SOCIAL ENTERPRISE STATUS

AMBIGUITIES

AND

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT











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ABSTRACT

Social entrepreneurship plays an important role in the socio-economic development of society, offering opportunities for integration and improvement of life in the community. In Albania, the importance of social entrepreneurship has been understood early, since the first forms of social enterprises started their activity before the 2000s, as part of the activities of non-profit projects and programs supported by foreign donors. In legal terms, social enterprises in Albania began to be regulated and recognized as such in 2016, with the approval of law no. 65/2016 on "Social Enterprises in the Republic of Albania" and the relevant by-laws, which were followed by the call for registering and obtaining the Social Enterprise Status and the call for financing from the Social Enterprise Fund.

This policy paper analyses the application process for obtaining Social Enterprise (SE) Status and the application process for financial support from the Social Enterprise Fund (SEF), and aims to provide recommendations that address the challenges and difficulties encountered by Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs), as well as the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP), as the institution responsible for the management of these processes.

The policy paper was prepared through the analysis of the legal framework documentation, the information provided through official requests for information, the results of the questionnaires with NPOs that have applied/are in the process of applying/have been refused the status of SE, outcomes of the consultation meetings with NPOs and inter-institutional tables organized with NPOs, Ministry of Health and Social Protection and other actors of the SE ecosystem.





The results indicate that the law encounters various problems that have created space for different interpretations during its implementation and have led to ambiguity regarding the documentation that must be submitted and the procedures that must be followed for the application for SE status and for financing from the SEF. These issues have prolonged and complicated the process of applying for SE status and in the case of the financing process have hampered the successful completion of this process.

The policy paper summarizes and presents to the responsible state institutions, social enterprises, NPOs that wish to obtain SE status, donors who support the development of social enterprises in the country, and other interested actors, the main issues that create barriers in the activity of social enterprises, which must be brought to attention and must be addressed to facilitate SEs functioning. In this way, the document contributes to the development of the social enterprise sector and consequently to the development and social-economic sustainability of the country.

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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE **SOCIAL ENTERPRISE** LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN ALBANIA

In 2016 was approved the Law No. 65/2016 "On Social Enterprises in the Republic of Albania", which regulates the establishment and operation of social enterprises, as well as defines the requirements and criteria for obtaining and maintaining the status of SE. This law was approved despite the many problems identified, presented and discussed by the actors of the ecosystem with the ministry responsible for social enterprises. A full analysis of the law was conducted by Partners Albania in 2019.[1]

After its approval, for a period of 4 years until 2020, the law was accompanied with relevant bylaws, which should have been issued by the responsible institutions within 6 months from the date the law entered into force. [2] Despite the specified deadlines, this legal package continues to be incomplete as the instruction on "Procedures and necessary documentation for terminating the activity of a social enterprise and the withdrawal of SE status" [3] is missing. This delay in the issuance of by-laws resulted in the non-implementation of the law until 2019 (three years after the approval of the law). The complete list of by-laws issued so far in accordance with Law 65/2016 on "Social Enterprises in the Republic of Albania" is in Appendix No. 1.

In May 2019, MHSP issued for the first time the instruction and the call for applications for registering and obtaining the SE status [4]. The call remains open and interested organizations can apply at any time for SE status. According to the latest information provided by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, it results that until April 2022, only 13 NPOs have applied for the SE status, of which 9 NPOs operating in the cities of Shkodra, Kukës, Tirana and Berat have received SE status, while 4 applications of NPOs were refused.

In February 2020, MoHSP announced the call for applications for funding from the Social Enterprise Fund [5] for subjects that have received the SE status. [1]. According to the information from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 4 SE (out of 8 NPOs with the status of SE in that period) have applied for financing from the Fund in Support of Social Enterprises. At the end of the process, no application was selected for funding from the dedicated Fund for the period 2019-2021[6].

^[2] Ligji Nr. 65/2016, "Për Ndërmarrjet Sociale në Republikën e Shqipërisë, neni 29, pika 1 dhe 2

^[3] Ligji Nr.65/2016, "Për Ndërmarrjet Sociale në Republikën e Shqipërisë, neni 14, pika 2

^[4] https://shendetesia.gov.al/apliko-per-statusin-e-ndermarrjes-sociale/ [5] https://shendetesia.gov.al/apliko-per-statusin-e-ndermarrjes-sociale/



This document has been prepared through the analysis of the legal package, the information collected in a standardized method through questionnaires directed to NPOs that are in the process of applying for the SE status, have received the status, or have been refused the SE status. As well as through the information provided by MoHSP through official requests for information, meetings and inter-institutional tables organized with representatives from NPOs, MHSP, and various actors of the SE ecosystem, to further discuss and analyse the issues identified above.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE STATUS



Following the approval of the law and relevant by-laws, in February 2019 the Ministry of Health and Social Protection announced the call for applications for registering and obtaining the SE status. In this section of the policy paper are presented the criteria that must be fulfilled and the documentation that must be submitted by NPOs during the application for obtaining the SE status. Also, it is provided an analysis of the overall process and documentation needed, identifying the challenges and barriers encountered by NPOs and MoHSP during the application process.



THE APPLICATION PROCESS FOR OBTAINING THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE **STATUS**

The conditions, procedures and the actions to be followed for applying and obtaining the SE status based on the instruction No. 602, dated 01.08.201 on "The Procedures and Necessary Documentation for Obtaining the Social Enterprise Status" [7] and the instruction of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection "Call for Application for Obtaining the Social Enterprise Status" 20198 [8], are as below:



THE LEGAL FORM OF THE ORGANIZATION

The entity must be registered as a Non-Profit Organization.



