

# Policy Making Recommendations

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*Produced by Regional Development Agency of Rodopi S.A*

**PROJECT: “REINFORCE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT  
THROUGH SETTING UP INNOVATIVE SUPPORT STRUCTURES IN THE  
CROSS-BORDER TERRITORY”**

**WORK PACKAGE 5: [STAKEHOLDERS ON THE (SOCIAL) MOVE]**

**DELIVERABLE 5.1.2: “IMPLEMENTATION PLANS DEVELOPMENT FOR  
SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN CROSS BORDER AREA AND POLICY  
MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS”**

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INTERREG V-A “GREECE- BULGARIA 2014- 2020”*

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## SUMMARY

The policy paper at hand is an effort to point out the main barriers which social enterprises of the cross border area face and provide recommendations for the development and sustainability of social entrepreneurship, highlighting the need for the social enterprise sector to be further supported and reinforced by the authorities.

The report for policy making recommendations has been implemented under the project entitled **“ReinFORCE SOCIAL Entrepreneurial Spirit through setting up Innovative Support Structures in the cross-border Territory”**, Work Package 5 [Stakeholders on the (Social) Move], Deliverable 5.1.2 **“Implementation plans development for Social Entrepreneurship in cross border area and policy making recommendations”**.

The project beneficiary assigned with the drafting of the present paper is the Lead Beneficiary of the project, the Regional Development Agency of Rodopi S.A (AN.RO. S.A.).

## ABOUT THE LEAD BENEFICIARY OF THE PROJECT



**Regional Development Agency of Rodopi S.A.** is Joint-Stock Company Local Authority (Local Authority Enterprise according to the 3rd article of 252 Law 3463/2006 “New Municipal and Community code”) and was founded in 1992.

“Rodopi Development S.A” creates, supports, coordinates, materializes and administrates local developmental initiatives that correspond to the needs of institutions (Public and Private) not only in the Prefecture of Rodopi but also in the wider region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, through the operational projects of the 3rd and 4th Communal Support Framework and other national and European projects, upgrading the human potential of the Region, offering innovative solutions and practices, creating or adapting know-how, participating in networks aiming at the transport of experiences, knowledge and contributing in the lifting of isolation through organizational models adapted in local needs with a possessed upgraded human potential with the use of new technologies and modern tools of organization.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

The project entitled **“ReinFORCE SOCIAL Entrepreneurial Spirit through setting up Innovative Support Structures in the cross-border Territory” (MIS Code: 5011020) with the acronym “SOCIAL FORCES”**, is funded by the **Cooperation Programme INTERREG V-A “GREECE-BULGARIA 2014-2020”** (co-funded by the ERDF and national funds of the participating countries) by 563.589,10 €. The project officially started on October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and is expected to end by July the 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

The **“SOCIAL FORCES” Project** is implemented under the Priority Axis4. “A Socially Inclusive Cross-Border Area”, under the Investment Priority 9c. “Providing support for social enterprises”, Thematic Objective: 09. “Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination” and Specific Objective: 9. “To expand social entrepreneurship in the CB area”.

The **Partnership** of the Project consists of the following beneficiaries:

1. Regional Development Agency of Rodopi S.A (GR)
2. Municipality of Haskovo (BG)
3. Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Xanthi (GR)
4. Drama Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GR)
5. Gnosi Anaptixiaki NGO (GR)
6. Haskovo Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BG)
7. Reconstruction Development Union (BG)
8. University of Plovdiv “Paisii Hilendarski“- Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences (BG)
9. University of Macedonia- Department of Educational and Social Policy- Research Committee of the University of Macedonia (GR)

## BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT (BACKGROUND AND MAIN OBJECTIVES)

The cross-border area includes some of the most deprived and isolated communities of both countries, as manifested by the rising poverty and high unemployment rates, as a consequence of this labor market breakdown. This results on the cross-border area’s depopulation trends.

The prevailing economic recession and fiscal crisis across both sides of the borders have further intensified public and private sector disinvestment in social services, further weakening the delivery and sustainability of social

welfare policy in the cross-border area, aimed at resolving poverty and social exclusion problems.

Also, the characteristics of the production system combined with the low education levels and the mismatch between labor demand and supply, have led to high unemployment, mainly in the Greek territory, poverty and social exclusion.

Social enterprises are an important driver for inclusive growth and play a key role in tackling current economic and environmental challenges.

The **overall objective** of the project is to reinforce the effectiveness of the regional policies and local initiatives in promoting and supporting social entrepreneurship through the designing of common activities, fostering awareness of social economy and cooperation for setting up an innovative support structure, acting as Social Entrepreneurship E- Help Desk in Greece and Bulgaria, as an asset for local economic development and territorial competitiveness.

