneurship has evolved in these countries, how legal frameworks shape the opportunities for social enterprises, and the pivotal role higher education institutions play in fostering social innovation.

The chapters ahead offer a thorough understanding of the challenges and opportunities within each country and practical recommendations that can guide the development of stronger social entrepreneurship ecosystems. Whether you are an academic seeking to incorporate social entrepreneurship into your curriculum, a policymaker aiming to strengthen the support systems for social enterprises, or an aspiring social entrepreneur eager to make an impact, this report will provide the comprehensive knowledge and tools necessary to advance the field.

We invite you to continue reading and delve deeper into the promising future of social entrepreneurship across Europe. By understanding the diverse approaches and recognising the importance of a unified strategy, we can collectively empower the next generation of social entrepreneurs to lead meaningful social change.

2 Towards a comparative definition of social entrepreneurship in the participating countries

Currently, there is no agreement upon a single definition of social entrepreneurship in the four project countries Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia. The definitions used emerged in each country in relation to each local history of welfare associations, and, more recently, the Social Business Initiative of the European Union (2011).¹ The available studies distinguish between the legal definitions of “social entrepreneurship” and “social enterprises” on the one hand and on operational definitions of the concept on the other. The researchers observed that sometimes the legal definitions of the term “social entrepreneurship” do not include all forms of social enterprises that exist in practice. In the current report, the focus will be on the broader operational definitions.

Among the four countries analyzed, the degree of acceptance of the concept “social enterprise” in Italy is among the highest in Europe.² The concept was introduced there sooner than elsewhere.³ Legally, it was coined already in 1991 as “social cooperative”. Social enterprise initiatives were boosted by the tradition of civic engagement dating back to the period before the First World War and sometimes connected to the Catholic and religious culture.

In Germany, another country with a strong tradition of civic engagement, the term “social enterprise” is not commonly used due to traditional social welfare institutions constituting the backbone of the German social economy.⁴ The newly developed National Strategy for Social Enterprises from 2023 uses the terms “social innovation” and “enterprise for the common good” instead.⁵

The concepts of “social entrepreneurship” and “social enterprise” are newer in Slovenia and Romania. They look at the concept through their historical inheritance of belonging for almost half of century to a socialist political regime (Slovenia) and a communist political regime respectively (Romania).

¹ Borzaga, Carlo, Giulia Galera et. al. (2020): Social Enterprises and their Ecosystems in Europe. Comparative Synthesis Report, p. 28, available at: <https://www.european-microfinance.org/sites/default/files/document/file/Social%20enterprises%20and%20their%20ecosystems%20in%20Europe.%20Comparative%20synthesis%20report.pdf>.

² Borzaga, Carlo, Giulia Galera et. al. (2020): Social Enterprises and their Ecosystems in Europe..., p. 35.

³ Borzaga, Carlo (2020): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Italy, p. 10, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=16380&langId=en>.

⁴ Göler von Ravensburg, Nicole; Gorgi Krlev (2018): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Germany, p. 37, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=20563&langId=en>.

⁵ Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Protection, Federal Ministry of Education and Research (eds.) (2023): Nationale Strategie für Soziale Innovationen und Gemeinwohlorientierte Unternehmen.

In Romania, social enterprises were legally defined in 2015 by the Law 219/2015 on Social Economy and are inextricably linked to it.⁶ The Romanian social enterprises have to fulfill several specific criteria that will be discussed below. The concept is politically and legally accepted; however, it enjoys a narrow understanding with a focus on work integration. A main cause might be the delimitation of current social entrepreneurial forms, like cooperatives, from the cooperatives of the communist period. Therefore, since 1990, cooperatives have been perceived as belonging to the “old system” that needed to be overcome.⁷ Thus, the self-recognition of social enterprises in Romania is still rather weak.⁸

In Slovenia, the first legal framework for defining social entrepreneurship was the Social Entrepreneurship Act (2011) created according to the European Social Business Act (2011, amended 2018) passed by the European Union.⁹ However, this act has prevented certain traditional organizations—such as employment centers and companies for people with disabilities—to register as social enterprises.¹⁰ This example shows that the legal definitions of the concept are sometimes narrower than the operational definitions of social enterprises existing in the four countries.

All participating countries, Italy, Romania, and Germany referred to the European Social Business Act when defining or updating their legal framework on social entrepreneurship.

2.1 *The three key dimensions of social enterprises*

The Social Business Act of the European Commission (2011), that is included in the definition framework of social entrepreneurship in all four countries discussed here, introduced an operational concept of social enterprise, referring to three key dimensions. According to this conception, social enterprises run commercial activities (entrepreneurial/economic dimension) in order to achieve a social or societal common good (social dimension) and have an organization or ownership system that reflects their mission (inclusive governance-ownership dimension).¹¹

Many definitions of the social enterprise are based on these three key dimensions. They are represented below:

⁶ Lambru, Mihaela; Claudia Petrescu (2019): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Romania, p 18, available here: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=20959&langId=en>.

⁷ Lambru, Mihaela; Claudia Petrescu (2019): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Romania, p. 16.

⁸ Borzaga, Carlo, Giulia Galera et. al. (2020): Social Enterprises and their Ecosystems in Europe..., p. 35.

⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0682>.

¹⁰ Rakar, Tatjana; Zinka Kolarič (2019): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Slovenia, p. 35, available here: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=21575&langId=en>.

¹¹ Borzaga, Carlo, Giulia Galera et. al. (2020): Social Enterprises and their Ecosystems in Europe..., p. 38.



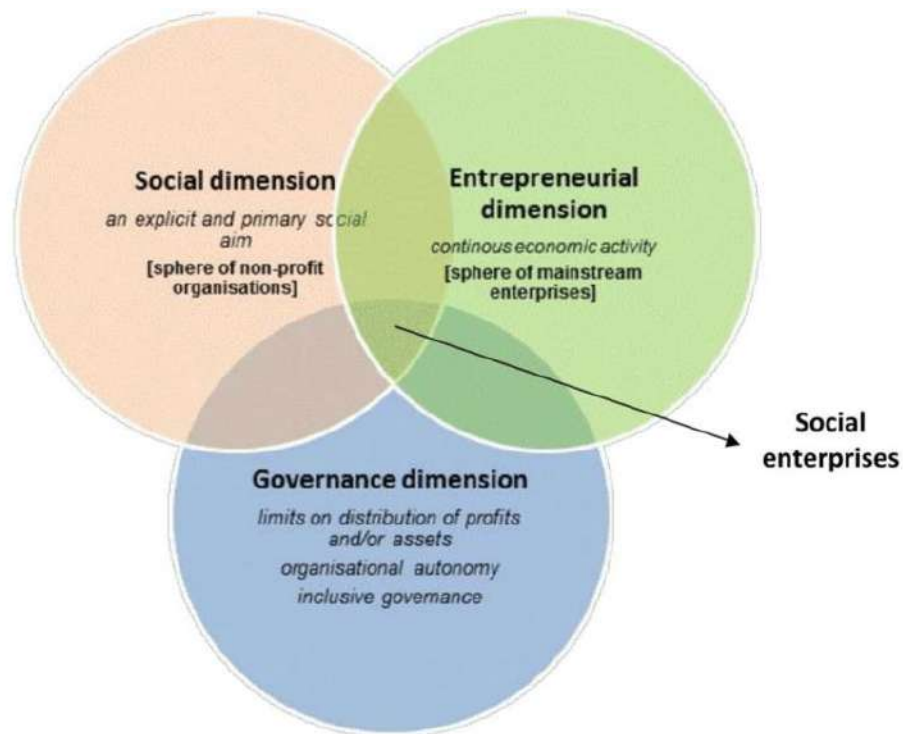


Fig. 1 Three dimensions of a social enterprise¹²

Social enterprises can fulfil the three dimensions—entrepreneurial, social and governance – in different ways. It is the interplay among the three dimensions that determines if the organizations qualify as social enterprises.¹³

¹² https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-three-dimensions-of-a-social-enterprise_fig5_347840753.

¹³ Borzaga, Carlo, Giulia Galera et. al. (2020): Social Enterprises and their Ecosystems in Europe..., p. 30f. The following paragraphs about the three dimensions of social enterprises rely on this report.



2.1.1 *Entrepreneurial dimension*

Social enterprises are production units fully belonging to the universe of enterprises. The entrepreneurial dimension separates social enterprises from the public sector as well as from traditional non-profit organizations. Unlike traditional non-profit organizations, which usually rely on donations and grants, social enterprises participate in market exchanges. Since social enterprises' success in achieving their statutory goals depends to a considerable extent on the generation of sustainable financial income, they must take a significant level of economic risk. Nonetheless, unlike conventional enterprises, social enterprises rely on a mix of resources: voluntary work, donations and grants in addition to earned incomes, which are either generated by the sale of goods and services to private clients or by the provision of general interest services on public contractual bases. The income sources of the social enterprise have to be sustainable. Moreover, the social enterprises are expected to have an innovative approach to achieving their statutory goals.

2.1.2 *Social dimension*

Social enterprises pursue the first and foremost goal of solving a social problem (of social / ecological nature). This separates them from mainstream businesses. The explicit social aim pursued must be clearly defined at a statutory level. The products and services delivered and/or production and allocation processes must also be “social” and generate direct benefits for the entire community or specific groups of disadvantaged people.

What is defined as “social” can change over time and is sometimes different from country to country. The definition of the “social” concept has to be consistent with the evolution of needs arising in a society, the organization of the welfare state (public service provision) and its historical developments. Social enterprises may hence deliver a wide set of goods and services of general interest. According to the diversity of unmet needs that may arise at the local level in different countries and contexts, the set of services delivered can comprise welfare, health, educational, cultural services, utilities (e.g., water, gas, electricity supply) and the tackling of a plurality of societal challenges.

2.1.3 *Governance dimension*

To ensure the primacy of the social goal and avoid mission drift (keeping their impact objectives anchored), social enterprises must have profit and wealth distribution limits. They also involve an integrative leadership culture that is participative and with democratic decision-making processes.

For example, the stakeholders can enhance their participation in designing adequate solutions to societal problems posed. Depending upon the type of social enterprise, ownership rights and control power can be assigned to one single category of stakeholders (users or workers) or to more than one

category at a time—hence giving ground to a multi-stakeholder ownership asset. Besides becoming full members, stakeholders can be appointed in the governing bodies of the enterprise. Alternatively, a voice can be given to users and workers by furthering their participation in special committees.

The non-profit distribution constraint can be operationalized in different ways, through a series of annual or life-long combinations. The non-profit distribution constraint can be addressed either to the social enterprise members or to stakeholders. It can be total, in which any distribution of profits is admitted, or partial, in which dividends on risk capital provided by members are capped at a specified rate. Restrictions and/or thresholds on remuneration of managers and workers are in some cases introduced to avoid an indirect distribution of profits. The partial distribution constraint is more consistent with the entrepreneurial nature of social enterprise as it incentivizes investors to commit capital and support the economic growth of the enterprise. Likewise, the partial distribution constraint does not lose its role as long as it is strengthened by the participation of relevant stakeholders and is supported by an asset lock. The “asset lock” prevents assets, including profits or other surpluses, lands or buildings, held by the social enterprise from being distributed to owners, thus safeguarding the public benefit pursued by the social enterprise in case of its dissolution. It is noteworthy that the non-profit constraint and the asset lock contribute jointly to guaranteeing that resources are employed in the interests of stakeholders other than investors and ensure the survival of the social enterprise in its endeavor to pursue explicit social goals over time.

The social economy tradition contributed in most countries to paving the way for the emergence of social enterprises by making available a variety of organizational forms that are suitable for use by social enterprises. Many social enterprises still use social economy legal forms – sometimes adapted – such as cooperative, association or foundation.

The main difference between the concept of social economy organizations and social enterprises is that the former promote mainly the interests of their members (such as traditional cooperatives), thereby having only an indirect impact on the community at large. Conversely, social enterprises pursue an explicit social aim in the interests of the community (such as provision of general interest services or facilitation of work integration).

In the following section, the prevailing definitions of social entrepreneurship in the four project countries, Italy, Germany, Romania and Slovenia, will be discussed in the context of social economy and the framework definition of social entrepreneurship by the European Union including the three key dimensions of the concept. The goal is to find similarities and specificities of the social entrepreneurship concepts in each participating country.





2.2 Concurrent definitions of social entrepreneurship in Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia

While in Italy and Germany, the practices of social entrepreneurship are rooted in the countries' welfare systems, in Romania and Slovenia social enterprises needed the incentive of European Social Funds and direct references to the Social Business Act (2011) of the European Commission to develop. With regard to the EU Social Business Act (2011), the first laws in Romania and Slovenia setting the framework for social entrepreneurship and defining social businesses were passed in 2011 (Slovenia) and 2015 (Romania). In Italy, the law defining social entrepreneurship is older than in other European countries. However, the legislation on social enterprises was updated and adjusted to fit the framework set by the EU Social Business Act. In Germany, there is no law defining social enterprises yet, as they are encompassed by different laws regulating corporations. However, Germany developed in 2023 a National Strategy for Social Enterprises.

The understanding of social entrepreneurship in each of the four countries is discussed below.

2.2.1 Italy

In Italy, the definition of social entrepreneurship is closely linked to the development of its welfare system. The first social enterprise initiatives were developed at the end of the 1970s, during a period of increasing unemployment, and in response to the inability of the Italian welfare state to find solutions to the arising economic problems. Catholic groups played a key role in supporting the development of new initiatives. Activists, inspired by religious or civic engagement, became the promoters of new bottom-up initiatives aimed at advocating the rights of vulnerable social groups. Among the first such newly established organizations were "social solidarity cooperatives" aiming to supply social services and integrate disadvantaged people on the labor market.

The first Italian law recognizing social projects as "social cooperatives" was passed in 1991. A more general legal framework for the regulation of non-profit organizations was introduced in 2005-2006, creating the legal category of "social enterprise". Over the years, new legislation introduced in 2016-2017 key changes and provided a common framework for social enterprises and the third sector non-governmental organizations.

In Italy, there are two legally recognized forms of social enterprises – social cooperatives and social enterprises.

According to Italian law, "social cooperatives" are the cooperatives that pursue the general interests of the community and social integration of citizens through: (a) the management of social, healthcare and educational services, or (b) activities that support providing employment for disadvantaged people. The first type of organizations belonging to social cooperatives consists of



organizations that only perform activities described under point (a). They are labeled as “A-type social cooperatives”. The second type of social cooperatives only performs the activities mentioned at point (b), such as work integration of disadvantaged people, like individuals with physical or mental disabilities.¹⁴ This classification also applies to the social enterprises from the other participating countries.

From a legal point of view, the following categories of organizations are considered as social enterprises in Italy (of A-type or B-type):

1. social cooperatives
2. entrepreneurial associations and foundations
3. limited liability companies
4. traditional cooperatives and mutual aid societies

Following the complex legislation on social entrepreneurship in Italy, the social economy is highly developed here.

At national level, the Ministry for Labour and Social Policies is responsible for social economy policies. On its behalf, the National Council of the Third Sector promotes, develops, and supports Third Sector organizations with activities, projects, and initiatives in the country.

However, social economy is not equally supported in every region. Regional and local level support modalities adopted have changed over time depending on the objectives pursued by each region. They range from start-up subsidies to measures supporting financial consolidation, from investment to training support.¹⁵

2.2.2 Germany

The social enterprises in Germany are rooted in the social welfare system.¹⁶ Non-profit organizations supplying social services have existed since medieval times in Germany. However, there is currently no official definition of the concept of “social enterprises” or “social economy”, although a national framework strategy for “Social Innovations” and “Enterprises for the Common

¹⁴ Traversi, Marco (2019): The Italian Ecosystem for Social Enterprises, available here: https://www.pja2001.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/1-Marco-Traversi_THE-ITALIAN-ECOSYSTEM-FOR-SOCIAL-ENTERPRISES.pdf.

¹⁵ https://social-economy-gateway.ec.europa.eu/my-country/italy_en#framework-conditions-and-social-economy-ecosystem.

¹⁶ Göler von Ravensburg, Nicole; Gorgi Krlev (2018): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Germany.

Good” was published in 2023.¹⁷ Accordingly, no specific legislation on social enterprises exists in Germany. Social enterprises are encompassed by laws defining other categories of corporate, associations, welfare or non-profit organizations.

Although there is no legal definition of social enterprises, the Federal Ministry for Economy and Energy approached the concept 2016 highlighting the following three dimensions:

1. the pursuit of a social mission,
2. enterprising for sustainability,
3. a contribution to social cohesion.

Additionally, it is specific for social enterprises to draw on diverse funding sources, including grants from foundations and donations, according to the Federal Ministry for Economy and Energy. Furthermore, the application of asset or profit locks is not prominent in Germany. Thus, the concept of social enterprises in Germany remains influenced by its proximity to the social economy approach.

A specific aspect of the German conception of social entrepreneurship is that it doesn’t emphasize the EU key dimension of governance from the operational definition provided by the Social Business Act (2011). Additionally, the German concept emphasizes the topic of innovation (“social innovation”) in contrast to the EU definition.