- -Continuous operation in the field of production of goods and/or provision of services;
- -At least 20 percent of the revenue after the second year of the activity, and at least 30 percent of the revenue after the third and following year of the activity, must be generated from the activities predicted in the decision of the Council of Ministers:
- -Inclusion of at least 3 paid employees in the SE activity, in addition to the contribution of volunteers:
- -The utilisation of the generated revenue from the economic activity of SE for the continuous expansion of their activity.

REQUEST DIRECTED TO MOHSP

The NPOs themselves initiate the application procedure through a written request by the applicant or any authorized person, directed to the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, in accordance with the application format [9] approved by the head of the Application Evaluation Committee.

SOCIAL CRITERIA

- -Social enterprise aims to promote social objectives in a pre-defined field of activity.
- -At least 30 percent of the employees employed in the social enterprise must belong to the category of disadvantaged groups in the Social Protection program from the social and economic point of view.

BASIC DOCUMENTATION

- -A certificate released, no later than three months before the date of application, by the NPO Registration Office at the Court of the Tirana Judicial District:
- -A copy of the statute and the deed of incorporation:
- -A decision of the highest decision-making body of the non-profit organization expressing the organization's intention to obtain the social enterprise status;
- -Other documents certifying the fulfilment of economic and social criteria;
- -Copy of the license, if applicable;
- -Copies of the previous year's financial statements in case the organization has been operating for more than one year.
- -If the submitted documentation is not complete or when it is deemed reasonable, the relevant structures may request additional documentation in addition to the documents presented by the applicant.

ANALYSIS OF THE CRITERIA, PROCEDURES AND DOCUMENTATION FOR OBTAINING THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE STATUS **STATUS**

LAW NO.65/2016 ON "SOCIAL ENTERPRISES IN THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA" AND THE INSTRUCTION "CALL FOR APPLICATIONS FOR REGISTERING AND OBTAINING THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISES STATUS"

During the implementation of the law and the application process for SE status, various problems were encountered that affected the successful completion of the process. From the analysis of all the steps, it turns out that the main source of most of the problems is the Law 65/2016 on "Social Enterprises in the Republic of Albania" itself.

Box 1: Article 1, Law No. 65/2016 on "Social Enterprises in the Republic of Albania"

ARTICLE 1

OBJECT

This law regulates the organization and operation of social enterprises and defines the conditions and criteria that an entity must fulfill to obtain the social enterprise status.

Box 2: Article 7,8, Law No. 65/2016 on "Social Enterprises in the Republic of Albania"

CHAPTER II CRITERIA

ARTICLE 7

CRITERIA

An entity to **maintain** the status of social enterprise must meet a minimum of economic and social nature criteria.

NENI 8

ECONOMIC CRITERIA

In order to maintain the social enterprise status, these economic criteria must be fulfilled:

- 1. The social enterprise must continuously operate in the field of production of goods and/or provision of services.
- 2. At least, 20 percent of the revenue after the second year of activity and, at least, 30 percent of the revenue after the third year and in the following years of activity, must be generated from the activities stipulated in Article 10 of this law.
- 3. In its activity, the **social enterprise**, in addition to the volunteer's contribution, must employ **at least 3 paid employees**.
- 4. The revenue generated from the economic activity of **social enterprises** serves to the continuous expansion of their activity.

Box 3: Article 9, Law No. 65/2016 on "Social Enterprises in the Republic of Albania"

ARTICLE 9

SOCIAL CRITERIA

In order to maintain the social enterprise status, the following social criteria must be fulfilled:

- 1. **Social enterprise** aims to promote social objectives in a pre-defined field of activity.
- 2. At least, 30 percent of the employees employed in the **social enterprise** must belong to the category of disadvantaged group from the social and economic point of view, stipulated in Article 11 of this law.

As noted in the articles above, the law does not state the criteria that an NPO must fulfill in order to obtain the status of a social enterprise. In article 1, the object of the law is defined, which, among other things, should determine the conditions and criteria to obtain the SE status, but these criteria have not been specified in none of the law articles. Instead in the article 7

of the law is defined the criteria to maintain the <u>SE status</u>, presented in Article 8 and Article 9 of the law.

This ambiguity of the law has been addressed by the instruction for applying for SE status, issued by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, which by internal regulation has interpreted the law as follows:

Box 4: Instruction, "Call for Applications for Registering and Obtaining the Social Enterprise Status" [10] MoHSP, 2019

WHU GAN APPLY

Only non-profit organizations have the right to apply to obtain the "social enterprise" status, which **must meet a minimum of economic and social criteria** defined by law, No. 65/20 on "Social enterprises in the Republic of Albania", **to obtain** and maintain the social enterprise status.

Note: The social and economic criteria defined in the instruction by the MoHSP are the same as those specified in the law, as above, for maintaining the status.

It is evident that in its interpretation of the law, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in the absence of determined criteria from the law, has decided that the economic and social criteria defined to maintain the status should also be applied to obtain the SE status.

This interpretation of the ministry brings some problems, as follows:

First, since the criteria to obtain the status are a copy of the criteria stipulated by the law to maintain the status, there are problems in the terminology used in the instruction "Call for Applications for Registering and Obtaining the Social Enterprise Status". The term used in the instruction "social enterprises" in this case is not correct, as the organizations are in the application process and have not yet obtained the SE status.

