

The role of Romanian social enterprises in the alleviation of poverty and social exclusion

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Abstract. *Poverty and social exclusion are nowadays widely debated phenomena as they present highly threatening consequences for the wellbeing of humanity, making it unable to reach adequate living standards and to fully exercise social rights. To alleviate imbalances, adequate programs need to be put into place and for this process to be efficient, coherence and commitment must constitute elementary values to advance social welfare. Social enterprises can also contribute with their value creating potential to the fostering of a sustainable society that places a high emphasis on the defense of vulnerable groups and offers them an equitable treatment. The present paper firstly aims to illustrate conceptual elements referring to poverty, social exclusion and the social protection of marginalized groups. Secondly, the study is complemented by a research on Romanian social enterprises' perspective (associations, foundations and sheltered units) concerning social threats and the defense of less favored individuals, undertaken through a questionnaire-based survey. The research unveils the social enterprises' belief that the Romanian social field needs substantial attention from policymakers and that social protection services can aid them in gaining social privileges more adequately.*

Keywords: social enterprises, Romania, poverty, social exclusion, social protection, vulnerable groups.

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Introduction

In order to encourage social progress, the existing EU and Romanian decisional bodies must closely take care that citizens are provided equitable chances of reaching the resources that allow them a decent quality living. Additionally, the principle of granting an impartial treatment to individuals must also be taken into account if the main objective of the ruling authorities is the augmentation of social wellbeing.

This requirement becomes particularly more stringent due to the current socioeconomic context that is defined by rapid shifts of the legal framework concerning the social domain and consequently of the social policies as well. Thus, it is mandatory for the ruling bodies to alter their approach to suit these changes. In this process, they must also make sure that the beneficiaries of social programs are fully shielded and cannot become the targets of poverty and social exclusion, which represent types of material and social inequalities, respectively, as per Țâra (2013). Research on social inequalities reveals that this phenomenon was viewed as an inevitable byproduct of the modern societies' development (Blackburn, 1999), but its analysis was undertaken by defining it as an inconsistency regarding material elements, its distinctive features being discarded, as Binelli et al. (2015) indicate.

The intricate character of poverty and social exclusion is also given by their intertwining causes and consequences that destabilize people's chances of accessing good life conditions. As for poverty, which represents the unavailability of fundamental facilities, Lateh et al. (2018) acknowledges that its appearance is set off by the lack of suitable infrastructure, the inappropriateness of national strategies, a poor financial allocation for social concerns and finally changes in people's manner of living. The correspondent of poverty, namely social exclusion, has dreadful consequences as it impedes people from becoming involved in the functioning of their communities and restricts their access and usage of social privileges (Rawal, 2008). Literature defines the social privilege as being a claim, power or leverage given by a superior group to an individual or group of people, as a consequence of the latter's belonging to a certain identity from the birth moment. It is manifested in spheres such as gender, nationality, age or religious association (Black and Stone, 2005). A social privilege is viewed as a kind of affirmative action performed in the benefit of the non-dominant group, as according to Smith and Shin (2008).

Given the fact that poverty and social exclusion have a harmful impact upon society and the efforts of governmental bodies are not sufficient to restore its normal functioning and usually they fail in doing so, social enterprises have strongly flourished in reaction to this non-fulfillment, as Țigu et al. (2015) indicate. These entities have distinguished themselves as creators of social value and long term good through their ability of linking resources and making individuals to connect, as according to Kostetska and Berezyak (2014). Furthermore, the impact rendered by social enterprises upon communities is threefold since they shape social, environmental and economic concerns and they create positive change through a bold approach (Păunescu et al., 2016). From the standpoint of the social economy field, the three-way influence of social enterprises upon societies, namely people, planet and profit, is referred to as the triple bottom line (Gillis and James, 2015).

The importance of poverty is emphasized by the persistent present need of national economies to guard their citizens, regardless of their specificities, because they represent the main catalyst for society advancement. As members of an ongoing social system, they hold the ability to pass on the economic and social value they receive. Consequently, the present paper aims to capture a comprehensive perspective over the manifestation of poverty, social exclusion and social protection in Romania as viewed by Romanian social enterprises targeting marginalized social groups (the young, elderly people, individuals with disabilities and members of minority groups), together with the socially rehabilitating role of these entities. As research methods, we highlight the usage of a questionnaire-based survey and simple linear regression to verify whether offering social protection services to vulnerable individuals can help them to gain social privileges more adequately and if it can enhance their community involvement.