According to the operational definition of social enterprise, the following types of German organizations can be considered social enterprises:

1. civic associations – registered associations (“eingetragener Verein”).
2. welfare organizations (“Wohlfartsorganisationen”) – constitute the backbone of the German social economy.
3. operational foundations (“Stiftungen”)
4. social cooperatives (“Genossenschaften”)
5. mutual insurance associations
6. work integration social enterprises (WISE) – divided in two categories: enterprises for the inclusion of persons with disabilities and enterprises for persons with other permanent labour market disadvantages.
7. social enterprises – with a special emphasis on “social innovation”.
8. neighbourhood and community enterprises

Social enterprises in Germany have a relatively wide choice of legal forms under which to operate. However, their economic activity must not exceed a certain low-income level. Social enterprises

¹⁷ Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Protection, Federal Ministry of Education and Research(eds.) (2023): Nationale Strategie für Soziale Innovationen und Gemeinwohlorientierte Unternehmen.

enjoy a public-benefit status not granted to conventional enterprises resulting in tax deductions or exemptions. There are several available legal company forms: registered association, sole proprietorship, civil law partnership, limited liability partnership, limited liability company, entrepreneurial company (with limited liability), stock corporation (private/public company limited by shares), (registered) cooperative, mutuals, and foundation.

2.2.3 Romania

In Romania, social enterprises are in an incipient stage of development.¹⁸ The history of social entrepreneurship is relatively recent here, as the concept has been legally defined in 2015 with the adoption of law 210/2015 regarding social economy.

The concept of social enterprise was introduced in Romania after 2005, shortly before EU accession. The development of legislation on social enterprises is strongly connected with the European trends and policies in this area.

The recent evolution of the concept of “social enterprise” in Romania is tightly connected to the development of the concept of “social economy”. Social enterprises are included in the Law on Social Economy (Law 219/2015). The legal definition of social enterprises focuses on their purpose mostly as vehicles for employment of vulnerable groups. Other social enterprises pursuing different goals are largely not included.

According to the Law 2019/2015 on Social Economy, social enterprises have to fulfil several specific criteria:

1. priority of social aims over profit
2. solidarity and collective responsibility
3. democratic governance
4. allocation of the largest proportion of the profit to sustain the social aim and the statutory reserve

The Law on Social Enterprises is rather narrow and doesn't fully recognize all categories of social enterprises that operate in Romania. According to the EU operational definition (2011) these are:

1. associations and foundations that carry out economic activities and pursue general interest aims
2. work insertion social enterprises, including sheltered workshops and social insertion enterprises;
3. mutual aid associations of retirees;
4. cooperatives pursuing general interest goals.

¹⁸ Lambru, Mihaela; Claudia Petrescu (2019): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Romania.

Additionally, the Law on Social Enterprises distinguishes between social enterprises and the newly defined social insertion enterprises. While all social enterprises have to prioritize social aims over profit, a specific criterion that social insertion enterprises have to meet is that over 30 % of their employees have to belong to vulnerable groups.

The Law on Social Enterprises legally recognizes the social enterprises but doesn't offer any fiscal support or stimulation additionally to the already existing laws concerning fiscal regulations for associations, cooperatives and other forms of real social enterprises.

2.2.4 Slovenia

Similarly to Romania, in Slovenia the recognition of the concept of “social enterprise” is closely linked to the policies and incentives set by the European Union.¹⁹

The concept of social enterprises first emerged in Slovenia within the context of European Social Fund (ESF) pilot projects launched in 2009 to support social enterprise development.

The Social Entrepreneurship Act introduced the status and definition of social enterprises in 2011. The document defined the diverse forms of associations, cooperatives, Non-Profit-Organizations, and other forms of welfare initiatives already existing in the country. Only a few forms of social enterprises were newly established by the Social Entrepreneurship Act. However, the act focuses rather on social enterprises as businesses. This definition prevented certain traditional organizations – such as employment centers and companies for people with disabilities – to register as social enterprises.

Nonetheless, in Slovenian legislation, social enterprises do not exist as a formal legal form. The law defines social enterprise as a qualification, meaning that social enterprise is not defined as a mandatory legal organizational form. According to the Social Entrepreneurship Act, organizations get established through one of the formal legal forms of Non-Profit-Organizations (such as associations, private institutes and foundations), cooperatives or limited liability companies. On additional request and by fulfilling the criteria for social enterprises, the organizations can obtain the status of social enterprises.

Similarly to Romania, the legal definition of social enterprises doesn't encompass all existing organizations pursuing social goals and fulfilling the three dimensions defined by the European Social Business Initiative (2011) – the social dimension, governance dimension, and entrepreneurial dimension.

¹⁹ Rakar, Tatjana; Zinka Kolarič (2019): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Slovenia.

The Social Entrepreneurship Act was amended in 2018 in Slovenia according to the European discourse on social enterprises. It presented social enterprises within a broader context of “social economy”. Moreover, the concept of “social economy” was now defined for the first time. According to the amended Social Entrepreneurship Act, the social economy as an “economy, which is composed by social enterprises, cooperatives, companies for people with disabilities, employment centers, non-governmental organisations (associations, institutes, foundations), that are not established solely with the purpose to gain profit, operate in the benefit of their members, users or broader society and produce commercial or noncommercial products and services.”²⁰

The amendment to the Social Entrepreneurship Act further defined social enterprises and social entrepreneurship in 2018. A social enterprise is defined as a “non-profit legal entity, which acquires the status of social enterprise and can be an association, institute, foundation, company, cooperative, European cooperative or other legal entity of the private law, that is not established for the sole purpose of generating profit and does not distribute assets or the generated profit or excess revenue over expenditure.” The social entrepreneurship is perceived as a “permanent performance of entrepreneurship activities with the production and sales of products or the provision of services on the market for which the generation of profit is not a main objective of entrepreneurship activity, but the primary goal is the achievement of social impacts.”²¹ This definition of social entrepreneurship closely follows the dimensions set by its definition through the European Commission in the Social Business Initiative. Moreover, it explicitly describes social impact as an essential goal of social entrepreneurship. Here, the Slovenian Social Entrepreneurship Act comes close to the German understanding of the concept – that also puts emphasis on the achieved impact. Additionally, most legally recognized social enterprises fulfil the entrepreneurial dimension of the operational definition of social enterprises set in the EU Social Business Act (2011) as market-oriented organizations.

According to the Social Entrepreneurship Act of Slovenia, social enterprises can take legally the following forms:

1. limited liability companies
2. associations
3. cooperatives
4. private institutes
5. foundations

Additionally, there are some types of social enterprises not encompassed in the Social Entrepreneurship Act, that represent de facto social enterprises:

1. companies for people with disabilities

²⁰ Rakar, Tatjana; Z. Kolarič (2019): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Slovenia, p. 29.

²¹ Rakar, Tatjana; Z. Kolarič (2019): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Slovenia, p. 30.



2. employment centers

These types belong to the WISE category – Work Insertion Social Enterprises and Social Insertion Social Enterprises.

The fiscal framework for Slovenian social enterprises and social economy organizations is fragmented. Tax exemptions depend on the organization’s legal form and remain relatively low.

Although there is no single definition of social enterprises in Romania, Slovenia, Italy, and Germany, the concept is built along two coordinates: a legal and an operational definition of the term. The legal definition of social entrepreneurship is narrower than its operational definition in Romania and Slovenia. In Germany, there are several operational definitions but no legal explanation of the concept. In Italy, the legal framework for social entrepreneurship has the longest history and thus it encompasses most operational formats of social enterprises.

Another essential aspect shared by the social entrepreneurship definitions in the four countries is their reference to the Social Business Act of the European Commission. Hence, they follow the three key dimensions set by the respective act: an entrepreneurial/economic dimension, a social dimension, and an inclusive governance-ownership dimension.

3 Social entrepreneurship ecosystems in the participating countries

The social enterprise ecosystem can be analyzed according to several dimensions: (1) The social enterprises’ capacity to self-organize and participate in civic engagement, including its involvement in networks and mutual support mechanisms. (2) The visibility and recognition of social enterprises in the national entrepreneurship landscape, such as legal recognition and political recognition, but also public awareness about its benefits and contribution to the economy. (3) The resources available for supporting social enterprises, encompassing fiscal benefits and tax breaks, financial support, start-up support, resources from income-generating activities and other. (4) Education, skills and competences development and research on social enterprises – this dimension refers to educational offers on social enterprises, training offers for corresponding skills development and also research about this topic.²²

In this report, separate chapters are dedicated to networks and mutual support mechanisms (Chapter 8), education in social entrepreneurship (Chapter 5), and competences needed for social entrepreneurship (Chapter 6). The legal recognition of social enterprises was discussed in Chapter 2, where the legal definition of social entrepreneurship in the four participating countries, Italy,

²² Borzaga, Carlo, Giulia Galera et. al. (2020): Social Enterprises and their Ecosystems in Europe. Comparative Synthesis Report.



Germany, Romania, and Slovenia, was presented.

This chapter focuses on the political frameworks for supporting social entrepreneurship development in the four project countries and social recognition of social entrepreneurship initiatives.

The political recognition of social enterprises has increased in relevance in the EU Member States over the past decade in the EU Member States where social enterprises have a longstanding tradition, like Italy and Germany, and in countries that recently adopted regulations to support social entrepreneurship. This is the case, for example, in Slovenia and Romania where social enterprises have shifted from the margins to the center of the policy debate with support from ESF funding and the EU Social Business Act (2011).²³

With the exception of Italy, in the other project countries, policy frameworks targeting the development of social enterprises were implemented. Nonetheless, among the participating countries, Italy is the first one to have passed a legal framework concerning social entrepreneurship in 1991. In Germany, another country with a longstanding welfare tradition offering a solid fundament on which social entrepreneurship initiatives were built, the national strategy for social enterprises was developed only in 2023.²⁴ In Slovenia and Romania, national strategies concerning social entrepreneurship are closely linked to the social economy and EU policies and financial support respectively for the third sector. In Romania, a country that developed its civil society only in the last decades after the fall of communism, a National Strategy for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction was implemented for the period 2014-2020. The guidelines include social enterprises as part of the social economy. In Slovenia, a Strategy for Social Entrepreneurship was prepared for 2013-2016. The Slovenian follow-up Strategy for the Development of Social Economy targets a longer time period – 2019-2029.

A short analysis of the *status quo* in each country is presented in the following section.

3.1.1 Italy

In Italy, social enterprises have a long tradition rooted in the welfare system of the country. Italy is one of the first countries to have legally recognized social enterprises already in 1991.

The Italian policymakers responsible for implementation of guidelines in the area of social

²³ Borzaga, Carlo, Giulia Galera et. al. (2020): Social Enterprises and their Ecosystems in Europe. Comparative Synthesis Report, p. 53.

²⁴ Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Protection, Federal Ministry of Education and Research (eds.) (2023): Nationale Strategie für Soziale Innovationen und Gemeinwohlorientierte Unternehmen.



entrepreneurship are the Ministry for Labour and Social Policies, the National Council of the Third Sector (Chaired by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies), regional authorities, and local authorities. According to social entrepreneurs, close cooperation with public authorities represents one of the most important best practices in the development and implementation of support initiatives for social enterprises.

There is a wide variety of organizations which can be included in the Third Sector. That makes it difficult to have a clear measure of the national social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Italy. According to a national census carried out by ISTAT in 2016, 343.432 organizations fulfill the criteria to be counted as pursuing social goals, having a non-distribution constraint of revenues, a social aim and performing general-interest activities.²⁵ Among them, social enterprises are distributed as follows:

1. 8.491 (41,1% of all Social Enterprises) are social cooperatives.
2. 11.207 (54,2% of all Social Enterprises) are associations, foundations, and religious institutions.
3. 235 (16,1% of all Social Enterprises) are limited liability social enterprises²⁶

The majority of Social Cooperatives, 75.3%, are concentrated in two sectors: social services (40.6%) and WISE (Social Enterprises for Social Insertion). Roughly half of the social enterprises carry out activities in favor of their local communities.

While in companies the number of male workers (59,4%) is higher than the number of females, among the employees of non-profit organizations, the percentage of women is much higher than that of males (71.9% against 28.1%).²⁷

Almost half of the social enterprises (45%) work for public bodies, while over a third (38%) work directly with individuals.

According to a study provided in 2018,²⁸ the social enterprises in Italy still face a resistance to change and innovation necessary to pursue their social activities for a longer period of time. Thus, social innovation is a key element of social enterprises on which Italian organizations have to focus more. Aiming to tackle this aspect, several places of innovation are available in Italy for social enterprises to participate in. A place of innovation can be seen as a “research and training center” that generates knowledge which can benefit the various actors of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem. Participating in activities organized by a place of innovation can lead to important

²⁵ Traversi, Marco (2019): The Italian Ecosystem for Social Enterprises, p. 7.

²⁶ Cf. Traversi, Marco (2019): The Italian Ecosystem for Social Enterprises, p. 8.

²⁷ Cf. Traversi, Marco (2019): The Italian Ecosystem for Social Enterprises, p. 9.

²⁸ Impresa sociale 4.0 – Osservatorio ISNET sull’impresa sociale in Italia, XII edizione 2018, in: Travers, Marco (2019).

benefits for social enterprises, such as developing, accumulating and applying new knowledge that aids the development of new social projects.²⁹

The following places for innovation are available in Italy for social enterprises:³⁰

- a. **Community Hubs:** They are places where people spend their time between home and work, such as parks, recreation centers or churches.
- b. **Living Labs:** They are open innovation ecosystems aiming at studying innovation and co-creation of innovative services in environments of real life, such as real life communities, cities, farms, spaces equipped with new technologies like smart homes, etc.
- c. **Coworking Spaces:** Coworking spaces involve sharing of work spaces between professionals who are not necessarily part of the same organization, enabling the exchange of new ideas, and the creation of innovation through dialogue in a collaborative and stimulating environment.
- d. **Business Incubators and Accelerators:** The incubators are organizations that support the creation of new companies by providing them with a wide range of support services that include physical spaces, activities for business development and opportunities for integration and networking. The accelerators support the companies in the first phase after their creation with services necessary for their growth, such as mentorship services and physical spaces. Incubators and accelerators are managed mainly by entrepreneurs and mentors and are places offering assistance for the creation of business models.
- e. **Fab Lab & Makerspaces:** The Fab Labs or “Fabrication Labs” are small-scale workshops offering digital fabrication and empowering individuals to create smart devices for themselves outside the mass production opportunities. Fab Labs offer the opportunity to learn, and use advanced manufacturing tools for the general public, in order to provide new opportunities for innovation and social entrepreneurship even outside the classic research centers or factories.

For achieving social innovation, private organizations in Italy are encouraged to invest in social impact. With this aim, an Italian Social Innovation Agenda (SIA) was proposed by the Italian Ministry for Research and adopted; SIA addresses the most pressing social challenges faced by the country and included reference to innovative financial tools that were considered enablers of social innovation in the country.

3.1.2 Germany

In Germany, social enterprises are interconnected with the welfare system rooted in the Middle Ages. The number of organizations qualified as de facto social enterprises is among the highest in the European Union. However, the responsibility for sustaining the development of the social

²⁹ Traversi, Marco (2019): The Italian Ecosystem for Social Enterprises, p. 13f.

³⁰ Traversi, Marco (2019): The Italian Ecosystem for Social Enterprises, p. 13f.

economy and social enterprises is shared by each autonomous state in the German Federation, even if some support networks, policies, funding and training opportunities are offered on the national level. A centralized National Strategy for Social Innovations and Enterprises for the Common Good³¹ was developed only in 2023.

There is a multitude of key actors able to define policies pertaining to social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Germany. The main actors are the Federal Ministry for Family (BMFSFJ), Ministries for Family or Social Affairs in the Länder; the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi); the Federal Ministry of Transport and Federal Ministry for the Environment; State ministries; local authorities in their capacity to contract for procurement; social security funds; Länder, regions and municipalities.³²

The legal forms that can be adopted by social entrepreneurship organizations in Germany are varied as there is no single legal definition or law pertaining only social enterprises. The search for a legal form is often a difficult endeavor for social entrepreneurs. Fulfilling the “double bottom line” (generating social added value while at the same time ensuring financial sustainability and stability), is a major challenge when choosing a legal form.³³ The National Strategy for Social Innovation and Enterprises for Common Good is purposefully complex when defining the types of organizations belonging to social entrepreneurship area, allowing a high and diverse amount of organizations to comply with the developed guidelines. For that reason, the total numbers of social enterprises are only estimates. The German Social Entrepreneurship Monitor works with a representative sample of organizations; no final number could be provided. As of 2017, the estimate number of German social enterprises is as follows:³⁴

1. The highest estimate number belongs to registered associations (eingetragener Verein, e.V.) – 67 746 organizations making up 95 % of the legal forms available for social organizations and social enterprises.
2. There is a relatively small number of foundations compared with the registered associations – 2 620 organizations.
3. The businesses for the common good (gGmbH) make up 6 584 entities.
4. Only 501 organizations are registered as cooperatives.
5. Additionally, 7 entities are registered under the category “other”.

³¹ Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Protection, Federal Ministry of Education and Research (eds.) (2023): Nationale Strategie für Soziale Innovationen und Gemeinwohlorientierte Unternehmen.

³² Cf. Göler von Ravensburg, Nicole; Gorgi Krlev; Georg Midlenberger (2018): Social Enterprises and their Ecosystems in Europe. Country report Germany, p. 70f.

³³ SEND e.V., (2021/2022): 4. Deutscher Social Entrepreneurship Monitor, p. 25.

³⁴ Cf. Göler von Ravensburg, Nicole; Gorgi Krlev; Georg Midlenberger (2018): Social Enterprises and their Ecosystems in Europe. Country report Germany, p. 61f.

A multitude of organizations offer support measures for social economy and social enterprises both on the level of the Federation and on the level of each Land. Two national organizations dealing with local civic engagement as part of the social economy are the Federal Network for Civic Engagement (Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement) and the forum “Civic Engagement and Integration” (Bürgerschaftliches Engagement und Integration). The latter involves discussion around social entrepreneurship as a tool for the better integration of migrants, currently a very prominent topic. The terminology used and the fact that the term “social enterprise” has rarely found use in these policy-related activities, indicates that the governments aimed to foster entrepreneurial and innovative voluntary action, rather than provide a robustly supportive environment for social enterprises per se. Nevertheless, the further development of new-style social entrepreneurs also falls in line with the efforts by the federal government to foster entrepreneurial and innovative voluntary action.