Second, the economic criteria cannot be relevant for organisations that are in the early stages of social enterprise activity and therefore have not had economic activity for more than two or three years. To address this problem, but in conflict with the defined criteria, MoHSP has accepted the applications of the recently established or "new "organisations without the obligation to submit documentation that verifies that at least 20% of the revenues after the second year and 30% of the revenues after the third year, is generated by the activities foreseen in the decision of the Council of Ministers[11]. This "facilitation" for recently established or "new" organizations contradicts the principles of equality that should guide an application process, as it penalizes organizations that have had economic activity for the period specified in the guide, but have not managed to meet the defined level of revenue that must come from the economic activity.

In another perspective, the submission of the documentation that verifies the revenue from the economic activity is not valuable, if the organizations that have had an economic activity at the time of application for SE status decide to diversify the activity or change it to adapt to the activities listed in the decision of the Council of Ministers.

Thirdly, another problem induced from the interpretation of the law is the narrowing of the law scope, and putting the focus entirely in the implementation of employment policies.

As defined in Article 2 of the law, the purpose of the law is the protection and social inclusion of vulnerable groups, while employment and the provision of employment opportunities are seen as alternatives to achieve it.

This interpretation is reflected also in the documentation required by the MoHSP in the application process for obtaining the SE status. In addition to the document that certifies that the employees belong to one of the categories of disadvantaged groups stipulated in Decision No. 56, dated 31.01.2018 "On the Determination of Specific Categories of Disadvantaged Groups [12], MoHSP requires for every employee, regardless of the disadvantaged group to which it belongs, the certificate of unemployment issued by the Labor Office. This requirement, which is not expressed in any document, deprives persons from disadvantaged groups employed in unfavourable conditions, of the right to an employment opportunity in accordance with human dignity, as stipulated in the purpose of the law.

Box 5: Article 2, Law 65/2016 on "Social Enterprises in the Republic of Albania"

ARTICLE 2

PURPOSE

The purpose of this law is to regulate the activity of social enterprises, aiming the protection and social inclusion of vulnerable groups, through:

- a) employment, within the recognition of the fundamental right of the individual to have sufficient living resources, in accordance with human dignity;
- b) providing employment opportunities for persons whose age, health and family situation do not allow active particiaption in the labor market;
- c) providing goods and services in diverse forms and of good quality, providing suitable and accessible opportunities for individuals with special needs, as well as marking an essential step towards gender equality, as these services facilitate women's participation in the job market;
- d) economic and social integration of groups in need, promoting the spirit of responsibility, solidarity and social cohesion in the community.

DREQUIRED DOCUMENTATION FOR OBTAINING THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE STATUS



According to the organizations that participated in the questionnaire the necessary information and legal documentation to complete the application for obtaining the SE status (law, instructions, regulations, application forms) were easily accessible and MoHSP has guided and assisted organizations in providing appropriate documentation. The application form for SE status is comprehensible and easy to complete. In general, during the application process, NPOs were assisted by the MoHPS.

The main challenge identified by both, the organizations that have applied for the status and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, is the submission of the document that proves that employees belong to one of the categories of disadvantaged groups. Almost all organizations that have applied for the status have encountered problems with providing documentation for employees that belong to disadvantaged groups, which has resulted in protracted processes and higher costs for organizations.

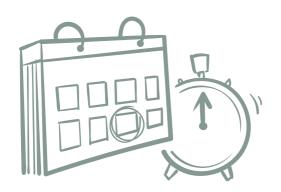
There are two main issues related to this requirement:

- 1. In Decision No. 56 dated 31.01.2018 on "Determination/Identification of Concrete Categories of Disadvantaged Groups", or in other decisions and instructions related to it, there are no specifications regarding the type and form of the document that proves that the employee belongs to one of the categories. The list of disadvantaged groups lists 28 different categories, for some of which it is impossible to receive a document from the responsible institution. For example, point k) women and girls victims / potential victims of trafficking, exploitation and domestic violence, point s) persons with different gender identity and sexual orientation, or point j) women living in rural areas: i) where the average level of unemployment exceeds 50% of the national average level for at least two calendar years; ii) where female unemployment is above 150% of the average level of male unemployment for at least two of the last three calendar years. In the last case (point j), apart from the impossibility to obtain a proof document, it is not clear whether only one or both conditions must be fulfilled.
- 2. As mentioned above, based on the requirements of the ministry, each applicant must submit, as part of the documentation for application, the unemployment certificate for the employee/s from disadvantaged groups, issued by the Labor Office as an institution registering jobseekers and issuing unemployment certificates, alongside the document that proves that the employe belongs to one of the disadvantaged categories (if applicable).

This request on the part of the MoHSP, is not expressed in any of the decisions related to the application for obtaining the status, and it seems to contradict Decision No. 56 dated 31.01.2018, in which the unemployed for a long-term period of at least 12 months are listed as one of the categories of disadvantaged groups (point d). Differing from the certification of unemployment for this category (point d), for all the other categories the period of unemployment is not important. This request of the ministry, not only obliges the NPOs to submit additional documents, but seen from a different perspective, it makes the submission of a document proving that a certain employee belongs to a disadvantaged group invalid and unnecessary (e.g. . persons with disabilities) in the case this individual is unemployed for a long-term period of at least 12 months.