Literature review

Poverty and social exclusion, as social misbalances

As it was previously highlighted, the good functioning of a society as an integrated system in which all participants possess both rights and duties, takes place only when people are granted the chance to reach facilities that allow them to have a good living and when society offers them a fair treatment irrespective of personal attributes that

differentiate them from others. When society is not able to meet this condition, negative social happenings such as poverty and social exclusion take place and prevent individuals from exercising their human quality and thus, the normal transmission of social welfare is distorted (Păunescu et al., 2017). Poverty and social exclusion are two widely studied phenomena by researchers and are intricate facts in terms of both their causes and effects.

Stated differently, these two social occurrences take place in a dynamic manner and they are difficult to forecast. This quickly shifting character exerts a high pressure on decision makers who are very often hampered in their process of identifying and enforcing plans for generating an equilibrium situation.

Present societies are inevitably affected by poverty because of their natural impossibility to offer equal amounts of resources to their citizens, this helping certain social classes to access larger shares of welfare and hampering others from rejoicing a decent living, as indicated by Țâra (2013). Furthermore, those individuals who have a precarious financial and material standing are trapped into poverty and kept in this condition because their poor resource accessibility limits them to look for deficiently remunerated jobs, so rejoicing a decent existence is out of question for them. Two explanatory factors for this happening are the absence of basic living elements' ownership and the non-performance of national decisional institutions which do not properly address these issues (Farias and Farias, 2010). The absence of necessary living supplies is considered to have a bigger contribution to poverty development by Sachs (2005) who also states that the inefficient processes of decisional authorities are not entirely liable for this phenomenon but proposes shifting the ruling authorities' perspective of dealing with the social domain to foster people's thriving chances. Moreover, Sundaram (2012) considers that poverty eradication needs to rely on national circumstances and not on having a broad picture and dismissing these aspects.

As for the measures to be used for assessing the implications of poverty, Seipel (2003) suggests the income approach or the Human Poverty Index, which depicts people's access to basic living aspects: adequate nutrition, water, educational and healthcare services. Cambir and Vasile (2015) and Gibson (2016) have also emphasized the importance of comprehending poverty by utilizing subjective benchmarks reflecting a person's degree of life quality.

Besides poverty, the stability of a social system and of its beneficiaries can be rapidly interrupted by social exclusion, a phenomenon that acts in a close correlation with poverty. When defining it, Dertwinkel (2008) asserts it imposes the removal of a group's members from society because they possess features of a different kind. The distorting character of social exclusion is best indicated by its triggering factors and consequences. In what regards the consequences, Teraji (2011) highlights the limited degree of accessibility towards services of open interest and the precarious material and financial security, whereas Popay (2010) uses an integrative approach and suggests dispossessing a human being of his chances to reach adequate settings for living and his social participation expressed in the form of exercising socially-based rights.

When approaching the determinants of social exclusion, Jahnukainen (2015) underlines the educational progress and unemployment as being representative for the youth exclusion and proposes two categories of factors: internal (poor proficiency

in the self-management of emotions; a deficient degree of self-esteem) and external (family-level social and economic constraints; a lacking educational background). Vasile and Anghel (2015) add the forecasts made by the person regarding his evolution and the membership to a marginalized group, as triggering factors, whereas Raaum et al. (2009) stress the minimal likelihood of these persons to be reintegrated in education and employment.

Diminishing the effects of poverty and social exclusion have always been key priorities of the European Union institutions. This major concern is reflected by the various social strategies issued across time, Europe 2020 being a representative instrument applied, as per Antonescu (2014). By relying on values such as knowledge acceleration to enhance life quality, systematic usage of resources and social inclusion, the strategy proposes to fulfill the following quantitative goals: incrementing the employment rate to at least 75%, addressing R&D efforts (3%), narrowing school abandonment (10%) and lessening the share of people at risk of poverty (20 million individuals).

Despite its bold pursuit, the strategy has received critical analysis from the scholars' part. Thus, Marx et al. (2012) doubt that an increased employment rate can minimize the relative income poverty, whereas Daly (2012) argues that its core concepts, sustainable growth and resource efficiency, produce a diffused understanding of how it will reduce poverty because they are solely conceptually explained. As concerning the growth encouraged by the strategy, Palumbo (2013) states that it is threatened by natural resources' depletion and by a stringent emphasis on economic advancement, which must be diminished. Objections were brought also regarding its structure, as Pagliacci (2017) claims that it intends to achieve dimensional progress and disregards territorial conditions, this being a barrier against its success.

Romania manifests an analogous interest of improving the life of people, having set up a social strategy that specifically addresses poverty and social exclusion. The time frame covered by the strategy is 2015-2020, while its denomination is the National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction, covering 4 main directions, as according to the Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Protection and Elderly (2016): labor, social services, education and social participation.

