

Social entrepreneurship in economic development: perceptions, impact and challenges - the case of Romania

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Abstract. Objective: The article investigates perceptions of social entrepreneurship in Romania, focusing on its contribution to local economic development, inclusion and economic equity, educational role, and institutional support. The study aims to highlight both the recognized benefits and the challenges faced by social enterprises. **Method:** The analysis is based on a structured questionnaire (21 questions) applied to a gender-balanced sample (58.9% women; 41.1% men), diverse in age (under 30 years: 42.1%; 30-45 years: 36.8%; 46-60 years: 21.1%) and professional background (56% economic; 44% technical). **Results:** The findings indicate a generally high level of agreement (3.6-4.8 out of 5) regarding the role of social entrepreneurship in local development, with specialists, NGOs, and social entrepreneurs showing the highest levels of support. Perceptions of reducing inequalities and integrating vulnerable groups are positive but more reserved among traditional entrepreneurs and citizens without entrepreneurial experience. Community support and awareness remain modest, while collaboration with local authorities and networks among social entrepreneurs are valued. The main obstacles identified include limited financing, restrictive legal frameworks, and insufficient access to information. **Originality:** Despite structural barriers, confidence in the future role of social entrepreneurship as a pillar of the economy is strong. The study provides one of the few empirical perspectives on Romanian social entrepreneurship, underlining the need for tailored public policies and improved communication of results to strengthen the sector's visibility and sustainability.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship, local economic impact, inclusion, institutional support, public policies, Romania.

JEL classification: O35, L31, R11, I38, M14

1. Introduction

Social entrepreneurship has gained visibility in the last decade as a mechanism for generating both economic and social value by solving community problems through entrepreneurial tools. In Romania, although the sector is developing, evidence regarding the perceptions of relevant actors-from specialists and NGOs to traditional entrepreneurs, employees, and citizens-remains fragmented. Understanding these perceptions is essential both for calibrating public policies and for the effectiveness of local initiatives.

The rationale for selecting this topic lies in the growing recognition of social entrepreneurship as a dual mechanism for social and economic transformation in Romania. Its study allows for a better understanding of how social innovation can generate measurable economic value and promote regional cohesion.

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Beyond its social dimension, social entrepreneurship is increasingly acknowledged as an emerging economic mechanism capable of generating employment, activating underutilised local resources, and reducing pressure on public welfare systems. Therefore, analysing perceptions without considering their economic implications would risk offering a partial interpretation of the phenomenon. For this reason, this study approaches social entrepreneurship not only as a social innovation instrument but also as a potential driver of local economic transformation.

This study systematically examines: (i) familiarity with social entrepreneurship; (ii) perceptions of local economic impact, inclusion, and equity; (iii) the educational role and support provided to young people; (iv) institutional and community support; (v) structural challenges (financing, regulation, access to information); and (vi) confidence in the future role of social entrepreneurship.

The study relies on a structured 21-item questionnaire applied to a diverse and gender-balanced sample, covering various age groups, occupational statuses, and professional backgrounds, predominantly from the economic and technical fields.

The results show high agreement regarding the economic role of social entrepreneurship, a favourable perception of its capacity to reduce inequalities and integrate vulnerable groups, as well as appreciation for collaborations with authorities and networks among entrepreneurs. At the same time, persistent barriers are reported, especially regarding access to financing, legislative constraints, and information deficits, together with a low level of community support and public awareness. The contribution of the article lies in highlighting differences in perception between professional categories and in formulating directions for action to strengthen the ecosystem: more adequate public policies, development of support infrastructure, and intensified communication towards the general public.

Key hypotheses:

- (i) Social entrepreneurship contributes significantly to community development and inequality reduction;
- (ii) (ii) an adequate financial and legal framework stimulates sector development;
- (iii) (iii) the degree of awareness and community support influences the sustainability of initiatives.

The research design is based on a 21-question survey applied to a diverse sample in terms of gender, age, occupational status, and professional background (predominantly economic, but with a significant technical component).

2. Literature review

Recent studies emphasize the growing role of social entrepreneurship in promoting inclusive and sustainable economic development. Social enterprises contribute to local economies by creating jobs, fostering innovation, and integrating vulnerable groups into the labor market (European Commission, 2020; OECD, 2022).

At the same time, research shows that their potential is often constrained by limited access to finance, regulatory uncertainty, and low public awareness (Doherty, Haugh & Lyon, 2019; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). The effectiveness of social enterprises depends strongly on institutional support, networking opportunities, and the recognition of their social value by communities (Phillips et al., 2022).

Overall, the literature highlights both the transformative capacity of social entrepreneurship and the persistent structural barriers that affect its consolidation, especially in emerging economies such as Romania.

In recent years, social entrepreneurship has increasingly been discussed not only as a mechanism for social innovation but also as a hybrid economic model capable of generating both social and financial value within local ecosystems (European Commission, 2023; OECD, 2023). The concept aligns with the foundational vision of Yunus (2007), who framed social business as a hybrid model combining economic function with a social mission. Comparative analyses at the European level indicate that social enterprises in Western Europe tend to operate within more consolidated support frameworks, characterised by structured fiscal incentives, impact measurement tools, and access to hybrid financing instruments (Phillips et al., 2022; Utama & Bhatt, 2024). In contrast, in Central and

Eastern European contexts, including Romania, the development of social entrepreneurship is still emerging and often lacks institutional continuity and economic recognition (OECD, 2023; RISE Romania, 2023).