Among the key organizations supporting the development of social entrepreneurship on the national level with training, counseling, coaching and networking opportunities, the most known are: Germany-wide: Open Transfer, Social Impact Award; in Hessen: Social Finance Academy, Social Startups Media; in Northrhine-Westphalia: Impact Factory Duisburg, Social Reporting Standard; in Hamburg: startsocial; in Schleswig-Holstein: yooweedo; in Berlin: Bundesinitiative Impact Investing, Bundesverband Nachhaltige Wirtschaft, Phineo, Platform Cooperatives Germany, ProjectTogether, Reflecta Network, Social Entrepreneurship Netzwerk Deutschland, Social Impact, Stiftung Bürgermut, talents4good; in Bavaria: Ashoka Deutschland, Financing Agency for Social Entrepreneurship FA-SE, Impact Hub Munich, Social Entrepreneurship Akademie, startsocial, Stifter Helfen.³⁵

Most organizations supporting the development of social entrepreneurship on a national level are situated in the “old” Länder of the German Federation, while almost no such Germany-wide organization is located in the Eastern part of Germany that once belonged to the Eastern Block.

In Germany, the social entrepreneurship sector is rapidly evolving, as shown by the necessity to develop and implement a National Strategy for Social Innovation and Enterprises for the Common Good. However, some recommendations for centralizing the overflowing information and resources available for social entrepreneurs were made by authorized institutions, such as: A joint understanding of social enterprises should be created. Improvements in terms of data and indicators, and an integration of social-enterprise and social-innovation indicators into existing monitoring systems for entrepreneurship should be developed. The public-benefit status should be reconciled with the enterprising factor. An impact orientation in public tendering should be put on the development agenda. Social enterprises should foster investment readiness, while the state funding and social-investment markets should increasingly focus on social enterprises. Additionally, it was

³⁵ SEND e.V., (2021/2022): 4. Deutscher Social Entrepreneurship Monitor, p. 75.



suggested to create a one-stop shop for social enterprises in Germany with the ability to inform, counsel, and connect actors.³⁶

3.1.3 Romania

In Romania, the field of social entrepreneurship is still very young. The first law concerning social enterprises as part of the social economy was passed in 2015. The law, however, offers a limited perspective for the development of social enterprises, focusing only on WISE (work integration social enterprises, respectively social insertion enterprises). Also the country lacks a strategic approach towards the development of social enterprises. As a consequence, Romania is situated last among the EU countries when it comes to the percentage of enterprises having other legal forms such as associations and cooperatives (0,4 %).³⁷ The country shares the place with Croatia and Slovakia.

In Romania, social enterprises have roots in associative, mutual and cooperative traditions dating back to the late Middle Ages. However, their evolution was discontinued during the Communist period (1945 – 1989), when it was impossible to register and set up independent organizations outside the State Party's control.³⁸ After the fall of Communism, since 1990, the modern civil society started to take shape. In this context, cooperatives as a legally recognized form of social enterprises were perceived as institutions belonging to the “old system” and needed to find a new identity, engaging in new business areas such as ecological agriculture, renewable energy, and new crafts.

The key actors crafting policies on social entrepreneurship and social economy in Romania are the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, the National Agency for Employment, and the local authorities at municipal and county level.

³⁶ Cf. Göler von Ravensburg, Nicole; Gorgi Krlev; Georg Midlenberger (2018): Social Enterprises and their Ecosystems in Europe. Country report Germany, p. 109f.

³⁷ Vamesu, Ancuta (2021): Barometrul economiei sociale din Romania 2021, p. 14, available at: <https://acceleratorul.alaturidevoi.ro/barometrul-economiei-sociale-din-romania-editia-2021/>.

³⁸ Lambriu, Mihaela; Claudia Petrescu (2019): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Romania, p. 15.



The number of social organizations qualifying as social enterprises continues to grow in Romania, despite a centralized coherent strategy for their development. According to the Social Enterprise Barometer, the number of private organizations belonging in 2023 to the social economy as de facto social enterprises is much higher than the number of legally recognized social enterprises as follows:³⁹

1. There are 180 323 foundations;
2. The number of registered associations (such as with cultural aim, sport associations, housing associations) is 144 732;
3. 3 097 organizations are registered as compossessorates;
4. 5 134 organizations are RMAAs (mutual aid organizations, mainly supporting elderly people);
5. A number of 9 472 organizations fulfilling the criteria for de facto (but not always de jure) social enterprises are registered as other organizations. Among them, 2 915 organizations were legally registered as social enterprises (in 2023).

The highest number of social enterprises is represented in Romania by associations and foundations.

Many social enterprises operate without being registered as such, due to a rather low level of legal, fiscal, and tax measures supporting social enterprises as part of the social economy. A very high percentage of social enterprises were registered as commercial societies (88 % in 2021).⁴⁰

The growth potential of social enterprises is still underexploited in Romania, as these are confronted with diverse obstacles. They are regarded as SMEs and lack a differentiate access to financing. They are mostly funded through projects and with support from the EU, as public funding decreases. However, it is necessary to evolve from a project-based approach to a long-term strategy that assures the continuity and financial sustainability of social enterprises.⁴¹

It has been observed that many start-ups in the area of social entrepreneurship funded by EU programmes end their social mission after the funding period finishes. They don't search for new financial support to continue their activities in the social field.⁴²

Moreover, social enterprises face difficulties when transitioning from grant support to contracts with customers.

Additionally, social enterprises need to become more present in the public awareness. Social

³⁹ Vamesu, Ancuta (2024): Barometrul economiei sociale din Romania 2023, p. 15 and 25, available at: https://alaturidevoi.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Barometrul_2023-compressed-1.pdf.

⁴⁰ Vamesu, Ancuta (2021): Barometrul economiei sociale din Romania 2021.

⁴¹ Vamesu, Ancuta (2021): Barometrul economiei sociale din Romania 2021.

⁴² Vamesu, Ancuta (2024): Barometrul economiei sociale din Romania 2023, p. 32.

entrepreneurship is close to non-existent in the classical education curricula. Thus, the business models typical for social enterprises are insufficiently known and understood. The broader public is unaware of the limited distribution or non-distribution of profit, focus on user/consumer or needs, a participative decision-making process, democratic governance or shared property. The financial market doesn't yet offer incentives supporting the development of social enterprises. Nonetheless, private investors show an increased interest in investing in social entrepreneurship endeavours.

The sector of social economy itself is still emerging in Romania, as in other countries in the region. Civil society awareness and bottom-up initiatives by organizations such as NGOs are not high, and there are only a few signs of coordinated actions in order to support social entrepreneurship as a whole. Social enterprises face several constraints related to limited understanding of the concept, insufficient targeted support from public authorities and overall limited administrative and policy capacity of the government to design and implement well targeted policy measures for social enterprises.⁴³ A major enabling factor for social entrepreneurship activities comes with the trigger effect of EU policies and funding. Specific education programmes dealing with social entrepreneurship and management are also an enabler in the ecosystem. A strategic and integrated approach which comprises a more concrete state support is needed.⁴⁴

3.1.4 Slovenia

In Slovenia, the citizens have a strong sense of community but a moderate level of civic participation.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, the country has a long tradition of civil society self-organization dating back to the "birth" of craft-guilds and religious charity organizations in the 13th and 14th centuries. This tradition was discontinued during the socialist period – similarly to Romania, where the contemporary civil society struggled to emerge only after the fall of communism. Social enterprises gained political support following Slovenia's EU membership in 2004 and the EU Social Business Act (2011). The concept was first used in 2009 when pilot projects supporting the development of social enterprises started with funding by the European Social Fund (ESF). The economic crisis in 2008 was an additional catalyst for this.

For the aim of the EU-funded project DigiFUNCollab it is noteworthy that mentoring and skills development initiatives addressed specifically to social entrepreneurs are provided in Slovenia only on an occasional basis, in particular in the framework of EU projects. They have not yet evolved

⁴³ Lambru, Mihaela; Claudia Petrescu (2019): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Romania, p. 79.

⁴⁴ Anca Draghici, Caius Luminosu et al. (2024), National Report on Social Entrepreneurship.

⁴⁵ OECD (2022): Boosting Social Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprise Development in Slovenia. In-depth policy review, p. 15, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/publications/boosting-social-entrepreneurship-and-social-enterprise-development-in-slovenia-8ea2b761-en.htm>.

into a permanent and systematic training offer. Additionally, there is a limited offer for continued training and technical support for founders and start-ups on how to design impact-focused strategies essential for social enterprises, how to measure and communicate effectively social impact.⁴⁶ Thus, increasing capacity building measures in social entrepreneurship is an important goal for Slovenia.

In Slovenia, the responsibility for social entrepreneurship policies and guidelines framework is dispersed across various ministries.⁴⁷ The regulatory responsibility for social entrepreneurship lies with the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology. One of its goals is to enhance the business element in social enterprises. Before 2015, the key actor bearing responsibility for legally recognized social enterprises was the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Other key actors responsible for creating and implementing policies in this area are the Council of Social Entrepreneurship (transformed in Council of Social economy after the 2018 amendment on the Social Entrepreneurship Act from 2011). The council is comprised of the representatives of all ministers, two representatives of social enterprises, one representative of social partners and one expert. The Ministry of Public administration is responsible for NGOs. The Prime Minister Cabinet (state secretary responsible for civil dialogue, coordination of citizen's initiatives and social enterprises) oversees social entrepreneurship policies on a centralized level. However, local authorities (municipalities) also have the capacity to support the regional development of social enterprises.⁴⁸

While the Social Entrepreneurship Act from 2011 contributed to a rather narrow understanding of social entrepreneurship with a focus on social business, the Amended Social Entrepreneurship Act from 2018 contributed to erasing the differences between A-type social enterprises tackling specific actions for social innovations and B-type social enterprises (workshops for social insertion of vulnerable persons such as persons with disabilities).

There is a broad spectrum of legal forms or statutes available for social enterprises, as no national centralized strategy is yet available. According to an OECD report from 2022,⁴⁹ the number of legal forms of social enterprises in Slovenia is as follows:

1. There are 24 000 associations, from which only 68 are registered as social enterprises de jure;
2. There are 474 cooperatives, from which only 70 are registered as legal social enterprises;
3. From the 288 available foundations in Slovenia, only 1 is registered as de jure social enterprise;
4. From the high number of 71 966 limited liability companies, only 33 are registered legally as

⁴⁶ OECD (2022): Boosting Social Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprise Development in Slovenia, p. 64.

⁴⁷ OECD (2022): Boosting Social Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprise Development in Slovenia, p. 22.

⁴⁸ Rakar, Tatjana; Zinka Kolarič (2019): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Slovenia, p. 57.

⁴⁹ The report was already mentioned in previous footnote: OECD (2022): Boosting Social Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprise Development in Slovenia, p. 31.



social enterprises;

5. There are 3 760 private institutes in Slovenia, of which 100 are de jure social enterprises.

The discrepancy between the high number of real existing organizations fulfilling the criteria to qualify as social enterprises and the low number of legally recognized social enterprises can have as a cause the lack of fiscal and financial advantages for registered social enterprises. The main goal of the Social Entrepreneurship Act was mostly to raise political awareness towards this type of organization. Thus, according to several stakeholders, the 2011 Social Entrepreneurship Act attracted less entrepreneurial organizations and organizations driven by economic incentives, such as the possibility to access EU funding schemes.

However, the development of social enterprises is a topic for the Slovenian Strategy for the Development of the Social Economy 2021-2031.

For many years the financial support for social entrepreneurship development offered by the Slovenian Government was very scarce. Currently, the main financial support refers to grants for the start-up phase and microfinance support for the growth and development of existing social enterprises. Other financial contributions are project-based: COSME, HORIZON, ERASMUS +.

There are several public funding programmes that support social innovations and WISEs in Slovenia. The Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities funded two of them:

1. **The Learning Workshop programme** that offered participants six months of on-the-job training in the social economy, including in social enterprises, employment centers and companies for persons with disabilities.
2. **SocioLab** is a programme that supports social economy development in the Podravje region.

Moreover, Slovenia's social enterprise ecosystem includes specialized local intermediaries that offer incubation, acceleration and other services to social enterprises. Notable examples include the business community KNOF, Tkalka, a development cooperative in Maribor, DPlac in Ljubljana and Centre Rotunda. These organizations support social entrepreneurs in developing a business plan and identifying suitable sources of funding. Likewise, the SPIRIT agency invests in social innovation and entrepreneurship, among other innovation-related initiatives, and provides grants for strategic business transformation using EU Cohesion funds as well as support from the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology. Start:up Slovenia is a publicly funded national innovation system for the support and promotion of startups, including social enterprises. At the local level, there are some emerging good practices aimed at creating support systems for social enterprises such as the involvement of Business Support Centers in different EU funded projects aimed at stimulating social entrepreneurship.

Overall, Slovenia has a high number of de facto enterprises that are not registered as such. The legal



definition of the concept as set in the Social Entrepreneurship Act (2011) and amended in 2018 is rather narrow and focuses on the business dimension. According to the Amendment from 2018, no differentiation is made between A-type social enterprises carrying out specific activities for social innovation and B-type social enterprises aiming at the social integration of vulnerable groups. Initiatives for mentoring social entrepreneurs and development of adjacent competencies are provided in Slovenia only occasionally, mostly funded by EU projects. A systematic training offer is yet to be developed.

In conclusion, the legal and political recognition of social entrepreneurship in the four partner countries Germany, Italy, Romania, and Slovenia is directly linked to the public awareness about its benefits and contribution to the respective economies. While Italy is the first country to have passed a legal framework concerning social entrepreneurship in 1991, it didn't consider necessary to implement a national policy framework for supporting social enterprises. By contrast, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia implemented policy frameworks for developing social enterprises but have a rather new and fragmented legislation. Romania and Slovenia developed their legislation targeting social enterprises after the EU Social Business Act (2011) and in close connection to it. Germany is the only country among the four without a clear legislation targeting social enterprises due to the diversity of the formats of organisations that fall under this category and clear regulations of the welfare state and its structures.

4 Inspiring good practices in social entrepreneurship

The four project countries Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia, have implemented a multitude of good practices in the area of social entrepreneurship. They are very diverse and range from receiving support from EU funding (Slovenia, Romania), offering financial counseling to social start-ups through support networks on the national level (such as the organization Financing Agency for Social Entrepreneurship FA-SE in Germany), and a dedicated national legal framework (Italy). Other good practice examples are dedicated organizations that pursue a social goal and excel at least in one of the three dimensions of social entrepreneurship defined by the EU Social Business Act (2011): entrepreneurial practices, social dimension, and governance dimension. This chapter presents selected best practices from the four project countries with the potential to inspire others and be transferred to other parts of the European Union. Two good practices will be presented from each partner country. The focus is on individual organizations that qualify as *de facto* social enterprises and irrespective of their legal form. Social entrepreneurship networks and support mechanisms are discussed in Chapter 8. Organizations offering education in social entrepreneurship are the main topic of Chapter 5.

4.1.1 Italy

There is a multitude of good practices in social entrepreneurship in Italy. An overarching element of



the context that enables the development of social enterprises is a dedicated national legal framework. Two good practices suggested by the Italian project partners are presented below.

1) BLUEAT – The Sustainable Fishery, <https://www.blueat.eu/chisiamo>

MARISCADORAS SRL BENEFIT is a social business aiming to preserve the native fish species in the Mediterranean Sea and protect them from other non-native fish species that are spreading in the Mediterranean due to the transformation of the marine environment. The indiscriminate and predatory spread of non-native sea animals endangers the survival of native resources and, consequently, the work of thousands of families who earn their living through small-scale coastal artisanal fishing and seaside tourism. The organization Blueat was established by five young women, who decided to come together to do business and contribute, at the same time, to the preservation of the environment. This good practice example also tackles the gender gap, as women are often invisible and underpaid in different business sectors.⁵⁰

The social entrepreneurship project has adhered to digital self-study paths, and the company has developed skills through which it is attempting to control the invasion of blue crab, incorporating it into Italian gastronomy. In fact, a line of food processing of blue crab has been created through the establishment of micro-branches, agreements with fishermen's cooperatives, fish market managers, local processing and canning companies, distribution in the catering and trade sectors so that the product is enhanced.

2) PONGOV CRONICITY - OBSERVATORY ON SOCIAL AND HEALTH INTEGRATION (OISS), <https://osservatoriocronicita.it/index.php/chi-siamo>; <https://www.oiss.it/>

The PON GOV Chronicity project is part of the PON GOV Institutional Capacity 2014-2020, which aims to effectively contribute to the strengthening of public administration. The Directorate-General for Health Planning of the Ministry of Health, with the collaboration of the Directorate-General for Digitalization, Health Information System and Statistics are the beneficiary of the project with the aim of promoting the reorganization of chronicity management processes through the use of digital technologies. The goal of the project is to foster the adoption of innovative and sustainable chronicity management models that put the person at the center. Additionally, the project supports policy makers in adopting healthcare measures. Integrating care models through the support of ICT makes it possible to develop networking to improve the provision of care while containing spending on chronic diseases. The innovation lies in the decision to promote, both at the central and local levels, a multi-profile and multidisciplinary approach aimed at supporting the construction of a

⁵⁰ Fronzoni, Vasco; Melillo, Luigia (2024): National Report on Social Entrepreneurship in the Higher Education Sector in Italy.



toolbox that allows the Regions to evaluate and plan, with the Health Authorities and stakeholders, actions and investments to support the challenge to Chronicity with the support of ICT. The scientific approach of PONGO V was validated by the EU Commission and strengthens Communities of Practice. The project creates a repository of good healthcare practices about chronicity with ICT and the related tool box and manuals.