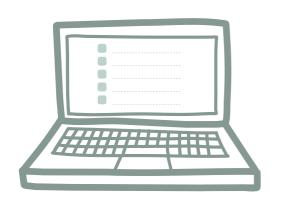
DURATION OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS TO OBTAIN THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE **STATUS**

DURATION OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS AND THE NOTIFICATION ON THE SE STATUS



In the instructions of the call for application and registration, to obtain the SE status[13] it is specified that the applicants are notified of the decision of ministry on status recognition or rejection within 30 calendar days from the request submission date, and in the case of rejection of the status, the notification must also comprise the reasons for the rejection. According to the MoHSP [14] the timeline for evaluating requests has been respected, but due to the problems identified above, the duration of the evaluation process has lasted on average 5-6 months, with the highest duration being 8 months, and the process itself has been accompanied by continuous communications between NPOs and the ministry for the submission of documentation, in compliance to the ministry's requirements.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISES REGISTER



In the instruction for the creation of social enterprise register[15] but also in the SE law [16] it is stipulated that social enterprises after obtaining the SE status will be registered in the social enterprises register, which will be public. According to MoHSP, the register of social enterprises is documented in an Excel table, but has not yet been created in an electronic format accessible to the public.

THE FUND IN SUPPORT OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

(SOCIAL ENTERPRISE FUND)



Based on the decision of the council of ministers (DCM) No. 85, dated 25.06.2018 "Authorization of the State Aid for the Creation of the Social Enterprise Fund"[17] dand DCM No. 789, dated 26.12.2018 "On the Creation of the Social **Enterprises Fund and Forms of Support through** the Subsidy for Social Enterprises"[18], it was created the SE fund to support social enterprises for the period 2019-2021 with a total value of 249,760,000 (two hundred and forty-nine million, seven hundred and sixty thousand) ALL. Subsequently, the creation of the fund was accompanied by instruction No. 376, dated 18.06.2020 on "The Granting Criteria and Monitoring Mechanism

of State Aid to Social Enterprises[19]" and the Guide "Call for Applications for Financing of Entities that have Received the Social Enterprsie Status"[20].

From the analysis of by-laws, instructions regarding the Social Enterprise Fund, it is noted that the information presented in these documents is often ambiguous and partial which can lead to confusion and misinterpretation.

As follows, some of the information, the presence of which in different parts of the documents with different explanations, leads to and causes confusion:

- In point 2 of DCM No. 85, dated 25.06.2018 "Authorization of State Aid for the Creation of the Social Enterprise Fund" it is determined that the aid will be given in the form of a subsidy from the state budget, but it has not been determined the forms in which this subsidies will be given.
- In points 2 and 3 of the DCM there is information about the limit on the maximum value that entities can benefit from the fund, the acceptable costs according to the scheme proposed in the draft decision and the percentage of costs that can be covered by the aid.

According to the funding scheme proposed in the MoHSP draft decision on "The Creation of the Social Enterprises Fund and Forms of Support through Subsidy for Social Enterprises", this information is directly related to only one of the forms of subsidy: for the activity of social enterprises.

Box 6: Quote from point 2,3,4 DCM No. 85, dated 25.6.2018 "Authorization of State Aid for the Creation of the Social Enterprise Fund"

- 2. The support will be provided in the form of a subsidy from the state budget, with a total value of 249,760,000 ALL and the scheme will have an implementation duration of 3 (three) years, for the period 2019-2021.
- 3. The funding will cover 70% of the eligible costs approved by the evaluation committee, but not more than ALL 1,500,000, in the case the entity is able to finance the remaining part of the investment.
- 4. The funding scheme proposed in the draft decision, allows as eligible costs:
- a) Investments in machinery and equipment for the production/service provision;
- b) Qualifications and trainings for enhancing the professional skills of young employees from the categories of disadvantaged groups;
- c) Coverage of up to 50% of the minimum wage for new employees from the categories of disadvantaged groups for a period of 6 months.

With the approval of DCM No. 789, dated 26.12.2018 on "The Creation of the Social Enterprise Fund and Forms of Support through the Subsidy [ER1] for Social Enterprises", it is determined that the aid would be provided in the form of a subsidy from the state budget to subsidize:

- The activity of social enterprises, with fund in the value of 135,000,000 (one hundred and thirty-five million) ALL (which includes all eligible costs defined in DCM No. 85);
- New jobs created for the employment of individuals from disadvantaged groups, with fund in the value of 37,000,000 (thirty-seven million) ALL;
- Compulsory social and health insurance of the social enterprises employees, belonging to disadvantaged groups, with fund in the value of 7,776,000 (seven million seven hundred and seventy-six thousand) ALL.

For each of the forms, the decision also specifies: the criteria's that must be fulfilled by SE to benefit from the subsidy, the eligible costs and the amount of payment from the fund, as follows:

1. SUBSIDY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISES ACTIVITY

1.1 CONDITIONS TO BE FULLFILLED

- 1.1.1 The subject has obtained the social enterprise status by the decision of the minister responsible for social affairs;
- 1.1.2 To have a business plan or a project and be capable to implement the proposed activities of the project on time;
- 1.1.3 To employ a minimum of 3 (three) new employees from the categories of disadvantaged groups, within 12 (twelve) months from the moment of receiving the subsidy for the development of the social enterprise activity.