Recent national analyses, such as the *Social Economy Barometer, 2025 Edition*, signal increased institutional awareness of the sector by documenting the rise in certified social enterprises and the gradual integration of impact-related indicators into policy agendas. However, these reports remain primarily descriptive and oriented towards programmatic evaluation rather than analytical interpretation. Similarly, sectoral commentaries published in 2023–2024 (e.g., *CECCAR Business Magazine, Manager.ro*) highlight the potential of social enterprises to contribute to employment and community resilience but do not systematically assess how these enterprises are perceived in relation to their economic role (Social Finance Association et al., 2025).

Scholarly literature has acknowledged the dual mission of social enterprises, emphasising their potential to address unmet social needs while simultaneously activating local economic capacities (Bacq & Defourny, 2021; Doherty, Haugh & Lyon, 2019). Nevertheless, the majority of empirical studies on Romania have focused either on legal classifications or on qualitative community case studies (Bucaciuc, 2022; Cojocaru, 2023), with limited empirical work assessing perceptions from multiple stakeholder categories. Moreover, while European research increasingly links social entrepreneurship to inclusive labour market dynamics and regional regeneration strategies (OECD, 2023), such analytical framing remains marginal in Romanian academic production.

Consequently, although there is growing institutional documentation of social entrepreneurship, there remains a clear research gap regarding how its economic role is perceived by different social and professional groups in Romania. Existing literature has not sufficiently examined whether social entrepreneurship is understood merely as a social intervention or whether it is beginning to be acknowledged as an economic driver capable of generating employment, reducing public expenditure, and contributing to local development. This study positions itself within this gap by empirically analysing perception patterns while explicitly connecting them to the potential economic implications of social entrepreneurship - a dimension that is underexplored but increasingly relevant in the current Romanian socio-economic context.

3. Methodology

The research used an online questionnaire applied during January–March 2025. A total of 600 individuals were initially contacted through professional and civic networks, including members of Rotaract and Bizz Club, NGO representatives active in the field of social economy, and employees from both the public and private sectors. Out of these, 95 valid responses were collected, resulting in a response rate of approximately 16%, which is considered acceptable for perception-based exploratory research conducted via online questionnaires (Phillips et al., 2022). The sampling approach can be characterised as purposive and knowledge-based, as participants were intentionally selected based on their potential exposure to the topic of social entrepreneurship.

The design of the questionnaire was informed by conceptual dimensions identified in the EMES European Research Network framework and survey structures used in European Commission studies on social enterprise ecosystems (European Commission, 2020; OECD, 2023). The items were adapted contextually to the Romanian socio-economic environment in order to ensure both comparability with existing literature and contextual validity in analysing local perceptions.

The targets included: 100 social enterprises (according to the national registry), entrepreneurs from Rotaract and Bizz Club networks (Suceava, Cluj-Napoca), public sector employees, leaders of five NGOs involved in the social economy, and community citizens. In total, 95 responses were collected.

Table 1. Structure of the questionnaire

Section	Description	Questions
Personal data	Collection of information on gender, age, professional background, and occupational status	Gender, age, training, occupational status
Familiarity with social entrepreneurship	Degree of knowledge of the concept of social entrepreneurship	Q1-Q2
Impact of social entrepreneurship on the local economy and community development	Perception of the impact of social entrepreneurship on the economy, inequality reduction, and job creation	Q3-Q10
Support and collaboration in social entrepreneurship	Level of support received by social enterprises from NGOs, authorities, and the community	Q11-Q13
Challenges faced by social enterprises	Main difficulties encountered, including access to finance and legal regulations	Q14-Q16
Opportunities and the future of social entrepreneurship	Perspectives on the future of social entrepreneurship and its long-term economic impact	Q17-Q21

Source: Author's own representation.

3.1. Economic dimension of social entrepreneurship in Romania

While social entrepreneurship is typically conceptualised through its social mission, recent developments indicate its increasing relevance as an emerging economic actor in Romania. Rather than functioning solely as a corrective mechanism for social exclusion, social entrepreneurship is increasingly recognised for its contribution to employment generation, local economic circulation, and public expenditure optimisation. This dimension becomes particularly significant in a national context where, according to Eurostat data (2024–2025), more than one quarter of Romania's population remains at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

According to the Social Economy Barometer – 2025 Edition, Romania registers 122,754 entities with social impact, of which 2,932 were officially certified as social enterprises between 2016 and 2024. Among these, 1,836 are active, having generated 4,036 direct jobs and an estimated 96.5 million lei contribution to GDP. Projections linked to FSE+, Just Transition, and ITI Delta Dunării programmes indicate the potential creation of up to 30,000 additional jobs by 2026, two-thirds reserved for vulnerable groups. This suggests that social entrepreneurship is transitioning from symbolic community intervention to measurable economic participation.