Among the labor policies there may be named a persistent focus on labor market integration for the people who are not yet involved in it; approaching the youth's vulnerability; monitoring the implementation of social strategies covering labor aspects, and finally promoting the ongoing accumulation of knowledge during an individual's life so that he can reach better employment chances as well as helping marginalized social groups to improve their literacy level.

Meaningful procedures of social services are: ensuring that the providers of social services are offered job training, based on a country-level program; evaluating the extent to which social services manage to fulfill their scope; having socially threatened individuals as main beneficiaries of social protection services through an effort of increasing the monetary allocation in this sense and collaborating with NGOs to outsource social protection to them; raising the quality of social protection provided to the disabled by financially focusing on complementary activities; empowering the community to provide services of social defense.

As for the educational measures, the most noticeable ones refer to taking children who are at risk of school dropout away from this threat by assessment programs; providing assistance and support to families in which the educational progress of children is absent due to school dropout; facilitating the access of vulnerable children to education.

Last but not least, social participation activities will consist of fighting against the discrimination undertaken towards segments of individuals who are ruled out by society, by organizing awareness programs; encompassing mass media as a factor of stimulating the active participation of the civil society in the healthy functioning and advancement of the society.

The efficiency of the strategy was contested by Udrea (2015), who underlines that the poor investment in trainings on social protection hampers the quality of social services, the absence of qualified staff not representing a stringent issue. As for the formulation of the objectives, they are not quantitatively described and they will trigger inaccurate estimations of their effects. Nevertheless, the author highlights that a helpful measure is a thorough collaboration between the government, NGOs and social field experts to better comprehend vulnerable groups' particularities and to assess the overall efficiency of the process.

Social protection and social enterprises

Maintaining the social integrity of an individual is a task of an utmost importance for making sure that the social sphere does not suffer any degradation that might hinder its normal existence. However, when speaking about social groups that are highly exposed to various social risks, in our case the attention being focused on the young, the elderly, the disabled and minority groups, the problem has to be approached in a different manner, as all the social programs that address them need to be tailored to their vulnerabilities.

Social protection is highlighted by Babajanian and Hagen-Zanker (2012) as being a tool which must definitely alter the living conditions of marginalized individuals and to help social progress through minimizing the risk of poverty and social exclusion. To pursue this goal, there is a strong need for approaching social aspects related to disparities combined with safeguarding the privileges owned by marginalized groups instead of concentrating all the efforts towards repairing solely the economic imbalances.

The vulnerability of socially threatened groups was widely debated by researchers, due to the fact that their chances of reaching social welfare are considerably lower than the ones of non-vulnerable individuals. Thus, concerning the social vulnerability of the youth, O' Higgins (2010) holds that the deficient process of introducing the young segment into the labor market is to be considered liable for their future incapacity of raising their wellbeing degree, whereas Marginean (2014) ascertains that an individual is likely to remain unemployed during his work life if he followed this approach from his youth years.

In what concerns the elderly as a vulnerable group, Pânzaru (2015) claims that their social caretaking is impeded by demographic changes implying: a reduced number of active labor market participators, population shrinkage, persistent labor market withdrawal followed by retirement and finally relocation to foreign countries. Population ageing in Romania is stressed also by Lupchian (2016) who claims that

17% of the Romanian population is composed of elderly people and notes that the southern part of Romania is representative in this sense. This phenomenon hinders the power of the Romanian social protection sector to safeguard the elderly both economically and socially, as the labor market input has diminished due to a reduced number of active contributors.

When approaching the disabled individuals and their social caretaking, it must be acknowledged that these individuals are exceptionally exposed to social rejection due to their special medical condition. Consequently, their ability of bringing a worthy output to the communities in which they live is significantly lessened, Baci and Lazar (2017) stating these persons are negatively affected by school dropout (22% of these individuals), poverty and social exclusion (36%) and unemployment (45,5%).

Poverty and social exclusion produce disastrous effects also upon minority groups, Loury (1999) asserting that minorities are negatively impacted by social hardships on the basis of their ethnicity because human beings create social associations and group memberships by relying on this attribute and on the conduct norms that society perceives as admissible. As for their integration in social protection schemes, United Nations (2017) holds that minority groups cannot access these programs because they have a limited intervention in the community's decisional activities, they are prohibited to decide who must receive social defense and they do not possess the necessary knowledge concerning the engagement in such procedures.

Romania's standing in terms of social disproportions extent is not an encouraging one as it approaches the values obtained by the Baltic states, as shown by Preotesi (2016), this proving that leaving the responsibility for the resolution of social threats solely to the side of legislative authorities is not an efficient step.