1.2 ELIGIBLE COSTS

THE FUND COVERS UP TO 70% OF ELIGIBLE COSTS, BUT NOT MORE THAN 1,500,000 (ONE MILLION FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND) ALL, IN CASE THE ENTITY IS ABLE TO FINANCE THE REMAINING PART OF THE INVESTMENT.

- 1.2.1 Investments in machinery and equipment for production/service provision;
- 1.2.2 Qualification and training for enhancing the professional skills of young employees from the categories of disadvantaged groups;;
- 1.2.3 Coverage, up to 50% (fifty percent) of the minimum wage, for new employees from the categories of disadvantaged groups, for a period of six months

1.3 PAYMENT

- 1.3.1 The payment of the received subsidy for the development of the activity is 70% (seventy percent) with the approval of the application but not more than 1,050,000 ALL and 30% (thirty percent) at the end of the project, upon the approved invoice/invoices, which prove the expenses incurred. The document required for the justification of expenses (investments in machinery and equipment for the realization of production/services) is the simple tax invoice with VAT.
- 1.3.2 A social enterprise, in its entire time of activity, benefits only once from the subsidy for the development of the activity.

2. SUBSIDY FOR NEW JOB POSITIONS OPENED FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF INDIVIDUALS FROM DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

2.1 CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED

2.1.1 Employment of persons from the categories of disadvantaged groups and the duration of the contract should not be less than two years

2.2 ELIGIBLE COSTS

ENTERPRISES CAN BENEFIT UP TO 100.000 (ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND) ALL FOR EACH NEW JOB POSITION

- 2.2.1 Work appliances
- 2.2.2 Raw materials and consumables.

2.3 PAYMENT

- 2.3.1 The payment of the received subsidy for the opening of new job positions is made 50% (fifty percent) with the approval of the application but not more than 750,000 ALL and 50% (fifty percent) after the realization of the expenses, supported with the invoices which prove the expenses incurred, according to the documents in 3.3.1.
- 2.3.2 A social enterprise can benefit for the opening of up to 20 (twenty) new jobs positions.

3.SUBSIDY FOR COMPULSORY SOCIAL AND HEALTH INSURANCE OF THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE EMPLOYEES THAT BELONG TO DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

3.1 CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED

3.1.1 Employment of people from the categories of disadvantaged groups, the duration of the contract should not be less than two years.

3.2 ELIGIBLE COSTS

The social enterprise can benefit an annual financing in the amount of up to 100% (one hundred percent) of the compulsory social and health insurance, of the part of the contribution of the employer and the employee.

3.2.1 Compulsory social and health insurances

3.3 PAYMENT

100% financing is done directly at the social insurance branch, according to the relevant procedures, upon the certifications of employment contracts agreement.

According to the information presented in the above tables, it is observed that:

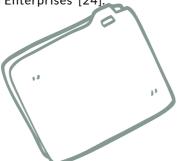
- Only for the subsidy for the development of the SE activity, the fund requires for cofinancing from SE (30% of eligible costs),
- The number of employees and the maximum value of the subsidy that can be applied and benefited by a SE for the third form of subsidy that covers compulsory social and health insurance, are not defined.
- According to point 11 of the decision on the creation of the social enterprises fund[21], a SE during the entire time of exercising its activity, benefits <u>only once</u> from the subsidy for the development of the SE activity, but apparently for the other subsidy forms there is no such limitation.
- The subsidy for the opening of new job positions for individuals from disadvantaged groups can be used for work appliances, raw materials and consumables for the new job, but not for covering the salaries of new employees. Therefore, organizations that anticipate creating new jobs for the categories of disadvantaged groups and want to benefit from funds to cover the salaries of employees, should apply for the subsidy for the development of the SE activity instead of the subsidy for the creation of new jobs for individuals from disadvantaged groups, and cover (up to 50% of the minimum salary), for new employees from the categories of disadvantaged groups, for a period of six months.

Another limitation for SEs is related to the total amount of support that social enterprises can benefit from the state budget. According to the specifications in DCM No. 85, dated 25.6.2018 "Authorization of State Aid for the Creation of the Social Enterprise Fund"[22], the total value of the aid granted to a social enterprise, provided under this scheme and other support schemes from the state budget (all forms of support from the state budget), should not exceed the amount of 14 000 000 (fourteen million) ALL for a period of three years.



APPLICATION PROCEDURES AND DOCUMENTS FOR FINANCING OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

In July 2021, five months before the end of the fund period (2019-2021), SEs were notified by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection about the launch of the call for applications for funding SEs. Below are the steps, criteria, conditions and documentation that must be completed by NPOs that have received the status of SE to apply for funding, according to Guide No. 376, dated 18.06.2020 on "The Criteria for Granting and the Monitoring Mechanism of Social Enterprise State Aid" [23] and the instruction "Applications for Financing of Entities that Have Received the Status of Social Enterprises" [24].



LEGAL FORM OF THE ORGANIZATION

The subject must have obtained the SE status.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA OF SES TO THE STATE AID SCHEME

- Capacity to finance 30% of the costs of the proposed project, at the application stage, only for the subsidy for the development of the social enterprise activity;
- SEs should operate in one of the activities that are included in point 4, of the Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 16, dated 12.1.2018 on "The Approval of the List of Activities carried out by Social Enterprises" [25];

- To employ a minimum of 3 new employees from the categories of disadvantaged groups, within 12 months from the moment of receiving the subsidy, and the duration of the contract should not be less than 2 years;
- To have headquarters within the territory of the Republic of Albania.