Data from the National Institute of Statistics (INS, 2022) further highlight that the social economy includes approximately 11,000 active entities employing more than 30,000 people. Case studies such as Fundația Pentru Voi (Timișoara) and ADV Romania (Iași) illustrate that social enterprises can reach a consolidated turnover of over €1 million annually, reinvested into social services and community innovation. Estimates by ADV Romania (2023) indicate that “each 1 leu invested in a social enterprise reduces public expenditure by 2–3 lei in the medium term”, reinforcing the idea that social entrepreneurship can serve as a cost-efficient policy instrument.

At a territorial level, social enterprises have contributed to the revitalisation of rural areas through the promotion of local products, community-based tourism initiatives, and alternative care services. However, most registered enterprises remain concentrated in major urban centres such as Bucharest, Cluj, and Timișoara, while rural regions, particularly Nord-Est and Sud-Muntenia, remain underexploited, despite having high potential for inclusive local development.

In terms of financing models, Romanian social enterprises increasingly access hybrid financial instruments, including European grants, crowdfunding, and microcredit schemes such as AFIN, the first dedicated microfinance institution for social entrepreneurs in Romania. In addition, as reported by CECCAR Business Magazine (2023–2024), insertion social enterprises may benefit from up to 90% profit tax exemption when reinvested into their mission, as well as salary subsidies equivalent to the minimum wage for up to three years for vulnerable group employment. These incentives indicate a

gradual shift in policy perception, positioning social entrepreneurship as a relevant component of economic development strategies, not merely a social adjunct.

Based on these observations, the economic role of social entrepreneurship can be analytically structured along a micro–meso–macro framework, as summarised below:

Table 2. Economic effects of social entrepreneurship – micro, meso and macro perspective

Level of analysis	Economic effects observed	Illustrative evidence
Micro - individuals and communities	Job creation, income stabilisation and reduced dependency on welfare transfers	4,036 current jobs + up to 30,000 projected by 2026; >60% labour reintegration rate (ADV Romania)
Meso - social enterprises as organisations	Revenue reinvestment, access to hybrid financing, development of circular and community-oriented business models	>€1 million consolidated annual turnover (ADV Romania); Impact Accelerator grants (€10,000–50,000)
Macro - regional and national economy	Contribution to GDP, reduction of public expenditure and stimulation of territorial cohesion	96.5 million lei GDP contribution; fiscal exemptions up to 90%; underexploited rural potential (Nord-Est, Sud-Muntenia)

Source: Adapted by the author from INS (2022), Social Economy Barometer (2025), ADV Romania (2023) and CECCAR Business Magazine (2023–2024).

4. Research results and comments

Respondents' profile

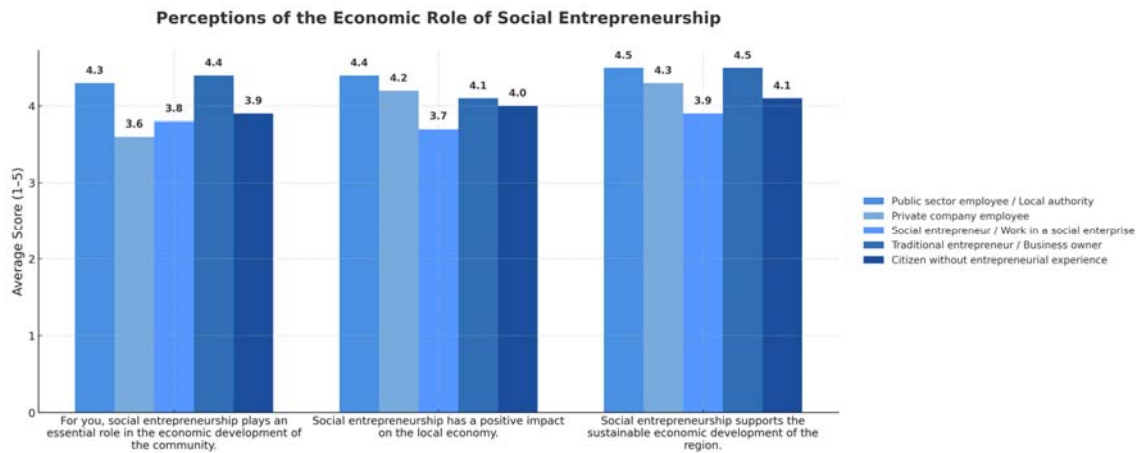
The profile of respondents reflects a balanced distribution across gender, age and educational background, as summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Summary of respondent profile

Category	Sub-category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Women	56	58.9%
	Men	39	41.1%
Age	Under 30 years	40	42.1%
	30–45 years	35	36.8%
	46–60 years	20	21.1%
Educational background	Economic	53	56%
	Technical	42	44%
Professional/Occupational status	Diverse distribution across seven stakeholder categories relevant to the social entrepreneurship ecosystem (citizens, social entrepreneurs, traditional entrepreneurs, employees in private and public sectors, NGO representatives and specialists)	—	—

Source: Compiled by the author based on primary survey data (2025).

Figure 1. Average perception of the current economic impact of social entrepreneurship, by professional status



Source: Author's own representation.

The figure above presents the average responses provided by the surveyed individuals, differentiated by professional status, regarding statements related to the economic role of social entrepreneurship. These statements refer to its contribution to community economic development (question 1), its positive impact on the local economy (question 2), and the support it provides for the sustainable economic development of the region (question 7).