PONGO V as a good practice and has been transferred and implemented in the new Observatory on social and health integration (OISS, <https://www.oiss.it/>) established by ANCI-Federsanità. The idea of a National Observatory on social and health integration stems from the need to collect the experiences made so far in the systemic integration of health and social care, driven by the holistic approach that guides the current national and international health debate. This approach makes the best experiences available to institutional decision-makers and public and private organizations working to plan services up to date with the socio-economic and technological evolution of our systems and times.

4.1.2 Germany

It is a challenge to select only two good practices from Germany, a country with one of the highest numbers of social enterprises in Europe. One example is a foundation registered as a limited liability company. The other one is a social enterprise. Both organizations were selected due to their high social impact.

One of the largest corporate foundations in Europe is the Robert-Bosch-Foundation (<https://www.bosch-stiftung.de/de>). The organization was founded through the testament of Robert Bosch in 1964. Currently, it employs 170 staff members in Stuttgart and Berlin and it is active in 28 countries. In 2023, it had a turnover of 97 million euros. The Robert-Bosch-Foundation covers three areas with funding and social projects:

1. The focus on health is a central task, starting with the Robert Bosch Hospital, which Robert Bosch inaugurated in 1940. Currently, the foundation runs 14 projects dedicated to health in 27 countries.
2. In the area of education, the foundation is campaigning for sustainable daycare centers and schools in Germany. To this end, it works closely with stakeholders from educational institutions, administration, research and politics. The foundation dedicates currently 38 projects to education in five countries.
3. In the Global Issues area, the Robert Bosch Foundation is committed to peaceful coexistence in the world. The projects developed address the current major social challenges. The goals of the funded projects in this area are to create lasting and inclusive peace, reduce systemic inequalities limit climate change through sustainable land use, ensure good coexistence in an immigration society, strengthen democracy, and make migration humane. This area is the largest: currently, the foundation carries out 141 projects related to global issues in 138



countries.

The Robert Bosch Stiftung utilises a wide range of funding instruments in the areas of education, health and global issues. The types of collaboration depend on the objectives and the respective needs. The foundation promotes topics, works bilaterally in partnerships or joins alliances.

In addition to specific project funding, the foundation also supports open idea development processes to solve complex social challenges at an early stage. It helps strengthening institutions, associations, organisations and projects in their development so that they can expand their scope for action and have a lasting impact. To this end, the foundation offers needs-based support with the necessary flexibility and focus on joint learning.

Every project and every project funding programme starts with a concrete idea of the social challenge to be addressed. Firstly, the foundation checks whether the idea is compatible with the foundation's funding objectives and strategy and whether the legal requirements are met, for example with regard to the project's non-profit status. If the foundation decides to pursue the project idea further, the applicants summarize additional information in a project application. The applicants define the objectives, target groups and the planned impact of their project. They can also submit a project outline at the same time. The foundation offers support with finalizing the idea and assists with the application.

The application forms the basis for the approval of the funding. Once the project has been successfully approved, the collaboration with the foundation will be regulated in a funding agreement, which will include the funding amount and the exact funding period. The applicant and the foundation also agree on a financing plan and a payment plan for the disbursement of the funding amount.

The second good practice example is Social Bee (<https://www.socialbee.org/>) a top work insertion social enterprise (WISE) specialized in matching companies with refugees and migrants that search for a new job in Germany. Social Bee is a needs-oriented mediation platform bringing together companies with job-openings and refugees or migrants seeking for employment. The organization supports refugees and migrants with training opportunities, further education, and filling out documents required by the authorities. The counseling and support are borne by the companies and free of charge for the refugees and migrants.

Social Bee has successfully worked with over 290 companies and made over 1 200 successful placements of which over 89 % work in the long term.

The hiring and matching process are described on their webpage. First, the organization analyses the needs of the company and draws up a requirement profile. Then they look in their database of over 4 000 persons seeking employment and search for the person matching the requirement profile.



When the correct person was found, Social Bee helps with filling out the needed forms and signing the contract. Additionally, the organization offers soft skills training and support for the new employees during their first few months.

For refugees and migrants, the recruiting process goes as follows: Refugees and migrants have two options: Firstly, to find a employment immediately. Social Bee helps with negotiating a fair payment, getting help with the work permit, personal help with the job application and the first months in the new job. Secondly, Social Bee offers free qualification programmes and support with starting a new job. The persons can also participate in the qualification programmes remotely. Additionally, the organization helps with the job start and developing a career.

In Germany, one of the most prominent issues on the job market is the skilled labor shortage. Work insertion social enterprises are therefore becoming more important for the economy as a whole.

4.1.3 Romania

In Romania, a significantly high number of social enterprises are funded through European programmes. Most of them don't have the necessary know-how to implement other funding mechanisms after the grant financing finishes. Their life span is limited to three to five years, coinciding with the EU-financed project duration. Therefore, the selected good practice examples are an EU-funded project and social insertion social enterprise (WISE). They were selected due to their high social impact.

The first good practice example is the Erasmus+ project MyDigiCoop (<https://mydigicoop.eu/>). The project promotes social-cooperative entrepreneurship in Higher Education. Its goal is to promote social-cooperative entrepreneurship in HE by equipping HE professionals with innovative online tools and competencies to foster social-cooperative entrepreneurship among their students. The project is a strategic partnership managed and developed by 3 HEIs and 3 SMEs from 4 different European countries: Faculty of Humanities and Education Sciences (HUHEZI) at Mondragon University, Spain; Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (ULBS), Romania; Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Finland; Senior Europa Sociedad Limitada (Kveloce), Spain; Gestionet Multimedia, S.L. (Gestionet), Spain; ACEEU (Accreditation Council for Entrepreneurial and Engaged Universities), Germany.

The project objectives to reach that goal are:

1. To map HE students' entrepreneur and cooperative profiles;
2. To design personalized learning paths for HE students with the aim of supporting HE educators in the development of the students' competences;
3. To create an interactive virtual platform to support the development of social cooperative economy and social entrepreneurship;
4. To provide the required skills, competences, and materials to teachers in HE to foster social-





cooperative entrepreneurship in their courses;

5. To strengthen synergies and cooperation among HE institutions, companies from both public and private sector, and associations by means of including their needs in the training course.

The target groups are students and (future) young entrepreneurs, educators, professionals in education.

The second good example is the Work Insertion Social Enterprise Workshops without Borders (Ateliere fără Frontiere, AFF, <https://atelierefarafrontiere.ro/>) established in 2008 and recognized by the Government as an organization of public service in 2024 (through the Governmental Decision Nr. 156/22.04.2024). The organization is located in the Bucharest and Ilfov region works with vulnerable people, preparing them to fully integrate, both socially and professionally, in the conventional labour market, while also taking the environment into account. Up to now, they helped 1 800 persons reintegrate and find a new job. They pursue this goal through 4 circular economy workshops:

1. educlick – deals with collecting electrical and electronic waste, reconditioning the IT equipment and donating it to schools and rural areas;
2. remesh – focuses on upcycling advertising banners and meshes which are transformed into ethical and sustainable fashion products;
3. bio&co farm – grows organically certified vegetables at the social farm in the Ciocanari village and distributes them weekly in Bucharest;
4. logietic – carries out co-packing activities such as packing, labeling, loading sustainable and responsible products.

The organization AFF works to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN.

Another domain of activity of AFF is represented by supporting Ukrainian refugees in finding a job.

Their values are solidarity and integration; systemic development; caring for the environment and people; creativity and innovation; entrepreneurial spirit; trust; social justice.

AFF also organizes diverse workshops and trainings about the circular economy, social economy, and social entrepreneurship. Some workshops are offered together with the organization RISE – The Romanian Network of Social Insertion Enterprises. Additionally, they publish yearly activity reports on the organization webpage.

4.1.4 Slovenia

Similarly to Romania, social entrepreneurship was supported at the beginning by EU funds. Accordingly, from the two good practice projects selected for presentation, one is a EU-funded project. As in the previous cases, the selected examples stand out through a high value of social





impact.

The first good practice example is the Erasmus+ project SocialB (<https://socialb-erasmus.eu/>), implemented between 2020 and 2023. The project involved organizations from Ireland, Greece, Italy and Slovenia. The project aimed to develop educational content in the field of social entrepreneurship targeting social entrepreneurs, their supporting institutions, teachers at secondary, higher, and tertiary education institutions, and students. The project addressed the varying levels of development of social entrepreneurship across EU countries, particularly focusing on Slovenia and Greece, where it aimed to promote and enhance social entrepreneurship.⁵¹

The educational material prepared by the SocialB project focused on key areas crucial for successful work and growth of social enterprises. It included 24 learning units covering topics such as social innovation, measuring social impact, human resource management, project proposal preparation, financing, strategic planning, marketing, and sales. The learning material was made available through the project e-learning platform. All content was translated into Slovenian.

The second good practice selected is the Centre for Reuse in Slovenia (<https://www.cpu-reuse.com/>), part of the USE-REUSE project, form a network of social enterprises focused on environmental sustainability and social inclusion. They accept, diagnose, and restore functional used equipment, offering them at affordable prices. The Reuse center is a full member of Social Firms Europe CEFEC.

The Reuse Center operates as a social enterprise and focuses not only on economic but also on social and environmental goals. It works in several key areas:

1. Reuse activities: It collects and sorts items from individuals and companies and sorts them according to type and condition. It restores and processes the items, extending the life of objects. It sells and distributes the restored products at affordable prices, promoting a reuse culture. It organizes workshops and events to educate the public about the importance of reusing objects and circular economy.
2. Development and project work: It participates in development initiatives and partnerships promoting the circular economy and sustainable development. It cooperates with educational institutions such as schools and universities, offering practical training of students. It includes vulnerable groups, promoting social inclusion and employment opportunities for them.
3. Innovation: It supports the development of new techniques and technologies improving the recovery and recycling processes. It cooperates with startup and technology companies to develop new solutions in the circular economy.

The Center provides jobs for people from vulnerable groups, promotes socially responsible

⁵¹ Novac-Trunk, Anica; Valerij Dermol (2024), National Report on Social Entrepreneurship.



consumption, and contributes to environmental conservation in alignment with the SDG set by the UN. It has its units in different parts of Slovenia: Ljubljana, Rogaska Slatina, Ormoz, and Slovenske Konjice. In reuse units throughout Slovenia, 250 tons of usable items from old products, furniture, and clothing are prepared for further use each year.

5 Social entrepreneurship education in the participating countries

The available overview documentation on social entrepreneurship education in the participating countries (Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia) is rather scarce. However, the various national reports confirm an increase in research and training across the four countries. A wide range of programmes and tools has emerged in addition to the training offers by practitioners and other stakeholders (including funders and policymakers). Research is identified as a key factor for the recognition of social enterprises and social entrepreneurship, particularly in Central and Southeast European countries such as Slovenia and Romania. In all, the situation is promising despite the lack of synchronized actions such as nation-wide educational strategies or a mainstreaming of the social entrepreneurship dimension in entrepreneurship education in general.⁵²

Overall, the training and educational offers are more diverse in the countries with a longer tradition in social entrepreneurship practices, such as Italy and Germany. In the countries from Central and Southeast Europe, such as Slovenia and Romania, social entrepreneurship training offers are rather scattered and still depend on a high degree on EU-funded projects, although universities and private training providers offer selected courses and even study programmes on this topic.

Social entrepreneurship educational and training programmes and courses are offered by universities, other Higher Education Institutions, private training providers, and also EU-funded projects. Additionally, in Italy and Germany, schools also provide education in social entrepreneurship.

In many instances, the effort carried out in the academic context goes beyond theoretical research by promoting the exchange and networking of practitioners, policymakers and other key actors within the ecosystem. Such a facilitator role stands out clearly from the reading of the national reports, though it is often overlooked when describing the contributions of academia to the development of social enterprises in Europe.

The following presentation of educational offers in social entrepreneurship in the project countries Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia is not exhaustive. Only a brief outline will be made to highlight some key aspects.

⁵² Borzaga, Carlo, Giulia Galera et. al. (2020): Social Enterprises and their Ecosystems in Europe. Comparative Synthesis Report, p. 95f.

5.1.1 Italy

Italy has a very well established educational system for social entrepreneurship dating back to the 1980s.⁵³ Educational institutions in Italy offer a broad range of courses, formal and informal training aiming at students, entrepreneurs, but also pupils. In the following paragraphs, some of the most important educational programmes at tertiary level will be presented.

1) MASTERGIS (<https://www.mastergis.eu/>) University Master Programme in Social Enterprise Management: The Master GIS is a Master Degree offered by the University of Trento, EURICSE (European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises) and Fondazione Caritro. The study programme aims to offer participants a comprehensive and practical approach to understanding the context of social enterprises, allowing them to strategically position themselves and lead the development and innovation of these organizations.

The Master welcomes students from different academic disciplines. It teaches key skills needed for social entrepreneurship through courses, research, and internships. It aligns, at an early stage, the key skills needed to successfully address the challenges of social economy organizations.

2) Bocconi University, Milan (SDA Bocconi School of Management): https://www.sdabocconi.it/it/master-specialistici-full-time-executive/master-specialistici-executive-landing?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=w_IT_sdabocconi_pmax_master_performance&gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjw3vO3BhCqARIsAEWblcAe04AyP0srxgltP2NVwH6pkM6eqlJAtD00iB9xh70hCEB2M_KuoZkaApLJEALw_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds

Bocconi offers pioneering education in the sector. It launched Italy's first bachelor's program in economics for nonprofits, cooperatives, and social organizations in 1993. Today, it continues to offer a comprehensive master's program in the Management of Social Enterprises, Not-for-Profit Organizations, and Cooperatives.⁵⁴

3) University of Bologna: Renowned for its array of master's programs focusing on social economy, economics, and management of nonprofits and cooperatives, alongside specialized courses in fundraising for nonprofits and public entities: <https://www.unibo.it/it/studiare/dottorati-master-specializzazioni-e-altra-formazione/master/2024-2025/economia-della-cooperazione-muec-1>

4) Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan: Celebrating its sixth edition, the Executive

⁵³ University of Patras, University of Tor Vergata, Development Agency Kozjansko (2020): O2.1 Report Literature Review, developed as part of the Erasmus+ project SocialB, p. 18.

⁵⁴ Fronzoni, Vasco; Melillo, Luigia (2024): National Report on Social Entrepreneurship in the Higher Education Sector in Italy.



Master's in Social Entrepreneurship highlights sustained demand and success in training future leaders in the field: <https://altis.unicatt.it/altis-master-terzo-settore-impresa-sociale-emptesis>

5) Social Entrepreneurship Open Camp, <https://socialopencamp.org/?lang=en>: The Social Enterprise Open Camp is a training and networking opportunity dedicated to social entrepreneurship and impact investing. Speakers and social entrepreneurship experts from around the world will lead four days of residential training. The duration of the yearly event is four days.

The Social Enterprise Open Camp is a unique experience due to the testimonies from social entrepreneurs, reflections and stimuli from mentors, academics, investors and key players in the industry and finance that will enable participants to implement skills, activate alliances and broaden their scope in a melting pot of knowledge and experience.

The Social Enterprise Open Camp

- has an international vocation,
- maintains the format of a 4 days intensive, immersive, and residential camp
- offers networking opportunities to generate new ideas and collaboration opportunities
- enables social and impact enterprises to grow through engagement with key players in the ecosystem
- offers a program with plenary sessions blended with workshops where social entrepreneurs alongside investors and eco-system partners share their experiences and business models to solve critical social and environmental problems in a responsible way.

5.1.2 Germany

The newly developed National Strategy for Social Innovations and enterprises for the common good dedicates its field of action 8 (out of 11 fields of action) to promoting skills development for social innovation and business for the common good. According to the National Strategy, the educational opportunities for social businesses and social innovation are not enough and should be expanded, although Germany is among the EU countries with the highest number of social enterprises. The document suggests expanding suitable teaching and learning programmes on social innovation and businesses for all age groups, raising awareness of these topics and impart the relevant knowledge and skills.

More and more educational programmes are already being created at universities, some of them with governmental support. The Government aims to continue to support this trend.

The most important providers of research, education and skills development services tend to be public and church-related universities. Welfare organizations, cooperatives, integrative and inclusive enterprises can also access training and education offers made by specialized institutes



within or organized by their federative structures.

Each Land accommodates a range of educational offers in social entrepreneurship that reach from courses or training opportunities to complete study programmes and even universities dedicated to imparting knowledge in this area. Due to the high number of educational opportunities in social entrepreneurship compared to Slovenia and Romania, only a few types of educational offers are highlighted here.

A great number of public universities and training institutes affiliated with the German welfare federations offer courses in “third sector” studies or “management in the social sector”, covering specialized business administration, strategy or marketing management, etc. Some institutions go beyond teaching and offer consultancy services, and some even fund social innovation projects.⁵⁵

(1) In 2010, a cooperation network between four universities in Munich formed to create the “Social Entrepreneurship Academy” (Social Entrepreneurship Akademie, Link: <https://seakademie.org/>). It contains its own study curriculum, with courses ranging from two days to full, certified two-year long programmes. It also supports start-ups through incubation centers and consultations and builds a broad network of stakeholders around social entrepreneurship.⁵⁶

(2) PHINEO takes the stage as the largest actor offering certified quality assurance, counseling, and education for social initiatives. It is a public-benefit venture established by Deutsche Börse, the Bertelsmann Foundation, KPMG, one of the "Big Four" auditing firms with the highest turnover in the world, PricewaterhouseCoopers and the Mercator Foundation. (Link: <https://www.phineo.org/>)

(3) An accredited Higher Education Institution teaching exclusively in the area of social entrepreneurship is the University of Applied Sciences for Social Design – (Hochschule für Gesellschaftsgestaltung, Link: <https://hfgg.de/>) located in Koblenz. The institution was established 2015 and developed from a previously church-sponsored Higher Education institution, the Cusanus University of Applied Sciences for Social Design (Cusanus Hochschule für Gesellschaftsgestaltung). The University for Social Design has currently ca. 160 enrolled students, 100 alumni.⁵⁷

The University for Social Design attracts students with a newly coined educational concept for the study of social entrepreneurship: Transformative Learning. Transformative learning has three

⁵⁵ A. Buzdugan, A. Krauss, (2024), National Report on social entrepreneurship in the higher education sector in Germany.