An important entity that can help to ensure a better social framework is the social enterprise, which acts in the benefit of the community by cancelling off a social issue that arises within its space and performs on the basis of the profit obtained by reinvesting it in its operations, as per Seddon et al. (2014). Social enterprises also distinguish themselves through their ability to discover unaddressed gaps in the social sphere and then to deploy the necessary resources to fill them, as according to Diochon and Anderson (2009) and through their socially innovating character, determined by their persistent community orientation reflected by the non-profit seeking character associated to normal enterprises (Lisetchi and Brancu, 2014). The provision of temporary employment chances to make sure the vulnerable person will possess adequate capabilities when seeking for a permanent job is another notable feature of social enterprises, more precisely of insertion enterprises, together with fostering social inclusion and offering trainings, psychological counseling, transportation and medical services to disabled staff (Matei and Dorobantu, 2015).

Social enterprises carry out their mission by embracing various legal forms, be them non-profit organizations, profit-oriented businesses and government-related bodies. Having a clearer perspective on non-profit organizations, Păunescu and Evans (2018) highlight associations, foundations, cooperatives and mutual organizations, all being linked by an autonomous existence and the common social good as a key principle. Sheltered units are added to the types of social enterprises by Pirvu (2015), their discerning attribute being that 30% of its employees are people with disabilities.

UNDP (2008) uses an extensive approach of the social enterprises' impact, highlighting the value enabling actions undertaken by these entities: allowing the

community to benefit from basic services, for example educational and medical ones; having a thorough contribution in the resource usage process and delegating stakeholders at local level; offering employment chances through the services supplied to the community and enabling social inclusion; strengthening the social capital associated to the local community based on an active participation. Putting aside the social output conveyed by the activities of social enterprises, the hardships encountered by these entities also need to be sketched: the unavailability of a proper infrastructure and uplifting circumstances; a restrained resource accessibility; privileged behavior demonstrated to certain economic entities; a precarious legislative and institutional context.

Lambriu and Petrescu (2012) share a similar opinion and specify that modifications in the public policy or fostering social development and a stronger collaboration between public and private structures to better resolve society's demands are imperative for the success of Romanian social enterprises' pursuit.

Methodology

The goal of the paper consists of exploring and providing a transparent view of poverty, social exclusion and the social protection of vulnerable groups (young individuals, elderly people, disabled, and people who are part of minority groups) from the perspective of Romanian social enterprises (associations, foundations and sheltered units) which tackle these groups through their activities. Additionally, the paper also intends to indicate the way in which the research participants have approached the social imbalances studied, namely the measures they have implemented, together with the impediments they have encountered in this process.

In order to adequately explore the paper's theme and goal, the research employs a mixed methodology approach to properly reveal the subject's significance. Briefly, it will be firstly based on a qualitative research dimension, meaning literature review, which investigates scientific articles on the research topic. Secondly, the paper imposes quantitative aspects in the form of a questionnaire-based survey, addressed to Romanian social enterprises serving marginalized social groups (young people, elderly, disabled and minority groups). Building on the literature review, the paper assesses the validity of two research hypotheses through simple linear regression, this constituting the second quantitative aspect of the research.

After having defined the goal of the paper, we may proceed towards the establishment of the paper's objectives, whose formulation was made according to the literature findings and may be grouped into 4 categories: poverty, social exclusion, social protection and social enterprises. However, the investigation has also firstly intended to determine whether or not marginalized social segments were the pursuit of the social enterprises that have formed the research sample. A second aspect to be assessed was pinpointing the group that constituted the target of the respondents' actions: young people, the elderly, the disabled and minority groups.

Decomposing the first category of objectives, the poverty-linked ones, the inquiry aimed to identify the respondents' perception regarding the current exposure of vulnerable groups to poverty and social exclusion in Romania, the discovery of the method that can minimize the threat of poverty and finally understanding whether combating poverty has to consider the national context instead of ruling it out.

Approaching the social exclusion dimension, the research was focused on evaluating the effects of social exclusion and establishing the main factors that enable it.

Moving to the social protection dimension, the investigation proposed to determine and quantify its ability to diminish the poverty and social exclusion threat for vulnerable groups in Romania, its impact upon the improvement of vulnerable groups' status as well as to assess a list of methods for refining the Romanian social protection.

In what concerns the social enterprises' dimension, the research aspired to evaluate their ability of minimizing poverty and social exclusion for vulnerable groups, to identify the programs they have implemented to foster the social inclusion of their beneficiaries, to illustrate the value enabling actions and the barriers faced by them and finally, to identify the respondents' county.