The results show that all average scores fall between 3.6 and 4.8 on a 1-5 scale, indicating a generally high level of agreement. The highest values are observed among specialists in education, economics, and research, as well as among NGO representatives, who perceive most strongly the developmental role of social entrepreneurship within communities.

Employees in the public sector and social entrepreneurs also reported consistently positive perceptions, suggesting both a solid theoretical understanding and direct experience with the field. In contrast, traditional entrepreneurs and citizens without entrepreneurial experience expressed slightly more reserved views, although their scores still remain above the neutral midpoint.

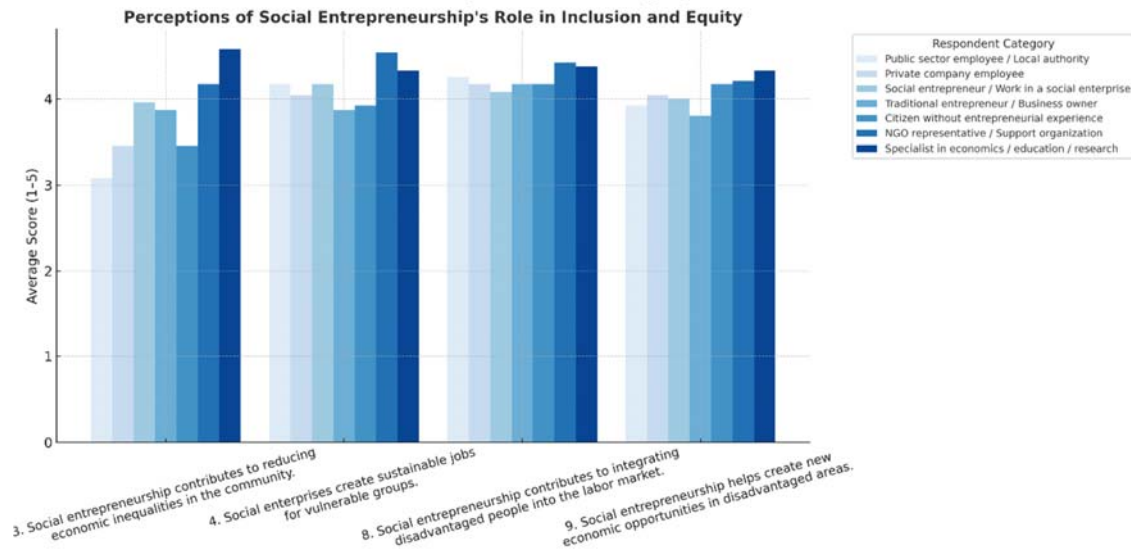
These differences indicate that perceptions of the economic impact of social entrepreneurship may be shaped by the degree of professional involvement in social initiatives and by familiarity with this type of economic activity.

Figure 2 provides a detailed picture of how different categories of people understand and assess the impact of social entrepreneurship. Through the results of the four examined statements - regarding the reduction of economic inequalities, the creation of sustainable jobs for vulnerable groups, the integration of disadvantaged people into the labor market, and the development of economic opportunities in disadvantaged areas, it becomes evident that the level of confidence in social entrepreneurship differs depending on respondents' experience and direct involvement in this field.

First, when discussing the role of social entrepreneurship in reducing economic inequalities, it is observed that those working in education, research, or non-governmental organizations assign the highest scores. These actors appear to be the most convinced that social entrepreneurship has a real impact on the community. In contrast, employees in the public or private sector give lower scores, which suggests a more reserved perception or more limited knowledge of this phenomenon.

The same trend is visible in the statement related to the capacity of social enterprises to create sustainable jobs for vulnerable people. Although most groups acknowledge this potential, those directly involved in social entrepreneurship or NGOs show a more positive attitude. On the other hand, citizens without entrepreneurial experience appear somewhat more skeptical, indicating that direct experience influences the level of trust in the effectiveness of such initiatives.

Figure 2. Perceptions of the contribution of social entrepreneurship to inclusion and economic equity, by professional category



Source: Author's own representation.

An interesting aspect emerges in connection with the integration of disadvantaged people into the labor market. Here, the responses are much closer across all categories, which shows that this dimension of social entrepreneurship is broadly recognized and valued. Even those who were more reserved in other cases, such as private sector employees or citizens without entrepreneurial experience, gave higher scores. This suggests that the social impact in this case is more visible and therefore easier to accept.

The last statement, referring to the creation of new economic opportunities in disadvantaged areas, generated more varied opinions. The most confident, once again, are specialists and NGO representatives. In contrast, other categories, especially those from the private sector or without direct links to social entrepreneurship, express a more reserved position. This difference may indicate either the lack of concrete examples at the local level or a lack of trust in the capacity of social entrepreneurship to generate economic change in severely disadvantaged areas.