Also, the project aims at encouraging knowledge transfer for the social enterprises, in order to familiarize them with efficient management and marketing and exchange of information practices, and raise awareness on the characteristics of social enterprises.

The expected results of the project also refer to an increased capacity of the policy makers and stakeholders in detecting the needs of social enterprises in their territories, thus favoring a local sustainable development.

The **main outputs** of the project, which consist its innovative character, are a roadmap and joint guidelines for setting up and running an innovative social enterprise, the identification of the common profile framework for social enterprise's manager and entrepreneur and the development of a multifunctional Web Platform, which will operate as the joint E-Help Desk for social enterprises.

Starting from different levels of competences and experiences, the partners intend to exchange experiences, methods and tools which have proved to be successful in strengthening the economic viability and entrepreneurial spirit of the social enterprises, and undertake actions to foster social enterprises' networking across the border area.

The key innovative element of the project which makes the difference from other initiatives is the fact that **this project puts a policy focus on the social economy sector in an interregional, cross-border perspective**. For this reason, the partnership has identified the need for joint action and exchange of experiences among partners of different strengths and needs, so that they could all actively learn from each other.

## INTRODUCTION

### SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In recent years, both the European and Global Community are committed to the pursuit of **sustainable development**, which can be defined as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

On the other hand, **social entrepreneurship** can be viewed as an undertaking, whose primary objective is to achieve social impact, rather than generating profit for owners and shareholders, uses its surpluses mainly to achieve these social goals and is managed by social entrepreneurs in an accountable, transparent and innovative way, in particular by involving workers, customers and stakeholders affected by its business activity (Social Business Initiative of the European Commission).

In addition to the definitions provided,

A CLOSER LOOK OVER **THE LINKAGE BETWEEN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT** CLEARLY DEMONSTRATES **THE NEED FOR THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE SECTOR TO BE FURTHER REINFORCED BY THE AUTHORITIES.**

The dominant worldwide vision for sustainable development, directly linked to the economic, social and environmental fields, is clearly reflected in the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, structured in September 2015 by the **United Nations**. Following an inclusive process of intergovernmental negotiations, 17 Goals and 169 Targets, **based on five main lines of priority (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, Partnership- 5P)**, were set for the implementation of the Agenda2030. Goals and Targets, which are integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities.

**The European Commission adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and is now committed to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda, **enhancing the vision of a sustainable European Union in a sustainable world.**

**The 17SDGs** (including: end of poverty, inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, gender equality, sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages, sustainable agriculture, access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and

modern energy for all, resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation, peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, global partnership for sustainable development) **were set to respond to the challenges which global community faces.**

**SO DOES SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP:** TAKES PART TO THE GLOBAL EFFORT BY RESPONDING TO THE MOST URGENT CHALLENGES OF THE SOCIETY.

Social enterprises are proven to have a key role to play in addressing demanding social, economic and environmental tasks, nurturing local social capital, supporting democratic participation and delivering good quality services.

Social businesses respond with social innovation to needs that have not yet been met and that is how **they contribute to smart growth.**

They also **foster inclusive growth and increase social cohesion** by creating sustainable jobs for women, young and elderly people and people with disabilities or vulnerable ones. Therefore, they offer not only a path for people to transform their lives, but also a way to empower others.

Combining a business approach with the achievement of social goals has many advantages over providing social assistance to vulnerable groups. Employment of disadvantaged people not only contributes to the financial independence of these persons, but also helps them to being integrated into society by acquiring new knowledge and skills related to the profession they practice, by acquiring communication skills and working in a team, by creating a sense of usefulness, which in turn leads to greater motivation for development and improvement.

In addition, social enterprises take into account their environmental impact by developing efficient ways to reduce emissions or by using natural resources, **creating in this way sustainable growth.**

In other words,

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP CREATES A DEVELOPMENT WHICH INCORPORATES THE **FINANCIAL GROWTH, THE SOCIAL WELLBEING AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, AS WELL.**

The above-mentioned elements **constitute the main dimensions of Sustainable Development**, which are not only reflected in the Agenda 2030, but **correspond to the primary objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy**, as well.

Therefore, it is more than obvious that not only the challenges but also the objectives set for the achievement of the global sustainable development and those set by the social enterprises sector are **mutually supportive and interdependent**.