The paper's intent was put into application by employing an online questionnaire constructed starting from the work of Farias and Farias (2010), Sundaram (2012), Teraji (2011), Popay (2010), Jahnukainen (2015), Vasile and Anghel (2015), Raaum et al. (2009), Babajanian and Hagen-Zanker (2012), Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Protection and Elderly (2016), Matei and Dorobantu (2015) and UNDP (2008). As for the sample of the study, it has involved 100 Romanian social enterprises (associations, foundations and sheltered units) which direct their activities towards young individuals, elderly, disabled people and members of minority groups. The selection of the sample members was undertaken by utilizing the lists of Romanian-based social enterprises available on the websites of the Romanian National Authority for Disabled People (anpd.gov.ro) and the network of social insertion enterprises in Romania (riseromania.wordpress.com). The sampling technique employed was convenience sample, which is a non-probability sampling method thus the elements' probability of being chosen was unknown. The sample members were picked due to the ease with which they could be retrieved, particularly because of the fact that the websites selected as source databases are acknowledged at the level of the Romanian social domain. The data sources have also proven themselves as easy to be acquired because they are readily available online in the form of lists and Microsoft Excel databases. The criteria used for establishing the study participants was for them to target socially vulnerable groups (the young, the elderly, the disabled and minority groups) whereas the interaction with them and the questionnaire transmission process were performed through their e-mail addresses available on the previously mentioned websites. The response rate was 90%.

The profile of the research participants is a heterogeneous one, as they belong to a heterogeneous set of expertise areas and implement a multitude of social programs. In a more detailed view, the respondents' expertise fields range from manufacturing (jewelry, medical equipment, paper and cardboard goods, textiles), recycling (promotional goods, computers) and cleaning services to cultural programs, sales and event planning, as in Figure 1. Conversely, the social programs they operate are offering jobs and labor counseling to the young and the disabled, consciousness campaigns and collaboration with local decision makers and global organizations to help the community understand their vulnerability and to advocate for their rights, and finally volunteering activities.

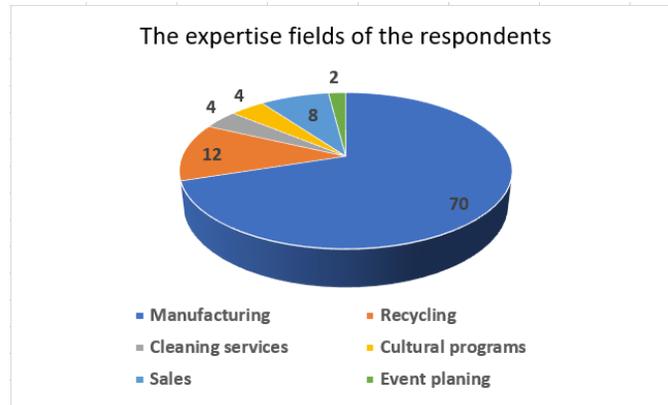


Figure 1. The expertise fields of the respondents

Source: Author's own processing.

The questionnaire has aimed to assess the outlook of the research participants on negative social occurrences, namely poverty and social exclusion affecting vulnerable groups and on their appropriate social defense. Briefly, the instrument has referred to the following aspects: the groups that the respondents target; the present exposure of vulnerable groups to social threats; the most efficient method for minimizing poverty; the effects of social exclusion and its facilitating factors; the ability of social protection to reduce the threat of poverty and social exclusion for vulnerable groups and its quantification; necessary measures for refining the Romanian social protection field; the ability of social enterprises to minimize poverty and social exclusion; the programs and the value enabling actions they have undertaken, as well as the obstacles they have faced. The data collection period was March-April 2018, while the platform used for building up the questionnaire was Google Docs. The obtained data was processed by using Microsoft Excel. The method of analyzing the data was simple linear regression, which depicts the kind of relationship that takes place between two variables, one of them acting as a response variable (Y) and the other one being the explanatory variable (Angelini, 2019). This type of analysis firstly checks the percentage degree of the correlation occurring between the variables of the model by employing two coefficients: R Square, which does not take into account the influence from other factors, and Adjusted R Square, which considers extraneous influence. Further on, the simple linear regression relies on the establishment of the econometric model, based on the coefficient values of the intercept and slope, which can be found in the ANOVA table. Finally, it imposes the model's validity check by comparing the value of Significance F with α , starting from the same previous table.

This econometric method suits the investigation as it manages to fulfill the goal of the paper and to illustrate the complexity of the theme. At the same time, it reflects the dependence that the improvement of the vulnerable groups' social situation manifests towards addressing coherent social protection programs targeted to their needs.