REQUEST TO MOHSP

The initiation of the procedure by the SE itself by means of a request addressed to the MoHSP, in accordance to the application format[26] approved by the head of the Application Evaluation Committee.

PROJECT PROPOSAL OR BUSINESS PLAN

Along with the application form, SEs must submit a project proposal or business plan, accompanied by an explanatory statement on the strategic importance of the project, as well as a detailed description of the following elements:

- the estimated total value of the subsidy;
- the time required for the implementation of the project;
- the productivity and added value brought by the project;
- employment opportunities and the opening of new job positions that are foreseen as the result of the financial support;
- the compatibility of the project with policies and sectoral economic priorities;.
- the regional and local economic development opportunities presented by the investment;
- the prospect of development and improvement of conditions and standards of the goods production and service provision represented by the investment;

- increasing the general level of security and the quality of life of the citizens of the community, that comes as a result of the implementation of this investment;
- self-declaration that the enterprise is capable of accurate and in time implementation of the proposed activities;

🔽 DOCUMENTATION TO BE SUBMITTED

- The document certifying the approval of the social enterprise status by the responsible minister, issued not later than three months before the date of the application
- Photocopies of the decision of registration in court and the organization's statute;
- Court extract (which can be obtained at the NPO Registration Office, near the District Court, Tirana).
- Evidence from the court that the organization is not in a situation of bankruptcy, liquidation, cessation of activity or agreement with donors/creditors or any similar situation arising from a procedure of the same type or subject to a procedure of the same type; (Online at e-albania/at Taxes with active status);
- Filled out application form, stamped on each page and signed by the legal representative of the organization;
- Identification number of the taxable person (NUIS/TIN);
- CV of the organization (signed and stamped by the legal representative of the NPO)
- Copies of the previous year's financial statements in case the organization has been active for more than one year, and/or Declaration and Payment Forms for natural/physical persons;
- Certification from the tax department for the payment of tax obligations (original or with a digital stamp (Online at e-albania/at Taxes), as long as you exercise the activity, but not longer than for a period of one year from the moment of the application;

- Information on the number of employees and the level of salary given to each person, based on the legislation in force on salaries in the public sector;[27]
- Certification for social and health insurance contributions for the specified taxpayers for the last three months;
- A copy of the act of inspection at work in case the organization has previously exercised its activity;
- Bank confirmation (where the IBAN number and the account number of the organization are reflected, in Lek) as well as the name/names of the persons authorized to perform banking operations.
- Bank certification that proves that the enterprise has in its bank account an amount equal to 30% of the business plan budget, for the subsidy for the development of the SE activity.
- Financial balance of the last year (Online at ealbania/at Taxes).

ANALYSIS OF THE PROCEDURES AND DOCUMENTS TO **APPLY FOR FINANCING** FROM THE SE FUND

The call for applications for funding of SEs is published on the MoHSP website, as well as the application form[28], which must be completed and signed at the time of applying for the subsidy. The positioning of the documentation related to the application for the fund in the MoHSP website, creates difficulties in identifying the right application form for the call for funding since the form is not related to the corresponding call, and it is not defined in the title for which application it is. The application form is the same for all three forms of subsidy, and an SEs can apply for all three forms of subsidy at the same time.

As on the MoHSP website where the call for funding is published, and in the call itself the information about the deadlines for the application period is missing. The call continues to be on the MoHSP website and due to the lack of deadlines for application, it seems like the call is still open, despite the fact that the call is closed and the fund was only valid for the 2019-2021 period.

Also, there is lack of information regarding whether a SE can apply for only one form of subsidy, more than one, or all three at the same time. There is only one moment in the call (item 2. Application procedures for receiving funding for SEs), in which it is stated that: "the application procedure for one of the forms of support for social enterprises is initiated by the non-profit organization itself....", which implies that a SE can apply only for one of the forms, but there is no clear reference to this in any of the documents related to the fund. Meanwhile, from discussions with the ministry, it has been said that SEs can apply for more than one form of subsidy.

Information about the fund and the forms of financing is scattered in three different documents:

- DCM[ER1] No. 85, dated 25.6.2018
 "Authorization of State Aid for the Creation of the Social Enterprise Fund"[29]
- DCM No. 789, dated 26.12.2018 on "The Creation of the Fund in Support of Social Enterprises and Forms of Support through the Subsidy for Social Enterprises" [30]
- Instruction No. 376, dated 18.06.2020 on "The Granting Criteria and Monitoring Mechanism of State Aid to Social Enterprises" [31]

Besides the repetition and overlapping of the information in the three above-mentioned documents, in some cases inconsistency in information is observed as well (e.g requiring different documents for the same criteria) which creates confusion and difficulties for SEs who want to apply for funds.

In point 12 of the decision[32] for the creation of the fund it is stated that: subsidies for the opening of new job positions, benefit those social enterprises that submit proposals, which reflect the increase in the number of employees with representatives from disadvantaged groups and need funds that partially cover the costs of opening the new job position. But, according to point 10 of the same decision (letter c), one of the conditions that must be fulfilled by a SEs in order to benefit from subsidies for the development of the activity, is to hire at least 3 new employees from the categories of disadvantaged groups, within 12 months from the moment of receiving the subsidy for the development of the activity. So, regardless of the form of subsidy the criteria requires that all SEs must increase the number of their employees, with at least 3 new employees from the categories of disadvantaged groups.