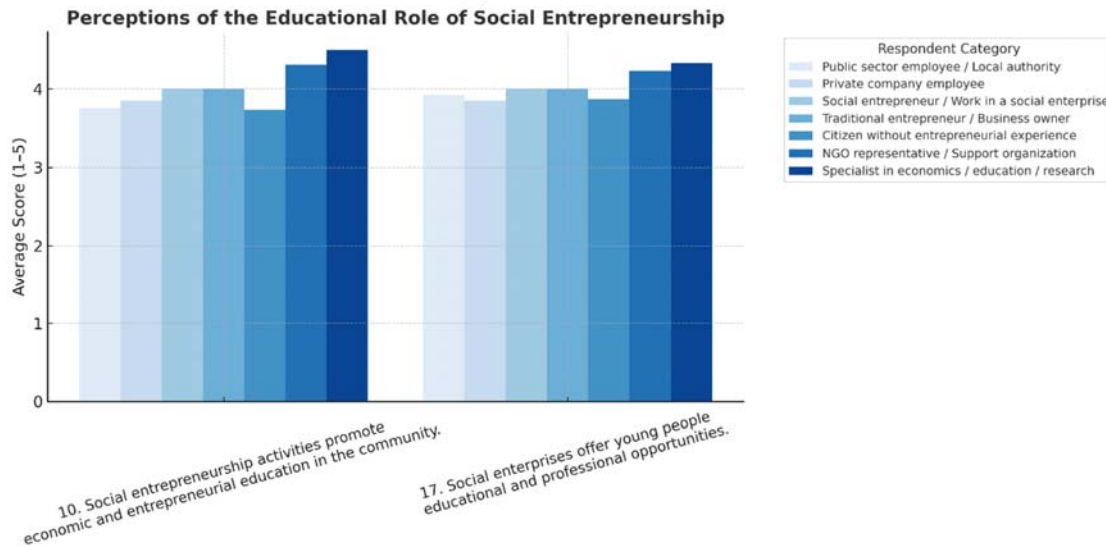
Overall, we can conclude that favourable perceptions of social entrepreneurship are stronger among those who have a direct connection with the field, whether through work, research, or civic involvement. Those without direct contact with such initiatives tend to be more cautious or less informed. This difference suggests that promoting successful examples and concrete results could contribute to a better understanding of the potential of social entrepreneurship in society.

Figure 3 explores respondents' perceptions regarding the contribution of social entrepreneurship in the field of education, particularly in terms of promoting economic and entrepreneurial education in the community, as well as providing educational and professional opportunities for young people. The two analysed statements offer a coherent perspective on the formative and empowering role of social enterprises, reflected in the average values assigned by the seven professional categories consulted.

Regarding the first dimension, promoting economic and entrepreneurial education in the community (question 10), the data highlight a generally positive perception, but with notable differences between groups. The highest scores come, as expected, from specialists in education and research (4.5) and NGO representatives (4.31), that is, those with direct experience in educational initiatives within the social context. Social and traditional entrepreneurs assign identical scores (4.0), which suggests recognition of this role, but possibly also a perception of limited educational impact compared to other operational objectives. Employees in the public and private sectors, along with citizens without entrepreneurial experience, express slightly lower scores (between 3.73 and 3.85),

indicating a more reserved appreciation, possibly due to a lack of direct contact with such initiatives at the local level.

Figure 3. The educational role of social entrepreneurship and support for youth - opinions differentiated by professional status



Source: Author's own representation.

Concerning the second question, supporting young people through educational and professional opportunities (question 17), perceptions are slightly more uniform, but at a higher level. All categories evaluate this function of social entrepreneurship positively, with scores ranging between 3.85 and 4.33. Differences are less pronounced, which may indicate a clearer and more widely accepted understanding of the formative potential of social enterprises for young people. Again, specialists and NGOs lead, followed closely by social and traditional entrepreneurs. Even less directly involved categories, such as public sector employees and citizens without entrepreneurial experience, evaluated this dimension favourably, suggesting greater visibility of the impact on youth compared to that on the community as a whole.

The results show that the educational role of social entrepreneurship is generally recognized, especially when referring to young people and the provision of concrete development opportunities. In contrast, the idea that social enterprises can support economic education in the community seems to be more strongly influenced by proximity to the social sector or by experience in the field of education. This finding suggests that social enterprises should communicate their educational component more clearly, particularly to the general public and to institutions that can help them expand their impact.

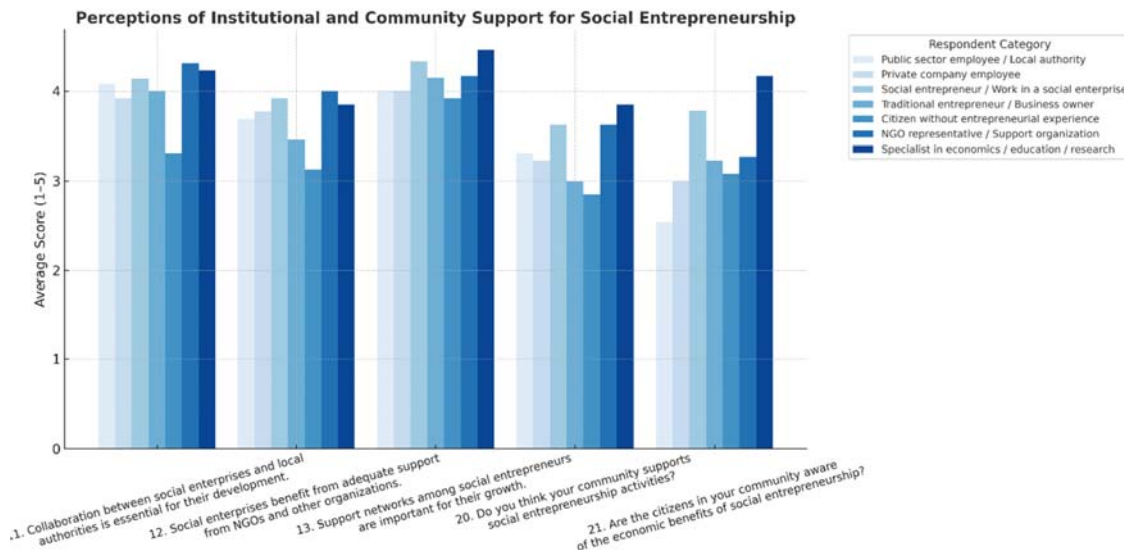
Figure 4 analyses perceptions of the institutional and community support available to social entrepreneurship, based on responses from seven categories of participants. The five evaluated questions provide an overview of the extent to which essential partnerships for the development of this sector are recognized, as well as the level of social support and visibility among the population.