The literature identified on the topic led to the establishment and testing of two research hypotheses:

H1: Offering social protection services to vulnerable individuals can aid them in gaining social privileges more adequately.

H2: Offering social protection services to vulnerable individuals will enhance their involvement in the decisional procedures of the community they belong to.

Results

Presentation of the survey results

While exploring and interpreting the questionnaire's results, an aspect that cannot be contested is that Romanian social enterprises manifest a great concern for the present situation of marginalized segments in terms of poverty and social exclusion exposure and they strongly believe it is an issue that definitely needs attention and appropriate efforts. A further analysis of the survey results will be undertaken for each research objective presented in the methodology chapter: poverty, social exclusion, social protection and social enterprises.

Regarding the first two questions, which established whether or not the respondents target vulnerable groups and what groups they are mostly focused on, all sample subjects stated they act in the benefit of such groups and they have primarily highlighted the disabled (65 respondents/72.2%). The elderly people were targeted by only 6 respondents (6.7%).

Poverty

In what regards the first objective, which refers to poverty aspects, the respondents believe that vulnerable groups are threatened by social imbalances to a very great extent (63 respondents/70%).

Furthermore, they think that the poverty threat can be minimized by shifting the national decisional bodies' outlook with respect to social concerns (85.6%), while raising the chances of people to reach a minimal life climate (14.4%) was considered as less effective. When being requested to confirm or infirm the fact that combating poverty needs to be done by considering the national context and not by ruling it out, 66.7% of the respondents have expressed a strong agreement and only 2.2% were neutral.

Social exclusion

As for the social exclusion effects, the respondents have firstly indicated the reduced social participation (60 responses) and the exercising of socially-based rights (61 responses), as being extremely important, while the person's dispossession from his chances of reaching adequate settings for living was considered slightly important (34 responses).

In what regards the social exclusion factors, the sample subjects have underlined the improper collaboration occurring between the decisional authorities that must safeguard these groups (81 respondents), whereas the person's deficient degree of self-esteem was viewed as less meaningful.

Social protection

Approaching the social protection dimension, the research participants believed that the social protection programs can decrease the poverty and social exclusion threat for vulnerable groups in Romania.

As for the quality of this field at the Romanian scale, they have mostly viewed it as "poor" (37.7%) and "good" (34.4%). Concerning the impact of social protection

upon the improvement of vulnerable groups' status in Romania, the predominant answer was "poor" (36.7%).

Furthermore, the respondents believed that the Romanian social protection needs to be refined in two extremely important ways: raising the quality of the social protection provided to the disabled by financially focusing on complementary activities (77 respondents); encompassing mass media as a factor of stimulating the active participation of the civil society in the healthy functioning of the community (72 respondents).

Social enterprises

As for the social enterprises dimension, the respondents asserted that social enterprises have an extremely important ability of minimizing poverty and social exclusion for vulnerable groups (82.2%).

With respect to the programs they have implemented to foster the social inclusion of their beneficiaries, they have mostly highlighted the provision of temporary employment to make sure the vulnerable person will possess adequate capabilities when seeking for a permanent job (68 responses), a smaller part of them providing transportation and medical services for the disabled staff (4 responses). Besides these programs, 5 respondents have enumerated other such schemes they have delivered: social and educational classes for the disabled, the unemployed and individuals who are not enrolled anymore in the educational field, social insertion programs, campaigns of community collaboration, advocacy seminars for the disabled individuals' rights, job counseling, volunteering.

Concerning the value enabling actions they have launched, the respondents have emphasized the delivery of employment chances through the services supplied to the community (77 responses), whereas having a thorough contribution in the resource usage process and delegating stakeholders at local level was less highlighted (15 responses).

When approaching the obstacles faced during their activity, the sample subjects have underlined the precarious legislative and institutional context (60 responses) as a critical barrier. The restrained resource accessibility and the privileged behavior demonstrated to certain economic entities were significantly less chosen, recording 23 responses and 5 responses, respectively.

As for the geographical location of the respondents or in other words the county where they activate, the largest share of the research subjects undertakes operations in Bucharest, Brasov, Sibiu, Prahova, Alba, Cluj, Dolj and Ilfov (61 respondents). The remaining respondents activate in Iasi and Timis (3 respondents each), Valcea, Arad, Bihor, Constanta, Bacau, Braila (2 respondents each), Buzau, Arges, Bistrita-Nasaud, Hunedoara, Giurgiu, Maramures, Baia Mare, Neamt, Vaslui, Botosani and Galati.