 $^{[29] \,} http://qbz.gov.al/eli/vendim/2018/06/25/85$

Referring to the economic criteria defined by the MoHSP for obtaining the SE status, which requires the employment of at least 3 full-time employees (of which 30% must belong to disadvantaged groups), so this criteria for obtaining the status combined with the criteria to benefit from the fund, increases the number of SE employees to a level that is considered high compared to their need for human resources based on their activities. Also, it is difficult for social enterprises to continue to keep employees employed, after the end of the financial support from the fund or the end of the activities and specific projects for which the staff were hired. This condition has been assessed by SEs as one of the reasons preventing them from applying for funds from the Social Enterprise Fund.

In addition to the written request and the application form, the instructions also define the documents that social enterprises must submit during the application, some of which present some issues as follows:

The document certifying the approval of the social enterprise status by the responsible minister, issued not later than three months before the date of the application;

It is not clear what is meant by "issued no later than three months before the date of application". The social enterprise status is issued only once by the MoHSP (recognition of the status is made by decision of the minister), after the application is evaluated and it is verified that the legal requirements have been completed. It is impossible for this document to be issued no later than three months before the date of application for funding, especially for those organizations that received the status in 2019 and 2020. In fact, the request for such a document seems excessive, since the MoHSP is the institution that issues this document and administers the register of social enterprises with all their data. The request of this document is justified by MoHSP with the fact that the process is evaluated by the State Aid Commission, as well as there may be social enterprises that have stopped their activity, for which MoHSP has no data (in the absence of the instruction "Procedures and Necessary Documentation for the Suspension of a Social Enterprise Activity and the Withdrawal of the Social Enterprise Status".

Evidence from the court that the Organization is not in a situation of bankruptcy, liquidation, termination of activity, is in a state of bankruptcy, liquidation, cessation of activity, bankruptcy or agreement with donors/creditors or any similar situation arising from a procedure of the same type or subject to a procedure of the same type; (Online at e-albania/at Taxes that have an active status);

This criteria is not clearly expressed, there is repetition and it refers to documents from two different institutions. The first document that is required "evidence that the organization is not in a situation of bankruptcy, liquidation, interruption of activity", is not a testimony but a certificate that the organization is not in a situation of bankruptcy, liquidation and is provided by court. Meanwhile, in contrary to what is specified in the instruction, the court does not provide certification for the termination of the activity, or the agreement with the donors. The second document is a certificate for the status of the organization (active, passive), which is provided by submitting a request/application to the e-albania state portal.

Identification number of the taxable person (NOUIS/TIN);

In this case, it is not specified in what form the document is required (copy with the same evidentiary power as the original document (certified/verified copy) /not certified/verified copy, etc.). This specification must be made in accordance with the instruction on "The criteria for granting and monitoring mechanism of state aid to social enterprises"[33],which in point 10: Procedures for application (10.2.) specifies that "documents are presented in original, copy with the same evidentiary power as the original (certified/verified copy) /not certified/verified copy , under the full responsibility of the applicant for the authenticity of the acts received as copies of the original".

Copies of the previous year's financial statements in case the organization has been active for more than one year, and/or Declaration and Payment Forms for natural/physical persons

The second part of the request "and/or Forms of Declarations and Payments for Natural / Physical Persons" is not applicable to non-profit organizations, which do not have a legal obligation to submit such declarations.

Certificate from the tax department for the payment of tax obligations (original or with a digital stamp (Online at e-albania/at Taxes), as long they carry out the activity, but not longer than for a period of one year from the moment of application; The expression "as long as it carries out the activity, but not longer than for a period of one year from the moment of application" is unclear and irrelevant. This certification is obtained online from e-albania with a digital stamp and confirms that the subject has or no obligations until the date of application for certification.

Information on the number of employees and the level of salary given to each person, based on the legislation in force on salaries in the public sector;

The requirement is not expressed in the form of a document. Information is required, but it is not specified the document that provides this information and the institution that issues it.

A copy of the act of inspection at work in case the organization has previously exercised its activity;

This is not determined by the NPO, therefore this document cannot be taken into consideration during the evaluation process.

Financial balance sheet of the last year (Online at e-albania/at Taxes)

The request for this document is a duplication, as it is the same as "Copy of the previous year's financial statements in case the organization has been active for more than one year".

APPLICATIONS FOR THE FUND IN SUPPORT OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES FOR THE PERIOD **2019-2021**

According to the information received from the MoHSP, there were 4 (four) applications for the fund in support of social enterprises, and none of them were funded for the period 2019-2021. Listed below are some of the reasons according to MoHSP for this process/decision.

Problems from the ministry's side:

- The Fund for Social Enterprises is approved by the State Aid Commission and has a term of use within a certain period of time (in this case, the period 2019-2021). According to the MoHSP, the management process of the fund has been difficult and has been accompanied with many problematics, therefore the ministry has not been able to complete the process within the time limits, and as the result the fund for 2019-2021 has not been used. The inclusion of the fund in the budget of the MoHSP is considered by the ministry as an opportunity for more flexibility and efficiency in its use and management.
- During the 2019-2020 period, which coincides with the emergency situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the MoHSP has made the fund available for the emergency situation, recovering it later.
- According to the MoHSP, all the organizations that applied for funds had problems in the submitted documentation, which led to their disqualification for benefiting from the fund. Some of the main problems during the application are related to the budget and business plan of SEs, which according to the ministry have failed to show that it ensures sustainability and the opening of new jobs. Another missing document was the act of inspection at work, due to the lack of inspection by the relevant inspectors.