The first question (11), which concerns collaboration between social enterprises and local authorities, is evaluated positively by most groups. The highest scores belong to specialists (4.23), NGOs (4.31), and social entrepreneurs (4.14), suggesting that these actors, by the nature of their activities, are more often involved in partnerships with local administrations and view such collaborations as an essential condition for the development of social enterprises. Public sector employees assign a score of 4.08, which indicates that, although they recognize the importance of such collaborations, they may also be aware of existing limitations.

By contrast, question 12, which refers to support provided by NGOs and other external structures, records a lower level of agreement. Values range between 3.13 and 4, indicating a weaker

perception of the efficiency or frequency of such support. In particular, citizens without entrepreneurial experience and employees in private companies evaluate this component more cautiously, which may reflect either the lack of visibility of this type of support or limited concrete experience with such resources.

Figure 4. Assessment of institutional support and community perceptions of social entrepreneurship



Source: Author's own representation.

Question 13 highlights consistent recognition of the importance of support networks among social entrepreneurs. All respondent categories assign high scores, with the highest given by specialists (4.46) and social entrepreneurs (4.33). The results suggest that collaborative relationships among entrepreneurs are seen as a key element for sustaining and developing the sector, valued not only by those directly involved but also by external observers.

Question 20 raises a less positive aspect: the extent to which the community supports social entrepreneurship. Here, the scores are noticeably lower, especially from citizens without entrepreneurial experience (2.85) and public sector employees (3.31), indicating a general perception that community support is weak. Only NGOs and specialists slightly exceed the 3.5 threshold, showing that such support is either occasional or dependent on local initiatives. The results suggest a lack of a social entrepreneurship culture at the community level or low visibility of existing projects.

The last question (21), regarding the level of public awareness of the economic benefits of social entrepreneurship, confirms this trend. Except for specialists (4.17), most scores range between 2.54 and 3.27, indicating a perception that the general public is not sufficiently informed or does not consider social entrepreneurship to bring tangible economic benefits. The lowest score is given by public sector employees (2.54), which may reflect direct experience with the lack of citizen engagement or awareness of the gap between public policies and the real level of information in society.

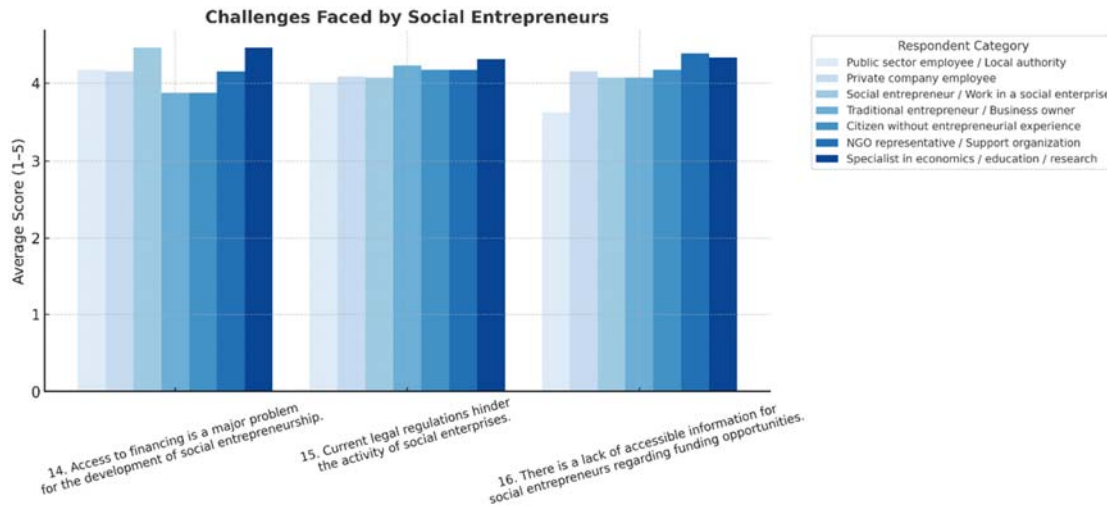
In conclusion, the data from this chart suggest that while there is relatively high appreciation for internal support (among entrepreneurs and from NGOs) and for collaboration with local authorities, the external dimension, community support and public awareness of benefits, is perceived as weak.

