

Enabling Social Innovation in Romania

Country Snapshot

Social innovation: "the processes and outcomes of developing novel approaches to address societal challenges facing people and planet." ¹

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from Romania's social innovation ecosystem.

✓ Direct focus on social innovation 🔗 Connected but indirect focus on social innovation ✗ No focus on social innovation

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Official Definition of Social Innovation 🔗

Public evidence of a standalone legal or policy definition of "social innovation" in Romania was not identified.

Related official terminology is more developed around social economy and social enterprise. Under the social economy framework, the law notes that social economy contributes to objectives including the transition to the circular economy and "social innovation." ²

Government Body for Social Innovation ✓

Romania's enabling environment is primarily organised around social economy and labour-market inclusion, with innovation-related functions managed through research and innovation governance.

Key central actors include:

Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity: mandated to develop policies/strategies and support for the social economy; the social economy field is described as managed through its labour policy structures. ^{2 6}

National Employment Agency (ANOFM): hosts social economy functions that coordinate county-level implementation, including certification/monitoring and the social enterprise register. ²

Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation: developed the national research/innovation strategy, which references social innovation within societal-challenge agendas. ³

Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓

While there is no single "social innovation strategy" identified, relevant elements appear in major national strategies:

- **National Strategy for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction (2022–2027):** includes an action line on promoting social entrepreneurship and social economy, including microfinance access for social economy entities, administrative simplification, awareness actions, and proposed development of a national observatory for social economy. ⁴
- **National Research, Innovation and Smart Specialisation Strategy (2022–2027):** frames research and innovation around societal challenges and includes references to "social innovation" in areas connected to inclusive society and sectoral transformation. ³

Policies, Laws & Regulations

Romania's most direct enabling legislation is for the social economy and social enterprises:

- Law no. 219/2015 on social economy: defines the social economy as private economic and social activities serving the general/community interest; establishes principles (e.g., prioritising social objectives, limited profit distribution), defines social enterprises and social insertion enterprises, and creates certification tools ("social enterprise certificate" and "social mark").²
- Public procurement framework (Law no. 98/2016): includes reserved contracts for authorised sheltered units and social insertion enterprises (Article 56) and enables reserving participation in some health/social/cultural services for operators including nonprofits, social enterprises and sheltered units (Article 112).⁵
- Tax-related incentives are primarily indirect (via NGO/charitable and labour-market provisions): the OECD notes no specific tax incentives for investors in social economy entities, while describing existing tax treatment/incentives for NGOs, donors and some employment-related incentives for vulnerable groups.⁶

Official Statistics

Public evidence of an official statistical series specifically dedicated to "social innovation" was not identified.

However, administrative and adjacent data sources exist:

Law no. 219/2015 establishes a unique register of social enterprises and requires recognition through certification; the OECD notes recognised social enterprises are included in the register and submit an annual social report.^{2 6}

Government Programs

Public support is strongly linked to EU cohesion and social inclusion instruments and to employment inclusion objectives.

Examples of documented instruments include:

- POIDS (Inclusion & Social Dignity) support for creating rural social enterprises: guidance for calls specifies up to EUR 100,000 per social enterprise and job-creation conditions (including minimum employment requirements), with prioritisation criteria linked to vulnerable groups (including Roma ethnicity) and rural targeting.⁷
- The OECD describes programmes such as "Social Enterprises for Employment" aimed at financing social enterprises focused on employing vulnerable groups.⁶
- The OECD also notes a "Support for the Social Economy" de minimis scheme approved in September 2024 by the Ministry of Investments and European Projects, positioned as part of blended support mechanisms for social enterprises.⁶

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders

Romania's ecosystem includes national networks, support organisations and international actors active on social entrepreneurship and social economy development.

Illustrative stakeholders with documented presence include:

- ADV Romania, referenced as a leader in promoting the social economy through accelerator activity, ecosystem-building and cross-sector collaboration.⁶
- Romanian Network of Insertion Social Enterprises (RISE) and National Federation of NGOs for Social Services (FONSS), described as ecosystem actors supporting networking, policy discussion, and social service provision linkages.⁶
- Ashoka Romania is referenced by the OECD as an international actor providing mentoring and seed support to social enterprises.⁶
- Impact Hub Bucharest is listed on the government's Accelerate Romania platform as supporting entrepreneurial development of initiatives with positive societal impact.⁸

Support Initiatives

Documented initiatives include acceleration, incubation and capacity-building programs focused on social entrepreneurship and impact ventures.