⁵⁶ Göler von Ravensburg, Nicole; Gorgi Krlev; Georg Midlenberger (2018): Social Enterprises and their Ecosystems in Europe. Country report Germany, p. 89f.

⁵⁷ A. Buzdugan, A. Krauss, (2024), National Report on social entrepreneurship in the higher education sector in Germany.



pillars:

- Shattering – finding underlying frameworks, thinking patterns and other prerequisites for the societal problems perceived by the students as important.
- Opening – finding the roots of societal problems with the aim of searching for solutions.
- Reorienting – finding opportunities for impactful changes developed as solutions to perceived societal problems and proposing ways to implement them.

(4) Another Higher Education Institution targeting the field of social entrepreneurship is the Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development. Its website can be consulted here: <https://www.hnee.de/en/Startseite/HNE-Eberswalde-Startseite-E9875.htm>).

The research profile of the HNEE is characterised by its focus on the following three research areas:

1. Sustainable development of rural areas
2. Sustainable production and use of natural resources
3. Sustainable management of limited resources

(5) An example of a study programme in social entrepreneurship is provided by the University of Applied Sciences Neu-Ulm. The institution offers the Master programme Social Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Development with duration of study of 3 semesters.

The aim of the programme is teaching students how social entrepreneurship can be used to develop innovative solutions for more holistic sustainability in corporate business models and in international development cooperation. The students are prepared for entrepreneurial and responsible leadership positions in sustainability management, innovation management and international management in companies, governmental and non-governmental organisations. The courses are taught entirely in English. The study programme combines - uniquely in Germany - the three main topics of social entrepreneurship, sustainability management and international development cooperation and brings students into contact with international practitioners from these fields through project work and guest lectures. In addition, participants learn how to develop own innovation ideas and business models for solving societal problems. (Link to the study programme: <https://www.hnu.de/studium/studiengaenge/masterstudiengaenge/social-entrepreneurship-for-sustainable-development-ma>).

Although the educational offers in social entrepreneurship in Germany are very numerous, a centralized approach is still missing. The National Strategy for Social Entrepreneurship aims to cover this and sets an overarching framework with guidelines for social entrepreneurship endeavors valid for the German Federation.

5.1.3 Romania

While educational programmes play an important role in recognizing social entrepreneurship, the



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respective offers are still only a few in Romania. The training offers are partly provided by universities, partly by private institutions and also within EU-funded projects.

Since 2019, the number of educational offers by universities decreased slightly.⁵⁸ The courses previously provided by the Academy of Economics Bucharest (ASE) and the National School for Political and Administrative Sciences Bucharest (SNSPA) are no longer run. However, other Higher Education Institutions continue to train students in social entrepreneurship, such as:

(1) Babeş-Bolyai University (UBB), Cluj-Napoca: Master of Social work and social economy: <https://socasis.ubbcluj.ro/program/asistenta-sociala-si-economie-sociala/>: The master's programme's duration is four semesters. It aims to translate the expertise of the economic-administrative field into the practice of social organizations, social assistance, and inclusion work in general. It is an interdisciplinary programme aimed at graduates in social work, economics, sociology, legal sciences, political and administrative sciences, communication sciences, as well as specialists already working in the social assistance system. It is a Joint Master's programme run in collaboration with higher education institutions in the European Union: University of Applied Sciences – FH Campus Wien (Austria), University of Applied Sciences, Munich (Germany), Institut Regional de Travail Social Poitiers (France), University of Debrecen (Hungary), University of Ostrava (Czech Republic), University of Applied Sciences, Lucern (Switzerland). The master is practically oriented, combining theoretical with practical knowledge.

The programme has the following objectives:

- provide skills for planning, setting up and running social economy entities,
- encourage empirical-scientific research and the development of new concepts and models in social work and the social economy,
- understand European developments and their impact on the social economy and social work.

Competences acquired: Knowledge of social economy and social work; knowledge of financial management, accounting and cost analysis; development of capacity to analyse social issues and policies; skills to work in intercultural projects; training in implementation and evaluation of social programmes and services; empowerment to turn entrepreneurship into entrepreneurial action; opportunities to interact with models of good practice in social economy in Europe.

(2) West University Timisoara (UVT): Master of Social entrepreneurship and community development: <https://admitere.uvt.ro/program/antreprenoriat-social-si-dezvoltare-comunitara/>: The Master's Programme's duration is of two years. It aims to articulate coherently the competences and

⁵⁸ Anca Draghici, Caius Luminosu et al. (2024), National Report on Social Entrepreneurship.

professional skills needed by specialists in social economy and community development, who can contribute to the sustainable valorization of community resources, to the increase of employment for disadvantaged people, to the development of sustainable socio-economic intervention tools.

The main objectives of this master's programme are:

- to train specialists in social entrepreneurship and community development, supporting sustainable development processes at community level, including marginalised communities;
- to train staff in social economy and community development organisations, including people interested in starting up social enterprises in the form of social entrepreneurship;

Competences acquired: Application of specific social governance tools in university and community practical-territorial contexts, application of specific tools for identification of social needs – social diagnosis in different communities, social and organizational contexts, application of the conceptual and methodological apparatus specific to the field of sociology in solving problems in the organizational sphere and social entrepreneurship, comparative analysis of social entrepreneurship models, social enterprises, corporate social responsibility and conventional business models, developing an application for funding to set up and develop a social enterprise, taking responsibility for participating in the creation and manifestation of an inclusive working environment in professional and social activities, developing partnerships between social businesses and different community actors and their management, solve problems specific to the organizational environment and social entrepreneurship.

Additionally, the University of Bucharest and University of Oradea offer some courses in social entrepreneurship as part of other B.A. and M.A. study programmes.⁵⁹ Moreover, some EU-funded projects also offer training opportunities in social entrepreneurship. Since 2019, 37 Erasmus+ projects (including mobility activities, Key Action 1), were funded in Romania with a focus on social entrepreneurship.⁶⁰

An important certified training in social entrepreneurship offered by a private foundation is:

(3) Foundation “Alaturi De Voi” (ADV), ADV Academy, private association/NGO: Training as Entrepreneur in social economy (certified): <https://academiaadv.ro/curs-antreprenor-in-economia-sociala-specializare/>: The course is run on request only for legal entities that can provide a group of at least 15 people, has a duration of 180 hours (60 hours theory + 120 hours practical experience). The level of studies required for attending the course secondary education, completed with

⁵⁹ Lambru, Mihaela; Claudia Petrescu (2019): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Romania, p 75.

⁶⁰ Cf. a search on the website <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects>.



baccalaureate diploma and is finished with a certificate issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity.

The course content includes: Elaboration of a feasibility study; development of the business plan; business management; elaboration of the social project of the business; management of the social activity; promoting social entrepreneurship; representing the organization in external relations.

Expanding the training offers in social entrepreneurship will increase the awareness about the topic and its importance as a motor of the social economy in Romania. The project DigiFunCollab aims to contribute towards this goal.

5.1.4 Slovenia

In Slovenia, many higher educational institutions have engaged in social enterprise research or have incorporated the concept within their academic curriculum since 2010. Currently, several faculties from different Slovenian universities offer courses on social enterprises.⁶¹ Additionally, private training providers make training programmes with a focus on social entrepreneurship available. Moreover, within EU-financed projects, training offers on the topic are being developed.

Within the Erasmus+ project SocialB (2020-2023), an overview of the course offers in social entrepreneurship at tertiary level in Slovenia can be consulted.⁶²

The University of Ljubljana provides several courses on social entrepreneurship within its academic B.A. and M.A. programmes. An elective masters' course at the Faculty of Economics focuses on this topic as part of the study programme Entrepreneurship. The course content includes:⁶³

- Differentiation of entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship (SE), and the non-profit sector
- Development of Social Enterprises and theoretical foundations of Social Enterprises
- Social entrepreneurship in the private, public, and non-profit sectors
- Advantages and challenges of Social Enterprises; areas and forms of Social Entrepreneurship activities
- Social Enterprises in Slovenia, EU, USA, developing countries, and examples of good practices
- Profile of a social entrepreneur
- Legal aspects of Social Enterprises
- Financing of Social Entrepreneurship and impact investing, competitions, and awards

⁶¹ Rakar, Tatjana; Z. Kolarič (2019): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Slovenia, p. 64.

⁶² University of Patras, University of Tor Vergata, Development Agency Kozjansko (2020): O2.1 Report Literature Review, developed as part of the Erasmus+ project SocialB, p. 23.

⁶³ http://www.ef.uni-lj.si/content/static_slovene/predmet/predmet.asp?l=100&li=1013&predmet_id=196534.



- Social impacts and their measurement; creating a supportive environment for Social Enterprises; Social and environmental innovations

The SASS School of Advanced Social Studies in Nova Gorica offers an elective introductory course in social entrepreneurship for its B.A.-level students.⁶⁴ The course content is similar to the one offered by the University of Ljubljana,⁶⁵ including:

- Introduction into the field of social entrepreneurship, and definition of the concept
- Similarities and differences between social and business entrepreneurship (social vs. classical economy; non-profit i.e. Third sector vs. private sector)
- The social venture as a new mind-set paradigm that combines “social” and “economic” performance criteria
- The impact of social trends and external factors such as PEST (Policy-law, economics, socio-culture, technology) to social enterprises
- The impact of internal factors of a social enterprise (personal characteristics of the social entrepreneur as creativity, prior experience, cognitive factors, and its social network, organizational culture of his company, the social structure, financial constraints, the quality of human resources, conflicting needs of stakeholders, etc.)
- Social and intellectual capital of the enterprise as the foundation and framework of the social entrepreneurial venture
- Specifics of the leadership and management of social enterprise;
- The impact of social entrepreneurship on social changes and sustainable development (eg. reducing the level of unemployment of vulnerable groups, the opportunity for volunteering and philanthropy, etc.)
- Corporate social responsibility of social entrepreneurship: challenges and threats in 21st century
- Concluding debate: a critical reflection on the possibility of successful implementation of the social entrepreneurial venture in everyday business practice and social environment

Private adult education providers from the tertiary level, such as GEA College, offer an elective course about social entrepreneurship within their B.A.-level study programme in Entrepreneurship, under the link: <https://gea-college.si/en/fakulteta/entrepreneurship/programme-presentation/> The course content is similar to the contents offered by University of Ljubljana and FUDS, including:

- Characteristics of social economy and a historical overview of social entrepreneurship
- Dimensions of social entrepreneurship.
- Characteristics of the social entrepreneur.
- Impact of social entrepreneurship on the environment.
- Legal aspects of social entrepreneurship; financial aspects of social entrepreneurship

⁶⁴ https://www.fuds.si/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/IZB.SMVS_UVOD-V-SOCIALNO-PODJETNISTVO.pdf.

⁶⁵ Novac-Trunk, Anica; Valerij Dermol (2024), National Report on Social Entrepreneurship.



- Leadership and management in social entrepreneurship; worker participation and influence of internal stakeholders in social entrepreneurship.
- Identifying needs, product development in social enterprises.
- Role of marketing and marketing communication in social enterprises.
- Social entrepreneurship in practice - case studies.

Additionally, within EU-financed multi-year projects, training offers in social entrepreneurship are being developed. The already mentioned project SocialB has developed a training implemented between 2020 and 2023 in the partner countries Italy, Slovenia, Ireland, and Greece. The training topics include:

- History and development of social enterprises in Europe
- Introduction to social innovations
- Growth strategies and long-term profitability of social enterprise projects
- Market assessment and competitiveness
- Fundraising and financing models for social enterprises
- Marketing, sales, and networking skills.

Despite the growing political support for social entrepreneurship in Slovenia, it is necessary to increase the relevant educational offers. The training offered within the DigiFUNCollab project contributes towards this goal.

Overall, Italy and Germany have a wide offer of social entrepreneurship courses both in the Higher Education and the adult education sector. That can be a result of the long tradition of social enterprises and welfare organizations in both countries. The educational offer in social entrepreneurship in Romania and Slovenia is more fragmented and consistently built with support by EU-funded projects. A few universities offer courses or study programmes in the area of social entrepreneurship in both countries. Also, a few organizations for adult education included training on this topic. With the support of EU-funded project DigiFUNCollab, the respective educational offer can be strengthened and capacities for further education in this area can be developed.

6 Comparing the competences needed by social entrepreneurs in the participating countries

In this chapter, the project partners propose a range of competences needed by social entrepreneurs. They used as inspiration the EntreComp booklet of entrepreneurship competences.⁶⁶ For the selection, each partner organization implemented a focus group with five participants and prepared

⁶⁶ Here is a long version of the EntreComp Pocket Book for Aspiring Entrepreneurs available: <https://entrecomeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/EntreComp-Europe-Pocket-Book-for-Aspiring-Entrepreneurs.pdf>.



two reports: a focus group report and a national report on social entrepreneurship.

Each partner institution had the task to select a minimum of five competences that are important for social entrepreneurs. The results were grouped in three categories, following the specific differences between general entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship and taking into account the personal competences needed:

1. Overall entrepreneurship competences: This category includes competences that align with the ones proposed in the EntreComp booklet.
2. Social entrepreneurship competences: This category includes competences that are specific for social entrepreneurs. Only two competences were mentioned that don't belong to the overall entrepreneurship competences: Using the Social Business Model Canvas and Measuring social impact. The latter can be included under the overall entrepreneurship competence of assessing the consequences and impact of ideas (part of the EntreComp competence 1.5 Ethical and Sustainable Thinking). However, measuring impact is fundamental for social enterprises that aim solving community problems. Accordingly, it was included separately in the category of social entrepreneurship competences.
3. Personal competences: this category contains competences that belong to the persons carrying out social entrepreneurship endeavors, such as proactivity, individual and team work, but also digital and data literacy.

The competences are presented in a general overview diagram and in a table grouped by country. The table below (Fig. 2) shows the competences grouped by country.

The two competences specific for social entrepreneurship, using the Social Business Model Canvas (2 mentions) and Measuring Social Impact (2 mentions) are listed only by the German focus group. For the focus group participants in Germany, social enterprises must have an emphasis on developing social impact.

The competences named by all partners belong to the group of overall entrepreneurship competences. Accordingly, entrepreneurs must work according to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)⁶⁷ (5 mentions) and know Strategic Planning (including evaluating risks, work objectives approach, creating and implementing a vision) (7 mentions overall).

⁶⁷ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

Domain	Competence	Sum	DE	IT	ROU	SI
Social Entrepreneurship	Measuring impact / The results staircase	2	2			
	Social Business Model Canvas	2	2			
Personal competencies	Social competences, including individual & team work, networking	4	1		2	1
	Data literacy, digital literacy	2	1	1		
	Ethical values/thinking	3			2	1
	Creativity, innovation	3	1		1	1
	Proactivity	1	1			
	Tolerating mistakes	1	1			
	Resilience	1	1			
	Systemic thinking	1	1			
	Empathy	1				1
	Self-awareness	1	1			
Entrepreneurship overall	Sustainable Development Goals	5	1	1	1	2
	Project management	5	3		1	1
	Management (including self-management and time management, management of resources; financial management)	4	2		1	1
	Marketing and Sales, including negotiation skills	3	2		1	
	Legal issues	2	1			1
	Strategic Planning, including evaluating risks; work objectives approach; vision	7	1	1	4	1
	Recognising opportunities	1				1
	Context analysis (micro-environment, corporate environment, external factors, STEEP factors - social, technical, economical, ecological, political)	3			2	1
	Cooperative competition	1	1			
	Intercultural competences	1	1			
	Concept evaluation & valorisation	1				1
	Multidisciplinary approach	1		1		
	Codesign, orientation towards the target	1		1		
TOTAL		57	24	5	15	13

Fig. 2 Competences needed by social entrepreneurs in Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia




Additionally, project management is an overall entrepreneurial competence considered very important by most partners (mentioned 5 times).

General management is included among the most mentioned entrepreneurial competences (4 mentions). Here are also included: self-management, time management, management of resources, and financial management.

Two overall entrepreneurship competences are mentioned three times each: marketing and sales (including negotiation skills); and context analysis (micro-environment, corporate environment, external factors, STEEP factors – social, technical, economical, ecological, political).

Knowing legal issues is an entrepreneurship competency mentioned twice by the project partners.

Several entrepreneurial competences received one mention each: recognizing opportunities, cooperative competition, intercultural competencies, concept evaluation and valorization, using a multidisciplinary approach, co-design and orientation towards the target.

Among the personal competences needed by social entrepreneurs, none was mentioned by all partners. The personal skill receiving most mentions was social competences (including individual and team work, networking) (4 mentions).

Two personal competences were mentioned three times each: ethical values/thinking and creativity (including innovation).

A personal competency received two mentions: digital and data literacy.

Additionally, some competencies were named one time each: proactivity, tolerating mistakes, resilience, systemic thinking, empathy and self-awareness.

For comparing the competencies between the participating countries, it can be useful to look at the competencies named only by one of the partner countries.