It is, consequently, of fundamental importance that

THE STATES AND THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES, BOTH GREEK AND BULGARIAN, **CONVERT THE GLOBAL AND EUROPEAN GOALS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INTO NATIONAL AND LOCAL ONES.**

It is of vital significance to realize that

THE PROVISION OF DIRECT SUPPORT TO RELEVANT ACTORS, WHO CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GLOBAL VISION THROUGH THEIR ACTIVITIES, IS MORE THAN CRUCIAL.

And this could be workable only **by taking specific measures which address specific demanding tasks** of the social enterprises sector, **in coordination with the European and global policies and strategies**.

## METHODOLOGY

Since the beginning of the project implementation, five **regional Round Table meetings** among relevant stakeholders have been organized, four by the Greek Beneficiaries of the project and one by the Bulgarian ones.

The first event was held in Drama in November 2018 by the Drama Chamber of Industry and Commerce (PB4).

The second one was organized in Komotini by the Lead Beneficiary of the project, the Regional Development Agency of Rodopi S.A.

The Chamber of Industry and Commerce of Xanthi (PB3) hosted the third Round Table meeting in the homonymous region in March 2019.

The fourth one took place in Thessaloniki, held by Gnosi Anaptixiaki NGO (PB5) in November 2019.

The Round Table held in the Bulgarian region, was organized by the Municipality of Haskovo (PB2) in February 2019.

The **main scope** of the abovementioned events' organization was to familiarize local people and stakeholders with the content of a Social Enterprise, as well as to enhance the visibility of the initiatives and actions of the national policy in respect of social entrepreneurship. Also, the events aimed to provide an opportunity of dialogue between stakeholders and give the chance to explore the industry's problems and propose appropriate solutions.

Throughout these meetings valuable input has been gathered from people working in the field of social enterprises, policy makers, representatives of social business and financial institutions, local stakeholders and the general public.

Following the conduction of the abovementioned Round Table events, two reports on the results of the meetings have been elaborated. The Municipality of Haskovo (PB2) produced the report on the outcomes of the Round Table held in the Bulgarian region and on the other hand, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Xanthi (PB3) made a relevant one, incorporating the results of the four meetings organized in the Greek territory.

The results of those five discussions, which have been reflected in the contents of the two reports, constitute the basis of the present synthesis report and are summarized below, in the form of **observations** and **recommendations**.

## OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The outcomes of the five Round Table events are mostly related to the barriers which social entrepreneurs face through their effort to create a social business.

### LACK OF SKILLS, TRAINING AND CONSULTING SUPPORT

Developing a social enterprise can be proved more demanding than creating a traditional one, because of the **skills needed** to start and manage a venture whose social mission is as important as the economic one. Having a brilliant idea is mostly not sufficient for creating a business. Specialized knowledge in marketing procedures is required, as well as communication skills. The development of a business plan together with its successful implementation requires significant market intelligence.

The **lack of training** has also a detrimental impact on the social enterprises' effort to entering the markets, as the access to the markets requires managerial capacity and effective strategies.

It is therefore crystal clear that

**TRAINING AND CONSULTING SUPPORT** IN THE FIELDS OF PLANNING, INNOVATIVE DIGITAL MARKETING PRACTICES, COMMUNICATIONS, FUNDRAISING, HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT ARE NECESSARY STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT.

Promoting the effective integration in the educational policy of the social entrepreneurship is considered crucial. By including social entrepreneurship in school and university, not only potential entrepreneurs and future managers are being trained, but most importantly, the awareness about the social economy spirit is being increased.

Additionally, educational, training and skills development programmes, such as distance learning courses, have to be put in place in order to meet the needs not only of the social entrepreneurs, but also those of community leaders, administrators and civil servants, in order for them to further realize the needs of the social enterprises sector and the added value conferred on the society.

Respective vocational training programmes- specially designed- should be provided for people with disabilities in order for them to be more efficiently integrated into the labor market.

Not to be neglected that many social enterprises cannot function successfully without the appointment of qualified social workers and psychologists to help in creating an appropriate working microclimate, to work individually and in groups with representatives of vulnerable groups, to contribute to the confidence creating, motivating them to be actively involved in the social and economic life of the society.

In addition to the abovementioned, the creation of a **startup center for social enterprises** is considered more than beneficial. Such a structure constitutes a place for the social entrepreneurs to get support and mentorship during the development process of their enterprise. Also, a startup center may even expand its operations to become a place for exchanging experience and developing common solutions for individual social enterprises, encouraging their sustainability.

Setting up advisory structures for social entrepreneurs could also contribute to **raising awareness** on the benefits of social entrepreneurship locally. Social enterprise organizations in coordination with the state initiatives should focus their efforts to raising awareness for social entrepreneurship's mission and to making their activities more **visible**.