Examples with public documentation include:

- ADV's "Acceleratorul de Întreprinderi Sociale" model, presented as combining training, mentoring and non-repayable support (including a stated EUR 100,000 per enterprise in the urban accelerator program page). ¹⁰
- Social Impact Award Romania, described as a youth-focused social entrepreneurship competition and incubation programme aimed at moving early-stage ideas into action. ²
- Impact Hub Bucharest's published portfolio of entrepreneur programmes includes a "Social Impact" program stream. ¹¹



Collaboration

Collaboration is visible through platforms and recurring competitions/events that connect entrepreneurs, mentors and funders.

A documented example on a government platform is Startarium PitchDay, described as offering prizes worth EUR 100,000 cash and linking entrepreneurs to resources and potential funding pathways. ⁸



FINANCE

Financing Schemes

Financing for social economy and social entrepreneurship is strongly associated with EU cohesion funding, national de minimis instruments, and social finance/NGO mechanisms.

Documented components include:

- Grant-based support to establish social enterprises under POIDS call guidance (including up to EUR 100,000 per enterprise for rural social enterprise creation in the referenced guide). ⁷
- OECD-noted blended support developments, including an EU-funded instrument intended to provide tailored loans and business development services to social economy actors, and a "Support for the Social Economy" de minimis scheme approved in 2024. ⁶
- Donation/sponsorship-related tax mechanisms: the OECD summarises that individuals may redirect a share of income tax to nonprofits and that corporate donations can be deductible within specified ceilings, while noting no dedicated investor tax incentives for social economy entities. ⁶



Financing Inclusivity

Public support instruments show a clear inclusion orientation via rural targeting and prioritisation of vulnerable groups.

Examples include:

- The POIDS rural support guide explicitly links selection/prioritisation points to vulnerable populations, including criteria related to Roma ethnicity and disadvantage status, alongside job-creation requirements. ⁷
- The OECD highlights broader labour-market measures (not limited to social enterprises) that include employment-related incentives and subsidies targeted at vulnerable groups such as long-term unemployed and youth not in employment, education or training. ⁶



Public Awareness of Social Innovation



Public evidence suggests that “social innovation” is more visible through social economy and social entrepreneurship discourse than as a standalone policy field. Law no. 219/2015 designates May as a dedicated month for promoting the social economy, indicating an institutionalised awareness mechanism for the broader field.²

Research



Romania’s national research and innovation strategy frames innovation against societal challenges and includes references to “social innovation” in this context.³ The OECD also describes a growing ecosystem of actors and partnerships operating at the interface of social economy and public policy, including network-building and policy advocacy functions.⁶

Education & Human Capital



Education and skills development appear in national policy planning and in university-level programmes.

Illustrative examples include:

- The 2022–2027 social inclusion strategy includes actions to build a culture of social entrepreneurship and develop curriculum elements linked to social entrepreneurship skills.⁴
- Babeş-Bolyai University hosts a master’s programme titled “Antreprenoriat Social,” oriented toward developing competencies to address community social problems through value creation.²¹
- West University of Timișoara lists a master’s programme in “Social entrepreneurship and community development,” explicitly linked to social economy/social entrepreneurship and creating social businesses.²²

Entrepreneurship

Latest available international indicators position Romania as an emerging innovator economy with relatively weaker entrepreneurship activity in the most recent GEM global table.

Selected indicators (latest available sources found):



World Bank Business Ready (B-READY):

World Bank Business Ready (B-READY): Romania is included in the B-READY economy coverage and has an economy profile and topic scores available through the World Bank’s B-READY programme.¹²



Innovation Capacity

Romania is listed at rank 49 (with a stated confidence interval for the ranking between ranks 47 and 49 in the WIPO country profile).¹³

Global Innovation Index 2025

European Innovation Scoreboard 2025: capacity

Romania is classified as an Emerging Innovator, performing at 37.7% of the EU average in 2025 and ranking 27th among EU Member States.¹⁵



Social entrepreneurship prevalence

Romania’s Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) is reported at 5.0% (rank 50/51), and Established Business Ownership (EBO) at 4.2% (rank 40/51, tied).¹⁴

GEM 2024/2025 Global Report



Social & Environmental Consciousness

Available indicators show mixed but measurable signals of environmental performance and climate progress, alongside moderate public salience of climate issues.

Selected indicators (latest available sources found):



EU Climate Action Progress

in 2023, Romania's GHG emissions were 105.2 MtCO₂-eq, 4.1% lower than 2022; net GHG emissions (including LULUCF) were 74% lower than 1990 levels. ¹⁷

EU Climate Action Progress (2024 fact sheet)

European Environment Agency reporting notes a 59.5% reduction in total GHG emissions in 2023 compared to 1990 (without LULUCF) and situates Romania at under 3% of EU total emissions. ¹⁸



Political participation (parliamentary election turnout):

IPU Parline reports 48.5% voter turnout for the December 2024 parliamentary election (Senate election results page). ²⁰



Sustainability

Romania is listed at rank 33 (score 57.3). ¹⁶

Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2024