Hypothesis testing through simple linear regression

Having illustrated the research participants' outlook with respect to the analyzed issues, the foregoing step is to check whether the hypotheses set out in the methodology chapter are plausible or not, the test being performed through simple linear regression. Proceeding with the first hypothesis under analysis (Offering social

protection services to vulnerable individuals can aid them in gaining social privileges more adequately) we formulate it as follows:

Null hypothesis (H0): Offering social protection services to vulnerable individuals cannot aid them in gaining social privileges more adequately.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): Offering social protection services to vulnerable individuals can aid them in gaining social privileges more adequately.

The variables of the econometric analysis are of two types, dependent and independent, offering social protection services being the independent variable (denoted with X) and gaining social privileges acting as a dependent variable (marked as Y). Further on, the variable correlation extent is tested through R Square (determination coefficient) and Adjusted R Square (adjusted correlation coefficient), as described by Table 1. Thus, the value of R Square, depicted in the table below indicates us that 6.9% of the variation in gaining social privileges is triggered by the offering of social defense services, excluding extraneous influence. Conversely, when assessing Adjusted R Square, a smaller part (5.8%) of the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variable, giving importance to external circumstances.

Table 1. *Regression statistics for the first assumption*

Multiple R	0.2629
R Square	0.0691
Adjusted R Square	0.0585
Standard Error	0.5922
Observations	90

Source: Author's own processing.

We may proceed to the establishment of the econometric model, rooted in the generalized form $\hat{y}_i = b_0 + b_1x_i$ and relying on the coefficients from Table 2:

$$\text{Gaining social privileges} = 3.50 + 0.25 * \text{Offering social protection services}$$

Table 2. *ANOVA for the first assumption*

ANOVA	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F	
Regression	1	2.2917	2.2917	6.5343	0.0122	
Residual	88	30.8638	0.3507			
Total	89	33.1555				
	Coefficients	Standard Error	tStat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Intercept	3.5042	0.4417	7.9324	6.37E-12	2.6263	4.3822
Offering social protection services	0.2515	0.0984	2.5562	0.0122	0.0559	0.4470

Source: Author's own processing.

The previously established equation depicts a positive relationship taking place between the variables, if we judge by the positive sign of the independent variable. As for the validity of the model, it is assessed by comparing Significance F

(0.01) with α (which is 0.05), hence we may conclude the model is valid, this making the null hypothesis to be rejected.

The next hypothesis to be evaluated is stating that offering social protection services to vulnerable individuals will enhance their involvement in the decisional procedures of the community they belong to. We proceed again with deciding the variables of the model: offering social protection services has the role of independent variable (X) and enhancing their involvement in the decisional procedures of the community is the dependent variable (Y) and then we construct the hypothesis:

Null hypothesis (H0): Offering social protection services to vulnerable individuals will not enhance their involvement in the decisional procedures of the community they belong to.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): Offering social protection services to vulnerable individuals will enhance their involvement in the decisional procedures of the community they belong to.

While taking a look at the correlation magnitude, pictured in Table 3, R Square depicts a value of 3.49%, meaning that this is the share of the change in the enhancement of the involvement in decisional community procedures described by offering social defense services, when external factors are ruled out. As for Adjusted R Square, it reflects a lower percentage (2.39%) of the change that the independent variable accounts for in the dependent one, encompassing external impact sources.

Table 3. Regression statistics for the second assumption

Multiple R	0.1869
R Square	0.0349
Adjusted R Square	0.0239
Standard Error	0.6929
Observations	90

Source: Author's own processing.

Moving further, we may assemble the model's equation looking at the coefficients column from Table 4, which appears as follows:

$$\text{Enhancing the vulnerable individuals' involvement in the decisional procedures of the community} = 3.67 + 0.20 * \text{Offering social protection services}$$

Table 4. ANOVA for the second assumption

ANOVA	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F	
Regression	1	1.5299	1.5299	3.1860	0.0777	
Residual	88	42.2588	0.4802			
Total	89	43.7888				
	Coefficients	Standard Error	tStat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Intercept	3.6754	0.5169	7.1102	2.92E-10	2.6481	4.7027
Offering social protection services	0.2055	0.1151	1.7849	0.0777	-0.0232	0.4343

Source: Author's own processing.

Finally, we acknowledge that the second model reveals a positive interdependence, a 1% increase in the independent variable directing a consequent addition of 0.20 to the dependent variable. However, the model does not respect the validity condition, Significance F (0.07) exceeding α (0.05), thus we may not dismiss the null assumption.

Discussions

The findings of the present research are in line with the literature identified on the theme, depicting the threatening character of poverty and social exclusion and of social protection as a tool for alleviating the situation of vulnerable groups.