Raising awareness is not only about financial gains, such as easier access to markets and stimulation of demand from mainstream consumers. It is more importantly about involving the end users in resolving a social challenge.

#### ACCESS TO PUBLIC PROCUREMENT PROCEDURES AND TAX RELIEFS

**N**evertheless, even if a social enterprise achieves its entrance in the market there is still a barrier called **low competitiveness**.

Social businesses generate part of their income by operating in the market, trading with both the public and private sector. **Public procurement** represents a noticeable proportion of the market. The tasks that social enterprises face in respect of this are the following two: on the one hand the size of the contracts which allows the participation in the procurement process only of a few already established and large enterprises and on the other hand the specific pre-qualification requirements, which tend to be strict.

The objective is

**TO PROMOTE THE PARTICIPATION OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES IN PUBLIC SERVICES CONTRACTS AND DELIVERY, IN ORDER TO ENSURE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THEIR ACTIVITIES.**

In this context, the state should reform the Legislative and Regulatory Framework for Public Procurement, encouraging the use of smaller public contracts in order for the social enterprises, which constitute mainly small entities, to easily participate in the public procurement process. Additionally, the creation of more flexible pre-qualification requirements in line with the nature of social businesses is considered necessary for accessing the public procurements.

Also, the overwhelming majority of the stakeholders participated in the Round Table events argued that the **endless bureaucracy** together with the **lack of tax relief** is a constraining factor for the efforts made for the development of a social enterprise.

In connection to the abovementioned, it is of great importance to be further realized that social entrepreneurship can only be sustainably developed in an appropriate legal environment, adapted to capture their specificities and needs. Therefore, efforts should focus on removing any administrative barriers. Also, incentives, such as opportunities for fiscal and tax relief, are an important element of the regulatory environment for social enterprises.

#### ACCESS TO CAPITAL AND FUNDS

The task for the social enterprises becomes even more difficult when it comes to **accessing capital and funds**. Businesses, generating revenue mainly from their own activities, rely financially on grants and donation and less on the state subsidies. The inability of Social Enterprises to access finance is regarded as one of the most basic problems of their sustainability with significant consequences on employment, as well.

The **difficulty in financing** can arise from the limited understanding of social enterprise's role and of the social value generated by its activities. The financial institutions generally refuse to lend to social businesses because they do not meet their established client criteria and are not seen as offering sufficient guarantees.

Public policies should

**CREATE AN ENABLING ECO-SYSTEM TO DEVELOPING SOCIAL BUSINESSES AND FACILITATING ACCESS TO FUNDING, PROVIDING SUSTAINABLE FINANCE.**

The creation of a more favorable framework for access to finance and lending by social enterprises is needed in order not to further reduce the investment potential and turnover of social economy enterprises to very low levels. Raising awareness about the nature of social entrepreneurship and the added value provided to the society by their activities is again considered helpful.

In addition to this, the **advantageous use of the social enterprises' services and products by the municipality**, its structures and municipal enterprises is a suggested measure. Such a measure would provide guaranteed contracts for social enterprises, which would contribute to their financial sustainability.

This incentive can be successfully combined with the creation of a Resource Fund to provide financial support to social enterprises. In addition to training and providing knowledge, it is necessary to provide also a resource to support an entrepreneurial idea. The state has to be the one who leads the

efforts on supporting social innovation, thus it is crucial to adopt capacity building programmes to financially support and facilitate social innovation.

**Partnership** between the social enterprises and the local authorities will be crucial for the functioning of such a fund, as it will lay the foundations for long-term joint initiatives, mutual recognition and the achievement of common goals for the development of the local community.

#### NEED FOR NETWORKING

Additionally, it is worth noting that only a few of the social enterprises participate in regional, national or European networks. Being part of a national or international network can provide access to a greater diversity of resources and idea, exposure to different contexts and of course, options to expand to international markets.

The state should, therefore,

SET OUT THE CONDITIONS OF CREATING A **STRONG NETWORKING SYSTEM** AND ESTABLISH EFFICIENT COMMUNICATION CHANNELS NOT ONLY AMONG THE STAKEHOLDERS OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR BUT ALSO BETWEEN THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC ONE.

The European practice shows that associations of social enterprises and network-type organizations are particularly successful. They have the potential to pursue economies of scale, achieve new knowledge for common purposes, access new markets, overcome legislative barriers, achieve greater flexibility and recognition by public authorities and the private sector, as well and have the opportunity to influence policies, especially at local and regional level.

Local and regional authorities, should mainstream the social enterprise dimension in relevant policies, programmes and practices. They should consult with and engage social enterprises as much as possible in the creation of new policies and actions. On the other hand, social enterprise organizations should actively promote and use these opportunities, as the establishment of permanent partnerships will further be facilitated through these channels.

#### CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Last but not least, the policy makers should take account of the social impact resulting not only from the activities of social enterprises but those of the traditional ones as well, through the implementation of the Corporate Social Responsibility.

In recent years, CSR strategies are adopted by a diverse range of enterprises at an ever-increasing pace as a core part of their business. This trend is in total compliance with the EU policy agenda, in accordance with which, national policy agendas should incorporate strategies for enhancing the CSR activities implemented from each kind of enterprise, in order for them to reinforce their social impact. It is worth noting that the European Commission, in its 2011 Communication on CSR defines Corporate Social Responsibility as “the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society”.

In this context, several initiatives could be carried out in order for the visibility of CSR to be further enhanced.

The main public policy options for governments in promoting corporate responsibility in EU and business engagement in development discussed in the report could be the following:

- Awareness-raising efforts to create a shared understanding of corporate responsibility among companies and the broader public, including what business can do to implement it.
- Partnerships designed to create win-win situations in which various stakeholders work collectively toward a shared goal.
- Soft law approaches that promote and incentivize voluntary action by business as a complement to state regulation.
- Mandating instruments that allow governments to monitor and enforce corporate accountability.

Concluding, either on the basis of the social enterprises or the case of the traditional ones, the goal of fostering the sustainable development through enhancing the social impact of entrepreneurship is mutual. Therefore, the policy making procedure should take into account the social impact arising from both ranges of enterprises in order to meet the needs of the sector in this direction.

## CONCLUSIONS

Undoubtedly, social enterprises represent an innovative and holistic business model, able to address societal challenges.

Social entrepreneurship is one of the proven successful approaches to overcoming social inequalities and supporting inclusive development, to achieving local financial growth and increasing the employment rates, to contributing to the environmental protection.

THE SOCIETAL CHALLENGES THAT SOCIAL ENTERPRISES ARE TACKLING WITHIN THEIR SCOPE OF THEIR ACTIVITY CORRESPOND TO THE ONES IDENTIFIED BY THE GLOBAL AND EUROPEAN COMMUNITY. THE **OBJECTIVE IS MUTUAL** AND THIS IS NONE OTHER THAN TO **ACHIEVE THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.**

For a variety of reasons, which mainly concern the nature of social entrepreneurship, social enterprises need the support of the state and local authorities much more than the traditional ones in order to start up activity and achieve sustainability.

IT IS NECESSARY FOR THE **POLICY MAKERS** TO FURTHER REALIZE THE SOCIAL IMPACT THAT SOCIAL ENTERPRISES ARE SEEKING TO HAVE AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE RESPONSE OF THEIR SPECIAL NEEDS, THROUGH **ESTABLISHING APPROPRIATE POLICIES IN ORDER TO REINFORCE THEIR PROSPECT OF ACHIEVING DEVELOPMENT IN A SUSTAINABLE WAY.**

**Municipalities** are a key partner for the development of social entrepreneurship. The first and **most important step in supporting social entrepreneurship is to integrate it into municipal development strategies.** This measure, on the one hand, testifies to the municipality's pursuit of supporting this type of social initiatives and, on the other, allows the allocation of public resources in support of social enterprises.

When it comes to the **state**, nothing is more crucial than **converting the European policies into national ones in an applicable and efficient way.**

**THE FOCUS OF THESE POLICIES SHOULD BE ON PROVIDING ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS IN WHICH SOCIAL ENTERPRISES CAN THRIVE**, INCLUDING ACTIONS THAT ARE IMPROVING LEGAL FRAMEWORKS, FACILITATING FINANCING PROCEDURES, CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR AN EASIER ACCESS TO MARKETS, DEVELOPING SUPPORT STRUCTURES, FOSTERING A VARIETY OF TRAINING OPTIONS AND ENHANCING THE NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES.

However, even if there has already been pursued a targeted public policy to support social entrepreneurship, which is being reflected in the adoption of the law on enterprises of the social and solidarity economy and the measures envisaged therein, **the most important condition for the state is to continually fostering efforts to develop social policies and services** that can address serious risk factors and allow social enterprises to build on social impact.

This results from the fact that social entrepreneurship is a special type of business where results and economic growth come much slower than traditional businesses. For this reason, **providing long-term assistance would lead to lasting social results.**

Within this framework, various, targeted, sufficient and mainly **constant social policies and services** need to be developed to ensure that

**SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP WILL BE FURTHER REINFORCED IN ORDER TO CONTINUE RESPONDING TO CURRENT CHALLENGES AND TOMORROW'S PROBLEMS.**