Figure 5 highlights the perceptions regarding the structural and functional obstacles that affect the development of social entrepreneurship in Romania. The three questions address funding difficulties, limitations of the legislative framework, and lack of access to relevant information on financial support opportunities, providing a clear picture of the systemic barriers perceived by different categories of social actors.

Question 14, concerning limited access to funding, is perceived as a major problem by all respondent categories. The highest scores are given by NGO representatives and specialists (4.46), indicating a strong awareness of the difficulties faced by social enterprises in attracting funds. Social

and traditional entrepreneurs also express significant agreement (3.96 and 3.87, respectively), reinforcing the idea that financial resource challenges represent a transversal obstacle in the development of the social entrepreneurial ecosystem. Public and private sector employees provide nearly identical scores (4.17 and 4.15), suggesting that the issue is acknowledged even outside the sector.

Figure 5. Challenges faced by social enterprises, comparative perspectives of the actors involved



Source: Author's own representation.

Regarding legal regulations (Question 15), the values are generally consistent. The highest score is assigned by NGOs (4.23), followed by specialists (4.17), showing that actors involved in public policy and consultancy perceive legislative norms as restrictive or poorly adapted to the realities of social enterprises. Social entrepreneurs give a slightly lower score compared to other categories (3.87), which may indicate either that they have become accustomed to these limitations over time or that they have adapted practically to a framework that, while not ideal, is the one available.

Question 16, which concerns the lack of accessible information on funding opportunities, highlights an interesting discrepancy between the analysed categories. NGO representatives and specialists once again give the highest scores (4.38 and 4.33), possibly reflecting a broad perspective on structural limitations in communication and dissemination of relevant information in this sector. In contrast, private sector employees and citizens without entrepreneurial experience provide lower scores (3.62 and 3.07), signaling either a lack of direct exposure to these difficulties or a different perception of the available sources of information.

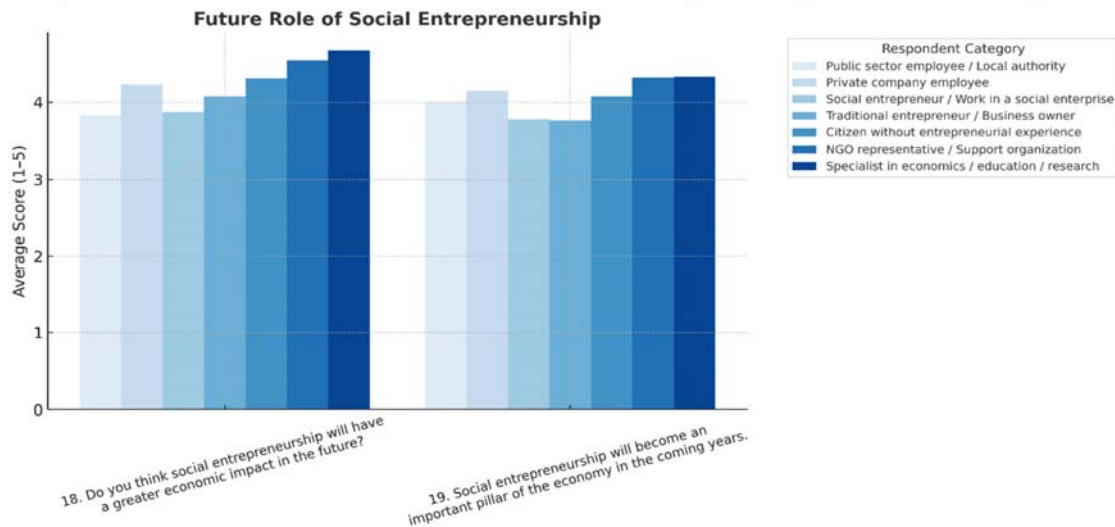
Looking at these results as a whole, a picture consistent with the data presented in previous charts emerges: while the transformative potential of social entrepreneurship is widely recognized, the infrastructure meant to support its development is underfunded and poorly regulated. Consistently, the actors directly engaged in the sector, social entrepreneurs, NGOs, and experts, show a high level of awareness of these issues, whereas external categories, although not ignoring the challenges, provide slightly more tempered evaluations.

These results support the idea that problems related to funding, legislation, or access to information are perceived as significant obstacles to the development of social entrepreneurship. For this reason, the need for better-adapted public policies and institutional solutions that respond concretely to the needs of social enterprises and support them in a sustainable manner becomes increasingly evident.

To complement the perspective on current challenges and the perceived support surrounding social entrepreneurship, the questions presented in Figure 6 (questions 18 and 19) assess respondents'

confidence in the anticipated economic impact of social entrepreneurship and in its ability to become a structural pillar of the economy in the coming years.

Figure 6. Level of confidence in the future role of social entrepreneurship in economic development



Source: Author's own representation.

Regarding the first question, the data reveal a high level of optimism among most professional categories. The highest scores are recorded among specialists in economics, education, and research (4.67), along with NGO representatives (4.54) and social entrepreneurs (4.54), suggesting strong confidence from those directly familiar with the dynamics and potential of this sector. These scores can be interpreted as recognition of emerging trends that position social entrepreneurship not only as a response to specific community needs but also as a sustainable economic model with structural effects.

