

## MESMER+

### Mapping European Social Economy: Employment, Social Dialogue and the European Pillar of Social Rights

Project nr. 101052222

#### Policy lab – Bulgaria

4 July 2023

From 10.00 to 15.30

Venue: Sofia, Globe Congress Centre, Asia Hall, 1 Macedonia Square

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### Event Summary

The Policy Lab in Bulgaria was organized by ISTURET Project team and conducted on 4 July 2023 at CITUB Congress Centre in Sofia. The meeting was attended by 25 participants – 23 women and 2 men. Among the invited organisations and interested parties were trade unions, employers' organisations, including the National Federation of the Employers of People with Disabilities, the responsible for Social Economy Unit of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, social enterprises, researchers from ISTURET, foundations, NGOs working in the area of social entrepreneurship training etc. Initially we expected around 15 participants, but the event and its topics were welcomed with serious interest, as far as the social economy and its diversity are in the agenda of the various actors in Bulgaria.

The meeting was launched by the ISTURET management, followed by introduction of the participants and their relations and activities connected to the social economy area. The project coordinator of the MESMER + for Bulgaria presented the project, its scope, main activities and expected results in the view of the implementation of the European Pillar of Social rights. All participants were encouraged to follow the project publications, social media and the project website, as well as to support the project research and analysis in the country.

After the questions and answers on the presentation, a guided discussion was opened with following topics discussed and pointed:

- **Industrial relations and social dialogue in Bulgaria:** CITUB representatives outlined the main areas of social protection in the framework of the social dialogue that are consulted and defended in various committees, groups and councils at national and /or regional levels. Other participants shared that there is a constant Working Group on Social Economy and Social Enterprises at public level. Social partners, particularly trade unions in Bulgaria work in cooperation with the social enterprises such as joint studies, initiatives and communicating their problems.

- The social enterprises in Bulgaria face number of difficulties and problems - mainly lack of sustainability, not sufficient support from the authorities, to assure quality products and services that give the social value to the national economy.
- Local economies of the rural areas could be an engine for development of the social entrepreneurship and social enterprises at regional level - there is much to be done ahead.
- Employer's organizations are convinced that the future is in social entrepreneurship and invest in training on it.
- There is different approach and understanding of the main terms in Bulgaria – what is social economy and what is social enterprise – most people do not know the concept in its diversity, so participants highly recommend elaboration of glossary of the terminology within the Mesmer+ project.
- There should be strong cooperation with the local authorities in order to conclude agreements for cooperation and support of the social enterprises.

The second-round discussion was based on the essential part of the questions from the interview, where the representatives of social enterprises, foundations and NGOs discuss why the social economy needs more visibility and representation in national industrial relations systems.

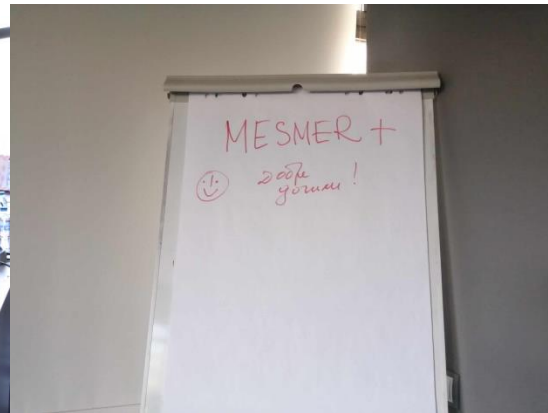
The examples on representation at national and local level were mentioned and possible ways of strengthening the cooperation with social partners and municipalities were presented. Participants clearly underlined that the efforts should be focused on engagement of the municipalities and the implementation of regional strategies for building effective partnerships between social economy organizations, trade unions, and other community organizations to promote economic development based on social economy principles. Additionally, the project WINNER promoting women in social entrepreneurship via training and consulting was presented as a good practice example.

The last session of the Policy Lab was focused on the elaboration of **Policy Brief**, where participants together organized their concerns, recommendations and proposals for Legislation amendments and updating, Social Dialogue representation, active government policies and unlocking social economy potentials. The key messages addressed in the Policy Brief were as follows:

- The social economy **supports** the process of social inclusion and is different from corporate capitalism. Within the framework of the social economy, a business model is created that is not characterized by size and spheres of activity, but by **respecting common values**, such as: supremacy of democracy, committed participation of civil society structures to achieve social progress, the rights of the personality; protection and application of the principles of solidarity and responsibility, combining the interests of member users and the general interest; democratic control by members; voluntary and open membership, management autonomy and independence in relation to public bodies; investing surplus revenue in the

service of the members combined with the common interest in achieving the goals of sustainable development.

- Despite the difficulties in creating and developing social enterprises in Bulgaria, the tendency to use the capacity of non-profit organizations to create employment and integration of disadvantaged groups, for social inclusion and provision of social services is visible.
- The differences between the regions and their problems and needs in Bulgaria are significant. There is a key need for the state authorities to strengthen the activity of policies to support and promote social enterprises in Bulgaria.
- Social enterprises and the entire civil sector must demonstrate their abilities to be an **equal partner of the state and social partners** within the framework of social dialogue in solving important social problems and prove that innovation and flexibility are their main distinguishing features. The country still lacks a sufficient number of good practices for the development of social enterprises.
- There is an urgent need for changes in the Law on Enterprises of the Social and Solidarity Economy /2018/ and the bylaws, including: specific incentives for the development of social entrepreneurship; introduction of mandatory regulations for municipalities to support enterprises and cooperatives from the social and solidarity economy in their territory, for example by providing free premises and equipment, reduction or exemption from local taxes and fees and incentives for hiring people with disabilities and people from vulnerable groups.
- Project- type financing of organizations from the social economy supports their development but creates significant obstacles to their sustainability. That is why a **long-term policy** on the financing of enterprises is needed, which guarantees the production of quality products and services, a regional dimension, and a strong commitment of the national authorities and especially of the municipalities.
- The social and solidarity economy is an opportunity to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and is a key partner and stakeholder in the implementation of **the European Pillar of Social Rights**.
- There is a clear need to increase society's interest in social added value as a result of the activity of social enterprises, to change the attitudes and culture of consumption of the products and services produced and offered by social enterprises. In this regard, there is a need for elaboration and communication of a **Glossary of the main terms and concepts** of the Social Economy to be addressed to the society.





#### Publications:

<https://knsb-bg.org/index.php/2023/07/04/issio-provede-nacionalna-rabotna-srestha-po-proekt-mesmer-2022-2024-g/>

<https://www.facebook.com/ISTURET/posts/pfbid02qfHQMgFfg39jdpibCHpvQrpLrYMUHGLdKttGcSuzZMKrAvHbwTtDeZNLzzuFiFul?notif id=1688560036681965&notif t=feedback reaction generic&ref=notif>

<https://www.facebook.com/WINNEREUproject/posts/pfbid023fiGNJrvidqDzRaydABMLpKrKRgv87f27wCGqgZZMVQdTJpmMr3H7vX4a1FZ2FC1l>