More precisely, the research illustrates that poverty can be better minimized by shifting the outlook of national decisional bodies regarding social aspects, which is confirmed by the work of Sachs (2005). In addition, national circumstances constitute an element to be taken into account when dealing with poverty, this aspect being validated by Sundaram (2012). Social exclusion is thought to trigger a reduced social participation, as confirmed by Popay (2010) and it is determined the person's deficient degree of self-esteem, thus supporting the study of Jahnukainen (2015). As for social protection, the study shows that it has the ability to reduce poverty and social exclusion and so it complies with Babajanian and Hagen-Zanker (2012) but at the current point it has a poor quality, as also validated by Lupchian (2016). Concerning its improvement, the research pinpoints the necessity of involving mass media as a catalyst of the civil society's social participation and focusing on complementary activities, whereas the importance of ensuring job training to the providers of social services was less acknowledged, thus disconfirming the research of Udrea (2015). As for the respondents, they provide temporary employment and medical services to vulnerable individuals, confirming the study of Matei and Dorobantu (2015). Concerning the obstacles met, the research participants are restrained by a precarious legislative and institutional context and so they endorse the viewpoint of UNDP (2008).

Moreover, the two hypotheses issued in the paper and which state that offering social protection to marginalized individuals will aid them in gaining social privileges more adequately and will also enhance their involvement in the community's decisional procedures were also supported by the literature. In detailed terms, they are backed up by the work of Babajanian and Hagen-Zanker (2012) who highlight the critical role of social protection for ensuring the social integrity of these groups and stress the importance of shielding the rights of vulnerable individuals as a key point.

Conclusion

The social protection of individuals and the fight against poverty and social exclusion are the sum of various influencing factors, this making them to be complex occurrences. In the absence of coherent strategies, these phenomena hinder individuals' chances of having a good quality existence, vulnerable social groups bearing the consequences of these happenings to the highest degree because of various causes: they have rudimentary chances of utilizing minimal living resources, they cannot escape the deficient social situation they undertake unless appropriate

aid is given to them and when it comes to decisional community activities, they are often excluded, so they have a restricted ability of exercising social prerogatives.

The paper has firstly presented theoretical aspects referring to poverty, social exclusion and their implications upon people's welfare extent, as well as the critical part played by social enterprises in downgrading these social threats and contributing to the social defense of marginalized segments. Secondly, the paper brings a valuable contribution to the research domain by employing a questionnaire-based study intended to explore the real time perspective of Romanian social enterprises specifically focused on marginalized groups with respect to poverty, social exclusion and the social defense of these groups. The research was also accompanied by a regression analysis to check if offering social defense to marginalized people can aid them in gaining social privileges more adequately and if it can increase their involvement in community processes. The simple linear regression has validated only the first hypothesis as it has met the plausibility requirement, meaning the value of Significance F to be smaller than the one of α . Additionally, the regression has reflected a positive correlation between the offering of social defense to vulnerable individuals and their acquisition of social privileges. Stated differently, when there is an increase of 1% in the offering of social defense, the vulnerable individuals' attainment of social privileges also augments with 0.25. To sum up these results, the regression proves the urgency of addressing appropriate social measures to positively alter the situation of marginalized social segments. To overcome their weak position in the society, they must be supplied opportunities of community inclusion and an improved access to adequate living resources. This constitutes an ongoing mission both for the Romanian decisional authorities, as enforcers of legislation, and for the Romanian social enterprises. The latter represent helping entities because they can enhance the life quality for these social groups through the value-creating actions they implement to their benefit.

The study reflected a persistent need for the alleviation of the social sector in Romania, social enterprises being highly convinced that a shift in the national decisional bodies is a first step towards progress. They have also acknowledged that social programs can definitely reduce the threat of poverty and social exclusion and that social protection can be refined provided that mass media becomes an active promoter of people's social involvement. The respondents have also claimed they have implemented sound social measures such as provision of temporary jobs and transportation and healthcare services for disabled staff, together with social advocacy workshops and campaigns. Nevertheless, their activity was highly disrupted by a precarious legislative and institutional context. As for the regression analysis, it was demonstrated that offering social protection services to vulnerable individuals can aid them in gaining social privileges more adequately, since the validity condition (Significance $F < \alpha$) was achieved.

The limitation of the current research is given by the sample size, or in other words by the employment of a reduced number of research participants in the study. As a consequence, the results obtained through the present inquiry might not be applicable to the Romanian social enterprises that target other vulnerable social groups or undertake other activities and value-enabling processes than the ones depicted in the paper, as they might perceive the studied phenomena in a different manner. However, the information discovered through the present research can be

directly beneficial to the institutions that are legally responsible for defending marginalized groups and which implement social programs.

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