Among the specific social entrepreneurship competencies, the German focus group nominated working with the Social Business Model Canvas (1 x) and measuring impact (1 x). This shows the special emphasis put by the German Focus Group on the impact aspect of social entrepreneurship.

Among the personal competencies, the German focus group nominated several skills (1 x each): proactivity, resilience, tolerating mistakes, systemic thinking, and self-awareness. The Slovenian focus group added empathy to the list of personal competencies needed by social entrepreneurs.

Additionally, several entrepreneurial competences were mentioned only by one national focus group as follows: the Slovenian focus group mentioned recognizing opportunities and concept evaluation



and valorisation (1 x each).

The Italian focus group highlighted the multidisciplinary approach and codesign (orientation towards the target) as important entrepreneurial competences (1 x each).

The German focus group named cooperative competition and intercultural competences as very important for entrepreneurs working on social problems (1 x each).

The results of the four focus groups carried out by the partner institutions in Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia show that all countries nominated a range of similar competencies for social entrepreneurs. However, some differences between participating countries in the perception of competences needed by social entrepreneurs was also observed. Germany was the only country mentioning measuring social impact as a specific competency needed by social entrepreneurs. All other partners focused more on general entrepreneurial and personal competences, showcasing an unclear delimitation between overall enterprises and social enterprises, although the latter is defined by law in Italy, Slovenia and Romania. Germany is the only one of the four countries without a law encompassing the definition of social entrepreneurship.

Working with Social Business Model Canvas and measuring social impact are social entrepreneurship competences that aren't mentioned in the EntreComp booklet of entrepreneurial competences.

Moreover, the German focus group participants also highlighted some personal competences needed by social entrepreneurs such as intercultural competences, proactivity, tolerating mistakes and other. The Slovenian and Italian focus group members focused more on entrepreneurial competences. However, most of the entrepreneurial and personal competences listed were mentioned by several focus group members showing the similarities in the perception of social entrepreneurship concept.

Below, a diagram with the focus group results grouped overall by competences is presented:

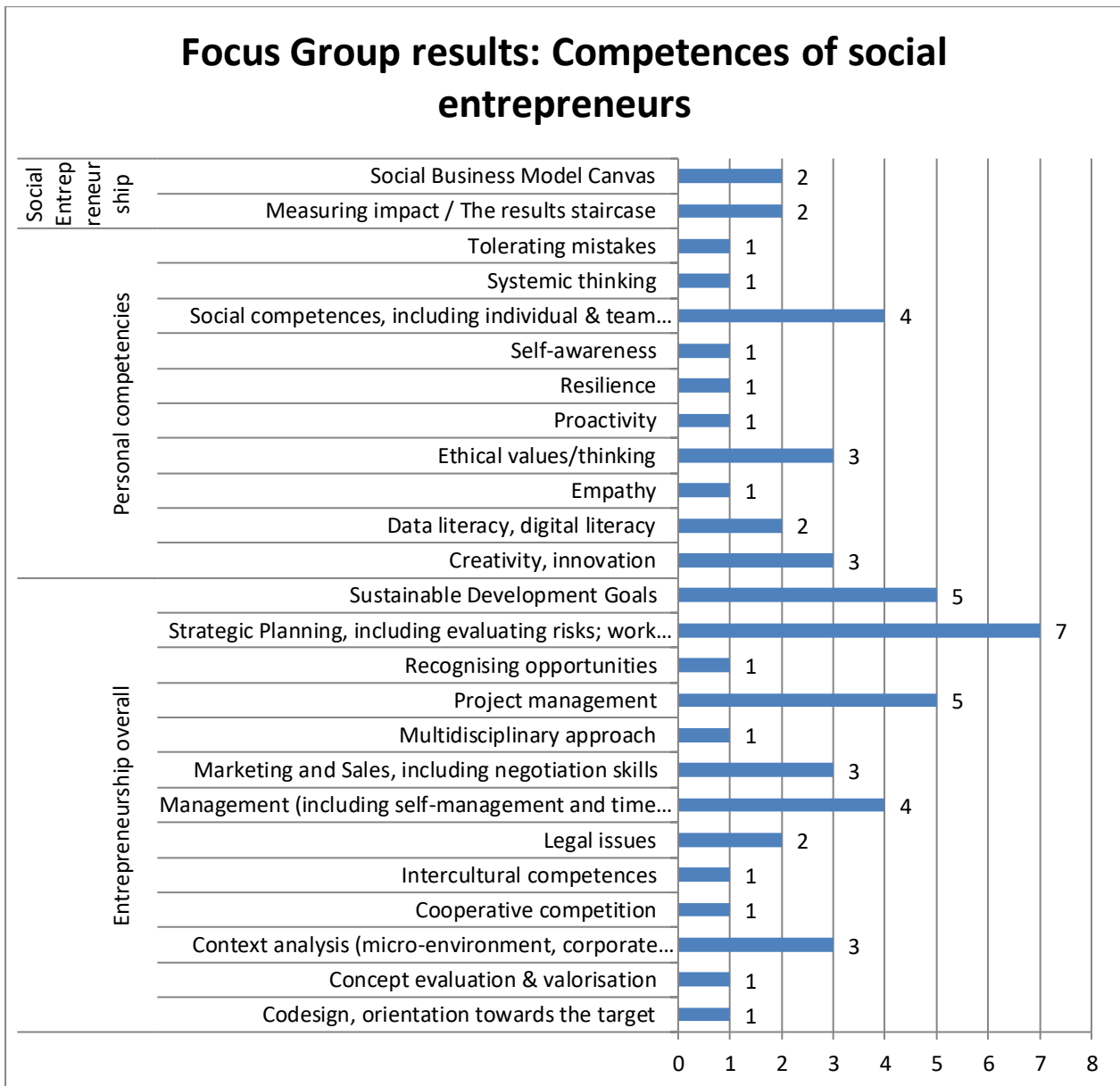


Fig. 3 Overall competences needed by social entrepreneurs

The diagram shows the competences perceived as most important for social entrepreneurship by the four focus groups carried out in Italy, Romania, Germany, and Slovenia. Their distribution by country was already discussed above and won't be repeated here.

It is worth mentioning that most nominated competences belong overall to the category of



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for the future of collaboration between University and Community**

Project Number: 2023-1-IT02-KA220-HED-00015873

entrepreneurship. Only two of them are specific for social entrepreneurs.



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7 Trends, opportunities and challenges in the participating countries (SWOT-Analysis)

This chapter analyses the trends, opportunities and challenges in social entrepreneurship in the participating countries. Despite their different level of development in this sector, some similarities can be observed in the area of social entrepreneurship between Romania, Italy, Germany, and Slovenia regarding their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges. A table with a comparative SWOT-analysis for the four partner countries can be consulted below.

Although the social entrepreneurship sector is different in the four project countries, Italy, Germany, Slovenia and Romania, all aim to stay aligned with the respective EU policies. This is a shared strength. Another common strength of all four countries is their growth and diversification potential in the area of social entrepreneurship. The policy, government and financial support for this emerging sector constitute another shared strength of the partner countries.

Among the most important weaknesses shared by the four countries in the area of social entrepreneurship are sustainability issues. Social enterprises have there a relatively limited life-span encompassing 5 to 8 years. Additionally, there aren't enough opportunities for follow-up financing, after the founding phase of social enterprises ends. Another issue is the rather negative public perception of social enterprises due to previous negative practices or lack of knowledge about the sector. This can change through targeted policies, dissemination of good practices, and a sustained social entrepreneurship education.

While all the four countries face different threats about social entrepreneurship, they all share struggling with financial issues. For example, the risk of opportunistic exploitation of project calls and offers can occur in Romania and Slovenia. Additionally, not having enough access to financing instruments and securing financial capital for social enterprises is another threat in the partner countries.

Among the most prominent opportunities mentioned is the EU support for further developing the social entrepreneurship sector in the four countries Italy, Germany, Slovenia, and Romania. Other shared opportunities in the four countries, but also individual traits, are presented in the table below.



Strenghts			
<p>Italy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established Social Cooperatives: Social cooperatives have a strong presence and a well-established legal framework that supports their operations. They have a proven track record in innovating and democratizing the welfare system. • Public Procurement Engagement: Significant participation in public procurement, despite delays in payments, shows resilience and commitment. • Permanent Employment Contracts: Over 70% of workers in social enterprises have permanent contracts, indicating stability and job security in the sector. • Diversification Potential: There is ongoing diversification into new markets, such as corporate welfare services and services for private users, which could drive growth. 	<p>Germany</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth and Diversification Potential: Many new social enterprises founded yearly; • Policy, government and financial support: National Strategy for Social Innovations published since 2023; Stronger government support for social innovations; • Institutional support – support networks: Many supporting organizations available at local and national level for social entrepreneurs and social innovators, such as SEND e.V., Social Entrepreneurship Academy, Ashoka, Phineo, Social Impact Award, Impact Hub Munich, FA-SE • Academic and non-academic training programmes: Growing number of University study programmes, and courses available in social entrepreneurship; growing number of non-academic certified training offers in the area; • Gender balance: Higher number of female founders in social entrepreneurship in comparison to the business founders (predominantly males); • Alignment to EU policies: Alignment to the 	<p>Romania</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth and Diversification Potential: The number and diversity of successful creative social enterprise practices is increasing the latest years; • Policy, government and financial support: The general awareness for necessity to support social entrepreneurship is growing in all relevant dimensions: social, political, economic, higher education, local and central authorities, etc.; Constant improving political, financial and legislative framework for supporting the social entrepreneurship at national scale; 	<p>Slovenia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth and Diversification Potential: A large number of organizations and networks that encourage the growth of social entrepreneurship; • Integration and insertion cooperatives: Favourable framework supporting the employment of people with disabilities • Good practices: Existence of several excellent, successful, and creative social enterprise practices.



	sustainable development goals and policies of the European Union;		
Weaknesses			
<p>Italy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislative and Bureaucratic Complexity: The current legislative framework is complex and fragmented, leading to administrative and bureaucratic challenges. Confusion and restrictive tasks complicate enterprise management, especially for non-social cooperative NPOs and ex lege social enterprises. • Financial Constraints and Delays: Delays in payments from public authorities (averaging 36 months) increase debt and financial instability. Strict legal requirements and limited incentives discourage investment and the attraction of risk capital. • Managerial Skill Deficiencies: Many social entrepreneurs lack managerial skills, as their profiles are often more aligned with social work than business management. • Negative Public Perception: Scandals involving some social cooperatives have damaged the sector's reputation, overshadowing its contributions. 	<p>Germany</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complexity of institutional support: Many offers for aspiring social entrepreneurs are available – but they are not yet systematical or centralized on a main user portal for example; it is hard to find orientation through all the diversity of offers. • Theoretical vs. practical orientation of training: Not enough hands-on courses and practical information available for students interested in social innovations; Students not receiving enough incentives for becoming more active socially; Limited selection of topics addressed by different courses in social entrepreneurship; • Sustainability issues: Relatively limited life-span of social enterprises (5-8 years); Not enough opportunities for follow-up financing, after the founding phase of social enterprises. • Lack of Public Perception: Lower visibility of social enterprises in the public sphere; 	<p>Romania</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability issues: Inconsistent business and management mid- and long-term abilities within the majority of the developed social enterprises; • Constraints related to inclusion of target groups: Large scale inclusive issues towards the target categories of the social entrepreneurship: people with disabilities, ethnical minorities (like gypsies), etc.; • Educational and institutional support: Reduced participation of higher education (HE) resources (groups, entities, promotion and methodologies etc.) in national social entrepreneurship development; • Financial constraints: Difficult financial gaining for social entrepreneurship; 	<p>Slovenia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative Public Perception: Heritage of distrust; some negative attitudes to social enterprise, social entrepreneurship and the social economy; • Constraints related to inclusion of target groups: State dependency of enterprises for disabled; • Sustainability issues: Business and management skills deficit in newly established social enterprises; Time constraints; • Financial constraints: Difficulties in obtaining money; • Weak NGO sector: Weak, although dynamic, NGO sector • Deficit in social entrepreneurship higher education:

			Recognized deficit in tangible good practices for social entrepreneurship in higher education and a request for improved promotion and understanding of existing methods;
Threats			
Italy	Germany	Romania	Slovenia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Dependence on Public Policies: High dependence on public policies and contracts for revenue makes social enterprises vulnerable to public budget cuts and spending reviews. • Increased Competition: Conventional enterprises are entering markets traditionally dominated by social cooperatives, increasing competition. Social cooperatives are also competing with each other for public contracts. • Limited Financial Capital: Entering new sectors often requires significant financial investment, which social enterprises may struggle to secure. • Insufficient Public Support: Limited implementation of supportive public procurement rules and social clauses reduces opportunities for social enterprises. Public authorities' reluctance to fully implement EU public procurement rules that favor social enterprises constrains growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial and Managerial Constraints: The main challenges lie in a concerted policy development, including public-benefit legislation and procurement issues; improved access to financing instruments that encourage innovation; • Lack of Public Perception: Strengthening the public visibility of social enterprises and innovations; Data availability; • Shortages in skilled labour: Demographic changes linked to a low birth rate and increasingly ageing population, shortages in skilled labour and growing demands for more individualized social services. Strengthening the cooperation between "old" and "new" actors of the social economy; • Sustainability issues: Problems with sustainable business models and with scaling-up; • Bureaucracy issues: Reducing bureaucracy and adapting legal support for legal forms of social enterprises; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial risks: The risk of opportunistic exploitation of opportunities of specific project calls related to social entrepreneurship and the resulting potential compromising the reputation such initiatives; • Sustainability issues: The high risk of failure of the programs dedicated to social entrepreneurship, in the long term, once the specific consulting and mentoring period granted to the beneficiaries ends and due to lack of consistent business and management skills in newly established social enterprises; Reduced co-financing availability from banks and other system towards the social enterprises or associated entrepreneurial business plans, especially after the end of the initial support framing (egg. financed programs for social economy), potentially generating their collapse; • Bureaucratic issues: Bureaucratic barriers and lacks of knowledge of local officials; • Market Constraints: The local market for products and services delivered by social 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •relatively small market for products and services of social enterprises •underdeveloped micro-finance system, conservative attitude of banks •lack of framework for financial and support needs of during start-up, development, and growth of their social enterprises •vertical integration policy and local officials not always well informed about policy framework •continuing budgetary constraints limiting opportunities •sustainability risks for new social enterprise •danger of opportunistic exploitation of offers on project calls and consequent reputation risks

		enterprises is still quite limited and constraining; • Financial issues: Shortage of a clear framework to address the financial and support needs during the start-up, development, and growth phases of social enterprises;	
Opportunities			
Italy • Reform Implementation: The recent reform (Law 106/2016 and Decree 112/2017) aims to address some of the sector's shortcomings, potentially fostering broader development. • Emerging Market Sectors: Potential growth areas include health, education, corporate welfare, organic agriculture, renewable energy, and social housing. New business sectors of general interest, such as waste management and advanced education, offer significant growth potential. • Public-Private Partnerships: Partnerships with conventional enterprises can provide new opportunities for social	Germany • Institutional support – support networks: New advice centers as well as existing start-up centers are increasingly interested in the topic; Expanding social entrepreneurship networks (SEND e.V.); Stronger focus on the development of infrastructure for creating and implementing social enterprises; • Financial support: Growing promotion and financial support of social entrepreneurship; • Political support: Consolidated political support for social entrepreneurship; • Increased opportunities for teaching / training: Stronger interest in the topic on University, community and civil society levels;	Romania • EU support: The European Community (EC) encourages the development and strengthen of social enterprises (social economy) by its specific means: policies, financial support, projects platforms, etc. • Aligning national and EU policies: The national policies and strategies dynamics align with the European ones, increasing the support and the allowance of valuable resources towards the social economy (The national strategy regarding social inclusion and poverty reduction for the period 2022—2027, The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), etc.); The nowadays governments increased considerably the initiatives	Slovenia • EU support: EU membership: the European Community (EC) through its policies encourages the growth of social enterprises (social economy); the EC designed various forms of financial incentives and support; • Governmental support: The current government develops numerous initiatives to support social economy and social entrepreneurship; The public and policy makers are becoming more aware of the importance of social entrepreneurship; Niche/quota strategy for procurement could use social clauses in current legislation; • Strengthening research and media: Strengthening research/policy/media networking • Informal economy: Social entrepreneurship plays a role in addressing the size of the informal economy;





<p>enterprises to expand and innovate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Innovation and Public Collaboration: <p>The rising collaboration between citizens and public authorities and the emergence of innovative community initiatives suggest significant untapped potential.</p>		<p>towards the social economy and social entrepreneurship (financing, legislation, mentoring, implementing, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher Education and research focus: <p>Higher education and associated research involvement in the social economy and social entrepreneurship is increasing in the last years, with overall positive effects;</p>	
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The SWOT-table above allows a comparison of some of the most important traits defining the social entrepreneurship sector, including educational, financial and policy support in the four project countries Romania, Italy, Slovenia, and Germany. The similarities and differences between the social entrepreneurship sectors as part of the social economy and the welfare state in the partner countries become more visible along the four analyzed dimensions: strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities for social enterprises.

8 Networks and other mutual support mechanisms

The OECD recommends creating and strengthening institutional support networks for the development of social enterprises and social economy (second recommendation).⁶⁸ Each of the four project countries Italy, Germany, Romania and Slovenia have diverse support mechanisms for social enterprises as part of the social economy. As previously mentioned, the countries with stronger roots in the welfare system, Italy and Germany, have a wide range of network types supporting social entrepreneurship endeavors. The countries where social entrepreneurship evolved mostly since 2011 with considerable support from the EU (through funding and supporting guidelines provided by the Social Entrepreneurship Act 2011), Slovenia and Romania, have a comparatively lower number of social enterprises than Italy and Germany. Accordingly, there are only a few relevant networks supporting the social entrepreneurship ecosystem.