Even among less directly involved actors, such as public sector employees (3.83) or private sector employees (4.23), positive scores are observed, indicating a generalized perception within both public and professional discourse regarding the accelerated development of the social economy in the coming stages. It is noteworthy that citizens without entrepreneurial experience (4.07) also display a reasonable degree of confidence, suggesting growing visibility of the potential economic impact of social entrepreneurship even among the general population.

As for the second question, specialists (4.33), NGOs (4.23), and social entrepreneurs (4.46) remain the most confident, while the lower scores among traditional entrepreneurs (3.78) and citizens without experience (3.67) may signal a degree of doubt not about the existence of the impact itself, but about its institutionalization. The difference between the two statements is subtle, yet significant: while the first refers to a general projection of growing economic influence, the second implies a formal, stable, and central positioning of social entrepreneurship within the national economic architecture.

In conclusion, the perceptions expressed in the two questions indicate that social entrepreneurship is increasingly seen as less of an alternative niche solution and more as a sector undergoing affirmation and consolidation. It is perceived as having a significant role in shaping new economic models that are fairer and more sustainability-oriented.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of perceptions regarding social entrepreneurship reveals a generally favourable attitude towards its potential role in reducing social inequalities, supporting vulnerable groups, and stimulating local development. Respondents with direct or indirect involvement in the sector, such as NGO representatives, social entrepreneurs, and specialists, exhibited higher levels of confidence in its capacity to generate change, while traditional entrepreneurs and citizens without entrepreneurial

experience expressed more cautious positions. These perception differences indicate that familiarity and engagement significantly influence how social entrepreneurship is understood and valued at the societal level.

The results also highlight a partial recognition of the importance of collaboration between local actors, although community awareness and institutional visibility remain limited. Despite structural constraints such as difficult access to finance, insufficient legislative clarity, and fragmented information flows, social entrepreneurship is not perceived merely as a charitable intervention, but increasingly as an organised form of socio-economic innovation.

Furthermore, respondents expressed a moderate but growing confidence in the future relevance of social entrepreneurship, especially if supported by coherent public policies and fiscal incentives. This confirms the gradual transition of the sector from a marginal associative activity to a more structured component of local development dynamics.

Integrated with the economic evidence presented in Section 3.1, these perception patterns acquire additional significance. While official data confirm measurable contributions to employment, GDP formation, and public expenditure reduction, the surveyed perceptions show that the economic potential of social entrepreneurship is acknowledged, yet not fully internalised at institutional and policy level.

Therefore, the study concludes that social entrepreneurship in Romania generates real economic effects, even if these remain partly undervalued within public discourse. The sector already produces a local multiplier effect by reinvesting generated resources into community services and labour integration, but its rural development potential is still insufficiently utilised. If accompanied by sustained policy recognition, stable financing mechanisms, and strategic visibility, social entrepreneurship could evolve into a structural pillar for territorial cohesion and sustainable development. The convergence between emerging economic data and stakeholder perceptions indicates that Romania is moving towards a phase of sectoral consolidation, where social entrepreneurship is no longer perceived only as a social corrective, but as a relevant economic actor in its own right.

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Annex 1 - Questionnaire on Social Entrepreneurship and Its Role in Economic Development

Demographic Data

1. Have you heard about social entrepreneurship before?

Yes No

2. Your gender:

Female Male

3. Your age:

Under 30 years old 30–45 years old 46–60 years old

4. Educational background:

Technical background Economic background

5. Professional / occupational status:

- Citizen without entrepreneurial experience
 Social entrepreneur / Employee in a social enterprise
 Traditional entrepreneur / Business owner
 Employee in a private company
 Employee in the public sector / Local authority
 NGO representative / Support organization
 Specialist in economics / education / research

Questions on Social Entrepreneurship

6. For you, social entrepreneurship plays an essential role in the economic development of the community.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

7. Social entrepreneurship has a positive impact on the local economy.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

8. Social entrepreneurship contributes to reducing economic inequalities in communities.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

9. Social enterprises create sustainable jobs for vulnerable groups.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
10. Social entrepreneurship has contributed to increasing incomes in your community.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
11. Social projects have a positive impact on small local businesses.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
12. Social entrepreneurship supports the sustainable economic development of the region.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
13. Social entrepreneurship contributes to the integration of disadvantaged people into the labor market.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
14. Social entrepreneurship helps create new economic opportunities in disadvantaged areas.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
15. Social entrepreneurial activities promote economic and entrepreneurial education in the community.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
16. Collaborations between social enterprises and local authorities are essential for their development.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
17. Social enterprises receive adequate support from NGOs and other organizations.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
18. Support networks among social entrepreneurs are important for their growth.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
19. Access to funding is a major issue for the development of social entrepreneurship.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
20. Current legal regulations hinder the activity of social enterprises.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
21. There is a lack of accessible information for social entrepreneurs regarding funding opportunities.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
22. Social entrepreneurship offers young people educational and professional opportunities.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
23. Do you believe that social entrepreneurship will have a greater economic impact in the future?
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

24. Social entrepreneurship will become an important pillar of the economy in the coming years.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
25. Do you believe your community supports social entrepreneurship activities?
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
26. Are the members of your community aware of the economic benefits of social entrepreneurship?
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

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