In this chapter, the most important networks and other mutual support mechanisms for social entrepreneurs in Italy, Germany, Slovenia and Romania will be presented as a source of inspiration.

8.1.1 Italy

In Italy, different types of support networks for social enterprises played a key role in boosting the widespread growth and development of social entrepreneurship sector. The good availability of data and knowledge from both official and administrative statistics and private research has boosted the visibility of the sector and has contributed to clarifying the role of social enterprises for policymakers at both the national and local levels.

In Italy, networks can be classified into four main groups: (1) representative bodies, (2) national, regional and local consortia, (3) support networks, and (4) networks running entrepreneurial activities.⁶⁹ Below, some relevant support networks are presented.

1) IRIS Network, <https://irisnetwork.it/>

IRIS Network is the national network of researchers and research institutes on social enterprises. It supports empirical investigation and theoretical ideas to facilitate a deep understanding of social enterprise organisations, affirming their role and improving their ability to act. The IRIS Network promotes ideas and the exchange of information between research centres, universities, single researchers and the world of social entrepreneurship. Their hallmark event, the Scientific

⁶⁸ OECD Legal Instruments (2024): Recommendation of the Council on the Social and Solidarity Economy and Social Innovation.

⁶⁹ Borzaga, Carlo (2020): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Italy, p. 70.



Colloquium on Social Enterprise, has been instrumental, showcasing over 400 research papers.⁷⁰ Other activities include organizing workshops, publishing scientific research and reports about social entrepreneurship.

2) European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises (Euricse), <https://euricse.eu/it/>

Euricse is a research institute that offers Research, training and consulting regarding cooperative and social enterprises and other nonprofit organizations. It was founded in 2008 at the initiative of the University of Trento, with the support of the Trentino Federation of Cooperatives, the Autonomous Province of Trento, the Cassa di Risparmio di Trento, Rovereto Foundation, and the International Cooperative Alliance.

The mission of Euricse is to promote knowledge development and innovation for the field of cooperatives, social enterprises and other nonprofit organizations engaged in the production of goods and services. The European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises aims to deepen the understanding of these types of organizations and their impact on economic and social development, furthering their growth and supporting them to work more effectively. Through activities directed toward and in partnership with both the scholarly community and practitioners, including primarily theoretical and applied research and training, we address issues of national and international interest to this sector, favoring openness and collaboration.

3) Forum Terzo Settore, Forum of the Third Sector, <https://www.forumterzosettore.it/>

The National Third Sector Forum ETS is a representative network for social enterprises in Italy. It is structured as a non-profit organization and is the main unitary representative body of the Italian Third Sector. It was officially established on 19 June 1997. According to communicates by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, the Forum of the Third Sector is the most representative association of Third Sector organizations in Italy, based on the number of member organisations. The Forum represents approximately 100 national organizations (of which 86 are registered in the National Third Sector Register) and over 121,000 territorial organizations (of which at least approximately 43,000 are already registered in the National Third Sector Register). The represented organizations operate in the fields of Volunteering, Social Cooperation, International Solidarity, Ethical Finance, Fair Trade in our Country.

⁷⁰ Fronzoni, Vasco; Melillo, Luigia (2024): National Report on Social Entrepreneurship in the Higher Education Sector in Italy.





Other relevant networks and representative bodies in Italy are:⁷¹

Representative bodies

- Federsolidrietà, <https://www.federsolidarieta.confcooperative.it/en>
- Legacoopsociali, <https://www.legacoopsociali.it/>

National, regional and local consortia

- Consorzio nazionale Idee in Rete, <https://www.ideeinrete.org/home>
- Consorzio InConcerto, <https://consorzioinconcerto.it/>
- Gruppo Cooperativo Gino Mattarelli-CGM, <https://cgm.coop/>
- Con.Solida, <https://www.consolida.it/>
- Sol.Co consorzio di imprese sociali siciliane, <https://www.solco.coop/>

Networks running entrepreneurial activities and social enterprise incubators

- Impact Hub, <https://www.impacthub.it/en/>
- A Cube, <https://www.torinosocialimpact.it/en/ecosystem/make-a-cube%C2%B3/>
- SocialFare, <https://socialfare.org/>

8.1.2 Germany

Each German state has established networks autonomously supporting social entrepreneurship. Additionally, there are important social entrepreneurship networks at the level of the German Federation. The National Strategy for Social Innovation (2023) aims to create a unified framework for the different networks. In the following, the focus will be on the most important networks at federation level.

1) SEND e.V. (Social Entrepreneurship Netzwerk Deutschland), (<https://www.send-ev.de/>) is the federation-wide network for social entrepreneurs. The association connects the social entrepreneurship system, organizes events, conferences, offers counseling and courses in social entrepreneurship, publishes the every two years the Social Entrepreneurship Monitor for Germany, and represents the interests of social entrepreneurs in Germany. Currently, the organization has 800 members. Financially, SEND sustains itself through member contributions, cooperation, projects, and through contributions by social investors.

2) FA-SE (Financing Agency for Social Entrepreneurship), (<https://fa-se.de/en/>) is a professional advisor for finding and mobilizing capital for impact ventures to create impact at scale. It is among the largest financial advisors for social entrepreneurs in Europe and aims to contribute to the overall

⁷¹ Borzaga, Carlo (2020): Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report Italy, p. 59.





development of the social ecosystem in Europe. It operates with impact ventures and a large network of impact founders and capital providers – from private investors, philanthropists, family offices and business angels, to foundations, VCs, ethical banks, asset managers and public funders. FA-SE works with state-of-the-art financing models that are adapted to each specific case. They encompass the entire range of impact financing instruments and include hybrid or blended finance solutions with catalytic capital. They support impact ventures in raising suitable capital to scale their impact. Until now, they have channeled more than 75 million EUR to the sector and assisted with the implementation of over 85 projects. Currently, FA-SE offers the possibility to participate in a Social Enterprise Idea Development Programme (<https://fa-se.de/en/social-enterprise-idea-development-program/>). Additionally, it collaborates with the European Social Innovation and Impact Fund (<https://www.avesco.de/european-social-innovation-and-impact-fund/>) which invests in social enterprises from Germany and the European Union. This specifically promotes business models that achieve a positive social impact, e.g. in the areas of education, equal rights and equal opportunities or the economical use of resources.

3) Social Impact Award (<https://germany.socialimpactaward.net/>) is a network supporting young, early-stage social entrepreneurs from 25 countries, including Germany, Slovenia, and Romania, in developing and implementing innovative solutions to tackle the social and environmental challenges. The programme runs since 2009.

Social Impact Award Germany (SIA) is the sister company of Social Impact Award and is focused on empowering youth to develop social impact ventures in Germany. SIA supports youth becoming active agents of change that build social ventures and innovative solutions to the world's most pressing issues. It hosts local events and organizes workshops on social entrepreneurship, running incubation programs to help validate and prototype impact and business models, and nurturing this global community of resilient social entrepreneurs whose stories raise awareness about the field and inspire local youth to take action.

SIA's role consists in enabling young people to translate their talents and passions into impactful endeavours that address important societal challenges both locally and globally. Because young people lack multidimensional support to become active citizens and social innovators, SIA offers advice and workshops. The most important dimensions are: suggesting valid models, developing competences, supporting with finding resources, supporting with developing networks.

8.1.3 Romania

The few networks supporting social entrepreneurship in Romania exist as a product of projects carried out with EU funding. They developed in a top-down process rather than bringing together organizations sharing a common need. Some of the most representative organizations fostering social entrepreneurship development are presented below.



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1) RISE – The Romanian Network of Social Insertion Enterprises (<https://riseromania.ro/>)

The purpose of RISE is to promote the social, professional and economic integration of people in difficulty in Romania on the labor market, through the development of social enterprises.

RISE advocates for social and cohesion, economic and environmental policies that guarantee the access of marginalized social groups to essential rights for employment, education, housing, maintenance, culture and well-being.

The specific objectives of RISE are:

- Communication, cooperation between members, fostering and developing partnerships, sharing experience; supporting the professionalization of social insertion enterprises and the mutualization and capitalization of skills and knowledge in the field of socio-professional insertion;
- Support services for access to finance, development of new activities and support in promoting products and services made in the community, as well as in identifying markets for them; creation of a national directory of structures, as well as products and services generated by social insertion enterprises;
- Carrying out awareness-raising and education actions and activities in the fields relevant for the social and professional insertion of excluded / marginalized / vulnerable people through the social economy;
- Analysis, research, statistics and prospecting for social, economic, entrepreneurial, pedagogical innovation.
- Representation in the field of public policies, consultative role in relation to local, national and European political authorities and synergy with other existing organizations, networks, groups at national and international level (consultation in the elaboration of national legislative devices in the social field, education, training and qualification employment, the economy, obtaining tax facilities, implementing social clauses, public procurement, tax deductions, facilitating access to funding from national or international funds) to participate in the development of national and European public policies to combat exclusion and sustainable development.

2) FONSS – National Federation of NGOs for social services (<https://fonss.ro/>)

The National Federation of NGOs for social services was founded in 2014 and is established in the North-Eastern Region of Romania, but aims at extending its activity nationally. FONSS has 44 members, NGOs providing social services to vulnerable groups.

FONSS aims at contributing to strengthening the capacity of the non-governmental organizations of Romania to act in the field of social services for achieving the following objectives:

- Promoting the involvement of the non-governmental organizations of Romania in the local, regional, national, European and cross-border politics in order to develop social services;





- Supporting the non-governmental organizations of Romania in contributing effectively to the sustainable development of the social services in the community;
- Raising the awareness of the citizens concerning the development of the social services in the community as means of inclusion and for fighting against poverty.

Other relevant organizations are retirees mutual aid associations (OMENIA) and Social Economy Coalition. An important non-EU international organization supporting the development of social enterprises in Romania is Ashoka.

8.1.4 Slovenia

In Slovenia, a relatively large number of organisations serve as a supportive environment for social entrepreneurship. However, the need to create an overall network of social enterprises connecting social enterprises to cooperatives or associations is still a desideratum. The network would provide a supportive environment for the social enterprises, represent the interests of social entrepreneurs and offer the possibility of mentoring knowledge transfer between experienced and new social enterprises.⁷² Nonetheless, there is a representative federation of agricultural cooperatives with a tradition from the 1970s.⁷³

In 2021, the Slovenian Ministry of economy, tourism and sport allocated specific funds to support social entrepreneurship, especially through seed funding, the set-up of consulting services and mentorship schemes.

Several organisations support the development of social economy and social entrepreneurship in Slovenia on a regional level. A few of them are presented below.

1) Regional Development Agency of Gorenjska – BSC Kranj (<https://www.bsc-kranj.si/en/>)

The Regional Development Agency of Gorenjska – BSC Kranj promotes sustainable regional development and creates development opportunities for local communities. The Agency has been actively engaged in supporting entrepreneurship and preparing various projects since 1995. Its involvement includes securing funding from both national and European development sources, and facilitating the expansion of the partner network internationally and locally.

⁷² Sens Network (2020): Analysis of social entrepreneurship in Slovenia, <https://sens-network.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Analysis-of-social-entrepreneurship-in-Slovenia-english-version.pdf>.

⁷³ https://social-economy-gateway.ec.europa.eu/my-country/slovenia_en#:~:text=Support%20organizations%20or%20networks%20for%20social%20economy%3A%201,of%20Slovenia%207%20PINA%20%E2%80%93%20Cultural%20Educational%20Society.





The Agency promotes the development of the Gorenjska region, which includes 18 municipalities: Bled, Bohinj, Cerklje na Gorenjska, Gorenja vas – Poljane, Gorje, Jesenice, Jezersko, Kranj, Kranjska Gora, Naklo, Preddvor, Radovljica, Šenčur, Škofja Loka, Tržič, Železniki, Žiri and Žirovnica.

2) BODI SOC – Strengthening the support environment for social enterprises in the area of the Eastern Slovenia Cohesion Region (<https://www.bodisoc.si/>)

BODI SOC is a project carried out by the Development Agency of the Savinja Region and co-financed by the Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of Economy, Tourism and Sport the European Regional Development Fund. The project aims to create a supportive environment for social enterprises in the area of the Eastern Slovenia Cohesion Region.

The goals of BODI SOC are establishing an effective and stimulating support environment for social enterprises, strengthening the skills and competencies of social entrepreneurs, increasing the opportunities for establishing new social enterprises, promoting the growth and promotion of existing social enterprises, contributing to the creation of new jobs and integrating social enterprises with the local environment. For achieving these goals, BODI SOC will carry out at least 42 consultations, ca. 90 hours of training, ca. 24 hours of workshops and provide non-financial support to at least 42 social enterprises.

The target groups of the project are existing and potentially new social enterprises that are registered or in the process of registration, in accordance with the Social Entrepreneurship Act and other actors of the ecosystem for the support of the social economy.

3) Združenje CAAP (CAAP Association, <http://brazde.org/>)

CAAP Association is a supporting non-governmental organization for the development of the social economy and new social practices, with an emphasis on research, development, advocacy, training and consulting in the field of cooperatives, which has supported over 60 social enterprises in their start-up and development since its establishment in 2011, half of which are cooperatives. The long-term vision of CAAP is to become an organizationally and financially stable professional, specialized and internationally connected support organization for the development of cooperatives and new social practices related to cooperatives.

National, regional, and local support networks are essential for the thriving of social enterprises in the four partner countries. As expected, in the countries with a long tradition of the welfare state, Italy and Germany, diverse types of support networks for social enterprises are in place: representative networks that support social enterprises on the policy and dissemination levels; networks of social enterprises; support networks that sustain the development and activities of social enterprises and provide appropriate education, such as networks of innovation hubs; regional,





local and national consortia that provide institutional support for social enterprises and help create the necessary infrastructure for their development. In Slovenia and Romania, despite favorable policies and supporting national legislation and despite additional support through EU funded projects, social entrepreneurship networks are not yet widespread and sustainable. In Slovenia, the development of a national social entrepreneurship network would be recommended. In Romania, the sustainable support of the available social entrepreneurship networks would be of great assistance to this sector of the social economy.





9 Recommendations for educators and students

Educators today face the challenge of preparing students and social entrepreneurs to address the complex problems posed by ongoing crises in sustainability, politics, and economics, as well as the resulting difficulties in the labor market. They must also confront social issues such as inequality, environmental degradation, and social exclusion.

The nature and purpose of higher education in social entrepreneurship continue to evolve. For policymakers in many countries, the positive relationship between education and economic growth has often led to a focus on higher education serving economic purposes. This sometimes overlooks important aspects such as socioeconomic structures, the emancipatory purpose, and even the moral dimension of education, especially when aimed at "sustainability."

Therefore, it is essential for educators and students to bear in mind these multifaceted challenges and maintain a harmonious balance between them. The task is to develop a world that responds swiftly and effectively to social challenges, where each individual has the freedom, confidence, and societal support to tackle any social problem and drive meaningful change. To achieve this, we must effectively educate the next generation of leaders in social entrepreneurship.

Given the increasing pace of global change and the rise of intractable and emerging social challenges, social entrepreneurship education needs to prepare the next generation to become competent problem-solvers. It is also important to recognize the diversity of social entrepreneurship experiences in the partner countries of this consortium.

These differences include varying definitions of the term, the presence of a legal framework (particularly in Italy and Romania), and the differing levels of experience (with Germany and Italy being more established in this field, while it remains a newer concept in other regions). In Romania, for instance, social entrepreneurship often depends on European Union funding, and many initiatives cease once funding ends. Despite these variations, educators remain crucial to the success of social entrepreneurship efforts.

As Victor Hugo wrote, "*There are no such things as bad plants or bad men. There are only bad cultivators*" (Les Misérables). In the same way, educational experiences should strive to become transformative and world changing.

Traditional educational models often fail to equip social entrepreneurs and students with the skills and mindset needed to create sustainable, impactful change in their communities. It is therefore crucial for educators who integrate social entrepreneurship into their teaching to provide students with the tools to become proactive, socially responsible citizens. They should guide students in fostering entrepreneurial approaches that create social value and drive sustainable development.





Educators must also explore how social entrepreneurship can engage and inspire students, giving them a sense of purpose and the ability to make a tangible difference in the world. Students should be involved in various activities, including lectures, case studies, and hands-on workshops. These should cover topics such as the steps to build a social enterprise, the characteristics of successful social entrepreneurs, and the legal structures they can use.

Students and educators alike must address the challenges of scaling social impact and the role of social enterprises in achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) according to Agenda 2030. Educators need to develop a deep understanding of how to teach and support the creation and sustainability of social enterprises that make a meaningful impact. They have to be equipped with the skills to tackle the challenges of social entrepreneurship and apply these competencies in their educational settings, fostering a generation of socially conscious leaders and innovators.

In this context, the importance of entrepreneurship educators, their training, and their professional development cannot be overstated. Ineffective teachers produce poor results. No digital tool, script, or course design can replace a skilled, motivated, and competent entrepreneurship educator who inspires their students to view entrepreneurship as a viable career and develop the skills needed to solve today's grand challenges.

Therefore, entrepreneurship educators and practitioners should be entrepreneurial themselves.

This does not mean they must start businesses, but they should adopt an entrepreneurial mindset, seeing the challenges of entrepreneurship education as opportunities to develop, implement, and test innovative teaching methods. However, not every new idea deserves to be celebrated simply because it is new and fancy. A good entrepreneurial educator must carefully consider their goals, the needs of their target audience, and their own personal growth. This often requires going beyond traditional teaching methods and focusing more on facilitating learning processes. The right kind of research is also needed to evaluate and improve teaching approaches, tools, and methods, ensuring a vibrant and successful entrepreneurship education.

10 Recommendations for counsellors and policy makers

Research on social entrepreneurship has been exploring various policy proposals to enhance its impact in Europe and worldwide, with authors and stakeholders in social organizations of various kind expressing their views, not only for the countries included in this study, but also on the level of the EU. These proposals aim to address the unique socio-economic and political challenges and opportunities within each country, fostering an environment favorable to social innovation and sustainable development. Below, we present some of the policy recommendations that have been articulated by research.

10.1.1 Germany

Integration into Economic Frameworks: in Germany, social entrepreneurship is increasingly seen as part of the broader economic framework. Policies should support this integration by recognizing social enterprises as key players in economic and social transformation. This involves creating supportive environments that encourage innovation and sustainability within the sector.⁷⁴

Diverse Policy Approaches: German policymakers are encouraged to adopt diverse approaches that reflect the multifaceted nature of social entrepreneurship. This includes addressing ecological, societal, and economic dimensions, ensuring that social enterprises can contribute to a wide range of social and environmental goals.⁷⁵

These proposals highlight the potential of social entrepreneurship to drive economic and social change. The diversity in cultural, economic, and political contexts across these countries requires tailored policy approaches. Moreover, the integration of social entrepreneurship into existing economic structures requires careful assessment and planning on a political strategic level to avoid conflicts, of both legal and economical nature, with traditional economic logics and welfare systems. As such, ongoing research and dialogue among stakeholders are essential to design and implement effective policies.

10.1.2 Italy

Third Sector Reform: Italy has undergone significant reforms in its third sector, which have implications for social entrepreneurship. These reforms aim to foster innovation, technology adaptation, and employability within the sector. Policymakers are encouraged to build on these

⁷⁴ Terziev, V. (2019). Social entrepreneurship in Bulgaria and Europe. IJASOS- International E-journal of Advances in Social Sciences, doi: 10.18769/IJASOS.592030

⁷⁵ Milotay, N. (2023). EU policy on social innovation. doi: 10.4337/9781800373358.ch68

reforms by creating policies that further support the growth and sustainability of social enterprises.⁷⁶

Cultural Considerations: Italy's social entrepreneurship landscape is shaped by cultural factors. Policies should be designed to accommodate these cultural influences, ensuring that social enterprises can effectively address local challenges and opportunities.⁷⁷

10.1.3 Romania

Cultural Influence and Policy Development: In Romania, the development of social entrepreneurship is influenced by cultural dimensions, which affect the dominant social enterprise models. Policies should consider these cultural factors to effectively promote social entrepreneurship. This involves creating a unified vision that aligns with Romania's socio-economic context, potentially enhancing the effectiveness of social enterprises in addressing local needs.⁷⁸

Supportive Regulations: Romania is part of a group of EU countries with supportive regulations for social entrepreneurship. These regulations are crucial for fostering innovation and sustainability within the sector. Policymakers are encouraged to continue developing legal and fiscal frameworks that support social enterprises, ensuring they contribute positively to economic and social welfare.⁷⁹

10.1.4 Slovenia

Policy Ecosystem Strengthening: Slovenia's policy recommendations focus on strengthening the existing ecosystem for social entrepreneurship. This includes improving access to finance, enhancing legal frameworks, and facilitating market access for social enterprises. Additionally, there is a need for better social impact measurement and reporting to ensure accountability and transparency in the sector.⁸⁰

Sustainable Development Focus: Slovenian policies should emphasize sustainable development,

⁷⁶ OECD (2022), "Foreword", in *Designing Legal Frameworks for Social Enterprises: Practical Guidance for Policy Makers*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/529df43b-en>.

⁷⁷ Loukopoulos, A., Taylor, M., Sotiropoulou, A., Hvalic Erzetec, B., Mikolič, S., Potočnik, I., Manti, A. (2022). Social entrepreneurship education enhancement through innovative training pedagogies across Europe. *Irish Journal of Management*, doi: 10.2478/ijm-2023-0002

⁷⁸ Loukopoulos, A., Taylor, M., Sotiropoulou, A., Hvalic Erzetec, B., Mikolič, S., Potočnik, I., Manti, A. (2022). Social entrepreneurship education enhancement through innovative training pedagogies across Europe. *Irish Journal of Management*, doi: 10.2478/ijm-2023-0002

⁷⁹ Liptrap, J. (2021). A Social Enterprise Company in EU Organizational Law. doi: 10.1017/CEL.2021.1.

⁸⁰ Martinov, R. (2024). Policies and Challenges for Social Entrepreneurship of EU Countries. *Public Policy.Bg*, 10(3). <https://doi.org/10.58894/EJPP.2019.3.326> (Original work published November 6, 2019)

particularly in transitioning from a socialist to a market-oriented economy. This involves supporting initiatives that address social protection and ecological challenges, thereby fostering a more inclusive and sustainable social economy.⁸¹

These proposals highlight the potential of social entrepreneurship to drive economic and social change. The diversity in cultural, economic, and political contexts across these countries requires tailored policy approaches. Moreover, the integration of social entrepreneurship into existing economic structures requires careful assessment and planning on a political strategic level to avoid conflicts, of both legal and economical nature, with traditional economic logics and welfare systems. As such, ongoing research and dialogue among stakeholders are essential to design and implement effective policies.

10.1.5 European Union

Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a significant focus within the EU policy framework, aimed at addressing social challenges such as poverty, social exclusion, and unemployment. The EU has recognized the potential of social enterprises to contribute to regional cohesion and sustainable growth. Consequently, several proposals have been made to policymakers to enhance the support and development of social entrepreneurship at the EU level. These proposals encompass legal frameworks, financial support, cross-border cooperation, and educational initiatives.

Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

The EU has emphasized the need for developing specific legal frameworks to support social enterprises. The OECD action, funded by the EU, provides guidance on designing these frameworks, focusing on assessing the relevance of new or updated legal structures, analyzing critical factors, and ensuring stakeholder involvement in their development and evaluation.⁸²

A notable proposal includes the European Parliament's 2018 resolution suggesting a directive to facilitate cross-border activities of social enterprises. Although initially met with skepticism by the European Commission, there is potential for reassessment and eventual success, highlighting the importance of regulatory harmonization across member states.⁸³

Financial Support and Economic Impact

⁸¹ Liptrap, J. (2021). A Social Enterprise Company in EU Organizational Law. doi: 10.1017/CEL.2021.1.

⁸² Cagarman, K., Kratzer, J., Osbelt, K. (2020). Social Entrepreneurship: Dissection of a Phenomenon through a German Lens. Sustainability, doi: 10.3390/SU12187764

⁸³ D'Alessio, A., Zbucnea, A., Scaletti, A. (2024). The influence of cultural dimensions on social enterprise models: a comparative study between Italy and Romania. Civil Szemle, doi: 10.62560/csz.2024.02.13

Financial support is crucial for the growth of social enterprises. EU policies advocate for diverse funding sources, including public funds, loans, equity, and hybrid funding models, to ensure the financial sustainability of social enterprises.⁸⁴

Research indicates that supportive regulations in EU countries positively impact social entrepreneurship, contributing to sustainability and innovation. This underscores the importance of an adequate legal and fiscal framework to promote social entrepreneurship.⁸⁵

10.1.6 Cross-Border Cooperation

Social entrepreneurship is seen as a tool for enhancing cross-border cooperation, particularly in EU border regions. The European Commission's territorial cooperation programs aim to leverage the complementarity between institutional and entrepreneurial processes to address regional disparities and foster social cohesion.⁸⁶

10.1.7 Educational and Training Initiatives

Addressing skills gaps and training needs is essential for the development of social enterprises. The EU project 'SocialB' focuses on enhancing social entrepreneurship education through innovative training pedagogies, targeting management, sustainability, and growth challenges in countries like Italy, Ireland, Greece, and Slovenia.⁸⁷

10.1.8 Broader Perspectives and Challenges

While the EU has made significant strides in promoting social entrepreneurship, challenges remain. The lack of a legally binding definition for social enterprises at the EU level complicates the uniform application of policies across member states.⁸⁸ Additionally, the overemphasis on social utility rather than transformative social change poses a barrier to more effective EU policies on

⁸⁴ Kenel, P. (2024). Social Entrepreneurship in Germany. Edition Politik, doi: 10.14361/9783839473153

⁸⁵ Fernández-Guadaño, J., Montes Diez, R. (2023). Social Entrepreneurship Impact in Ten EU Countries with Supportive Regulations. Journal of The Knowledge Economy, doi: 10.1007/s13132-023-01513-4

⁸⁶ Rihter, L., Zidar, R. (2018). Social Entrepreneurship in Slovenia: An Opportunity for Sustainable Development?. Revija Za Socijalnu Politiku, doi: 10.3935/RSP.V25I3.1492

⁸⁷ Schneiders, K. (2017). Social Entrepreneurship als neues Leitbild der Sozialpolitik. doi: 10.1007/978-3-658-15982-5_20

⁸⁸ OECD (2022), "Boosting social entrepreneurship and social enterprise development in Slovenia: In-depth policy review", OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Papers, No. 2022/02, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/8ea2b761-en>.



social innovation.⁸⁹ Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive strategy that includes developing new funding models, strengthening social procurement, and better organizing data to enhance policy effectiveness.

The EU's proposals for social entrepreneurship focus on creating supportive legal and financial environments, fostering cross-border cooperation, and enhancing educational initiatives. These efforts aim to harness the potential of social enterprises to drive social and economic change across the region. However, overcoming existing challenges and refining policy frameworks will be crucial for realizing the full impact of social entrepreneurship in the EU.

From a strictly legal point of view, the creation of specialized Union legislation on social entrepreneurship would help to create a framework form setting minimum standards regarding social enterprises throughout the EU. This would also greatly help in unifying legal terminology such as the definition of a social enterprise. These measures would enable social enterprises to operate in any and every member state without having to comply with every national requirement.

The European Parliament proposed a directive to facilitate cross-border activities of social enterprises, highlighting the need for a harmonized legal framework to support the social economy's integration into the broader EU market. This proposal, although initially met with skepticism, suggests that a consensus might be forming among Member States to support such initiatives in the future.⁹⁰

The diversity in legislative approaches across EU countries, with some nations adapting existing legal forms and others creating new ones, underscores the need for a more uniform EU-wide legal framework. This would help streamline the operations of social enterprises and reduce the complexity arising from varied national regulations.⁹¹

The EU has been urged to develop a comprehensive strategy on social innovation, which includes new funding models and strengthening social procurement. This strategy would address current barriers, such as the lack of theoretical frameworks and an overemphasis on social utility, by focusing on transformative social change.⁹²

⁸⁹ de Boer, S. (2024). (8) Inclusive Policymaking in Social Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: The Role of Local Policy Frameworks in Cultivating Inclusive Social Entrepreneurship. *International studies in entrepreneurship*, doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-50164-7_7

⁹⁰ Liptrap, J. (2021). A Social Enterprise Company in EU Organizational Law. doi: 10.1017/CEL.2021.1. Terziev, V. (2019). Social entrepreneurship in Bulgaria and Europe. *IJASOS- International E-journal of Advances in Social Sciences*, doi: 10.18769/IJASOS.592030

⁹¹ Bohinc, R. (2019). Social Enterprises and Eu Regulation. *International Journal of scientific research and management*, doi: 10.18535/IJSRM/V7I4.LLA01

⁹² Milotay, N. (2023). EU policy on social innovation. doi: 10.4337/9781800373358.ch68





Social entrepreneurship is seen as a key driver of innovation and sustainability, with empirical evidence showing its positive impact on economic and social factors. Policies that promote an adequate legal and fiscal framework are essential to harness these benefits and encourage further innovation in the sector.⁹³

Policymakers are encouraged to support training initiatives that equip social entrepreneurs with the necessary skills to scale their impact, thereby contributing to job creation and economic growth.⁹⁴

While these proposals highlight the EU's commitment to fostering social entrepreneurship, challenges remain. The need for a more cohesive strategy on EU level that aligns with the diverse needs of social enterprises is crucial for maximizing their impact. Addressing these challenges will require ongoing collaboration between EU institutions, Member States, and social enterprises themselves.

⁹³ Fernández-Guadaño, J., Montes Diez, R. (2023). Social Entrepreneurship Impact in Ten EU Countries with Supportive Regulations. *Journal of The Knowledge Economy*, doi: 10.1007/s13132-023-01513-4

⁹⁴ Martinov, R. (2024). Policies and Challenges for Social Entrepreneurship of EU Countries. *Public Policy.Bg*, 10(3). <https://doi.org/10.58894/EJPP.2019.3.326> (Original work published November 6, 2019)





11 Summary

The present report offers a comparative analysis of social entrepreneurship in Italy, Germany, Romania, and Slovenia, the four partner countries implementing the DigiFUNCollab project. At the same time, it takes the policies of the European Union in this regard as a reference point. The report is structured in ten chapters and also gives a list with useful resources for the approached topics.

The introduction is an invitation to reading. It offers an overview of the main issues discussed, and highlights key findings. It presents emerging trends and challenges in social entrepreneurship in the four analyzed countries, and suggests key recommendations for improving the social entrepreneurship ecosystems.

Chapter 2 compares the definitions of social entrepreneurship in the four project countries. In each country, the definitions of the concept emerged in relation to the local history of welfare associations, and the Social Business Initiative of the European Union (2011). While there is no single definition of social entrepreneurship, the distinction between a legal and an operational perspective on social enterprises can be observed overall. However, most available definitions rely on the framework of social entrepreneurship coined by the Social Business Act of the European Commission (2011). The respective act introduced an operational concept of social enterprises, referring to three key dimensions: running commercial activities (entrepreneurial/economic dimension), achieving a societal common good (social dimension) and having a management structure that reflects their mission (inclusive governance-ownership dimension).

Chapter 3 scrutinizes the social entrepreneurship ecosystems in the four participating countries from the point of view of its legal and political recognition. With the exception of Italy, the project countries have established national policy frameworks for supporting social enterprises. However, Italy is the first country to have passed a legal framework concerning social entrepreneurship in 1991. Germany doesn't have a legislation targeting directly social enterprises, but this type of organizations are encompassed by laws for other welfare organizations that are part of the social economy. Romania and Slovenia developed their legislation about the social economy based on the EU Social Business Act (2011). Nonetheless, the legislation in both countries is narrower than the diversity of forms for social enterprises. Slovenia has a high number of de facto enterprises that are not registered as such. Romania's legislation focuses mainly on WISE (social insertion enterprises and work integration social enterprises) and offers a limited perspective for the development of social enterprises. Nonetheless, through adequate education and more public acceptance, the social entrepreneurship ecosystems can become more sustainable.

Chapter 4 presents selected best practices in the area of social entrepreneurship in the four project countries that have the potential to inspire others and be transferred to other parts of the European Union. From each partner country, two good practices are presented. The focus is on organizations

that qualify as operational social enterprises and irrespective of their legal form.

Chapter 5 offers an overview over the social entrepreneurship education in the four participating countries. In all, the situation is promising and a wide range of training offers has emerged, despite the lack of synchronized actions such as nation-wide educational strategies or a mainstreaming of the social entrepreneurship dimension in entrepreneurship education in general. The social entrepreneurship training and education is more diverse in Italy and Germany, countries with a longer tradition of the welfare state. In Slovenia and Romania, social entrepreneurship training offers are rather scattered and still depend on a high degree on EU-funded projects. However, universities and other training providers offer courses and even study programmes on this topic.

The following chapter 6 proposes a range of competences needed by social entrepreneurs. It takes the EntreComp booklet of entrepreneurship competences as a source of inspiration. The competences were grouped in three categories, following the specific differences between general entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship and also taking into account the personal competences needed: 1) Overall entrepreneurship competences; 2) Social entrepreneurship competences; 3) Personal competences.

Chapter 7 discusses trends, opportunities and challenges in social entrepreneurship in the four countries and compares their respective ecosystems. A shared strength in the four countries is their aim to stay aligned with the respective policies, even if their social entrepreneurship sectors are different. One of the main weaknesses in the four countries in the area of social entrepreneurship is related to sustainability and the relatively limited life-span of 5-8 years for social enterprises. Additionally, a main common threat in the four countries is the struggle with financial issues and lack of adequate financial support. Nonetheless, an important opportunity is the EU support for further developing the social entrepreneurship sector in all the four countries.

Chapter 8 presents the most important social entrepreneurship networks and support mechanisms in Italy, Germany, Slovenia and Romania. As already mentioned, the countries with stronger historical roots in the welfare system, Italy and Germany, have a wide range of networks supporting social entrepreneurship. In Romania and Slovenia there are only a few relevant networks developed with considerable support through EU funding and guidelines that need additional support to become more sustainable. National, regional, and local support networks are essential for the thriving of social enterprises in the four partner countries and the OECD recommends strengthening and expanding them.

Chapter 9 provides key recommendations for social entrepreneurship educators and students. Traditional educational models often fail to equip social entrepreneurs and students with the skills and mindset needed to create sustainable, impactful change in their communities. Therefore, it is crucial for educators of social entrepreneurship to offer students the tools to become proactive, socially responsible citizens.



Chapter 10 offers essential recommendations for counselors and policy makers. Their aim is to address the unique socio-economic and political challenges and opportunities within each country, fostering an environment favorable to social innovation and sustainable development. Social entrepreneurship appears as a key driver of innovation and sustainability, with empirical evidence showing its positive impact on economic and social factors. Despite the differences between the participating countries, the need for a more cohesive social entrepreneurship strategy on EU level is crucial for maximizing the impact of social enterprises.





12 Resources

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