Problems from the SEs' side

Organizations with the SE status, evaluate the financial schemes offered by MoHSP, as useful financial means that are important for the development of their activity. However, despite the appreciation and the advantages that SEs could benefit, half of the organizations with SE status have not applied for funds from the social enterprise fund. Some of reasons for this decision of SEs are as below:

- short period of time for applying for funds;
- difficulties in completing the appropriate documentation;
- limitations and difficulties in meeting the criteria for applying for funds;
- the high number of people they have to employ from disadvantaged groups; and
- limits on the amount and number of applications from the SE fund.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above analysis, this document offers recommendations that address the issues related to the status and funding of SEs, for further interventions, in order to create a supportive environment for the development of entrepreneurship and social enterprises in Albania.

Recommendations related to the Social Enterprise Status

The problems identified during the process of drafting and approving the law on social enterprises, have been reflected in practice, bringing various difficulties in its implementation both by the law enforcement institutions (in the specific case MoHSP) and by non-profit organizations, as its subjects. Therefore, a comprehensive revision and amendment of the law and the entire legal package is required, addressing the following issues;

Recommendation 1:

Revision of the legal and regulatory package for social enterprises, to reflect the purpose of the law for social enterprises, which is: "the social protection and inclusion of vulnerable groups,..", and not supporting unemployed people to leave the unemployment scheme. The employment and integration of people from disadvantaged groups and the provision of services to individuals with special needs (two components of the law) should have the same value in applications for obtaining SE status and benefiting from the social enterprise funding schemes. On the contrary, the legal framework should be revised, separating two forms of social enterprises: those that provide services and those that provide integration and employment for people from disadvantaged groups.

Recommendation 2:

The definition in Law 65/2016 "On Social Enterprises in the Republic of Albania" of the criteria for benefiting or obtaining the social enterprise status. The implementation of the law in practice has shown that the criteria for maintaining the status of social enterprise defined in the law cannot be applicable for obtaining the SE status as well. The application of the same criteria by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection has resulted in the withdrawal of NPOs from the initiative to obtain the status of SE, because it is impossible for them to fulfil the criteria, especially the employment of at least 3 (three) paid persons, or the generation of income from the economic activity in defined % in the law, for maintaining the SE status. Meticulous definition of the criteria in the law for the benefit of the SE status, as well as the review and usage of the appropriate terminology in the Guide "Call for Applications for Registration and Obtaining the Social Enterprises Status" 2019

Recommendation 3:

Complementing the legal package with the bylaw that regulates the termination of the social enterprises activity. The presence of this act would create transparency on how social enterprises are regulated, when they stop operating, determining the measures taken against them what happens with organizations after the loss of SE status.

Recommendation 4:

Revision of the list of categories of people from the disadvantaged groups and accompanying it with the respective list of documents that prove that the individual belongs to the category of disadvantaged groups, determining as well the institution responsible for issuing these

Recommendation 5:

KFrequent communication and consultation with all actors involved in the process regarding the possible modifications, implications or interpretations during the implementation of the law, so that these changes reflect the reality and prevent problems that may arise later during implementation in practice.

Recommendations related to the Social Enterprise Fund

The problems that have emerged during the application process to receive funding from the Social Enterprise Fund, as well as the ambiguities in the provided documentations for application, have brought many difficulties and have directly influenced in the unsuccessful ending of this process, with none being funded from the organisations with SE status. Hence, it is necessary to review the relevant documents and address the following issues:

Recommendation 6:

Revision of the call "For Applications for Funding the Entities that have obtained the Social Enterprises Status" and detailed inclusion of information regarding the social enterprises fund, forms of subsidy, limits on the amount of funding, limits on the number of applications to benefit from funding, duration of the application and the deadlines, and the attachment of the application format to the call. Providing different application forms adapted according to the criteria for each form of subsidy, as well as clearly specifying for how many forms of subsidy SEs can apply for in one call. The application process in practice has shown that the lack of this information has limited the number of social enterprises that were willing to apply for funding from the SE fund.

Recommendation 7:

Revision of the criteria for subsidy forms, criteria for limits on the value of the fund, as well as criteria related to the eligible costs and the way the fund is used. The subsidy to create new jobs should allow as eligible costs the salaries of employees from disadvantaged groups rather than using the subsidy for work appliances. It would be more reasonable that eligible costs for the payment of employees in the subsidy for the development of the SE activity were used for the subsidy for the creation of new jobs and the costs accepted for work appliances in the subsidy for the creation of new jobs are used in the subsidy for the development of the SE activity. Unification of information and the documents of the Social Enterprise Fund in one formal document.

Recommendation 8:

Reviewing the list of documents and addressing the issues identified above. Elucidating in a clear and precise manner the documents that are required as well as determining the institutions from which these documents can be issued and received.

Recommendation 9:

Providing and making available online, the information regarding the application process, consultation with groups of interest regarding the recommendations they might have related to the application process for funding from the SE Fund, reflection of the undertaken changes in the available online information, and notification to users regarding these changes.

General Recommendations

Recommendation 10:

Actively and effectively usage the social enterprise section on the MHSP website. Presentation and publication of calls, news, legal package, updated information and latest developments related to social enterprises in order to inform the ecosystem. Creation of a question and answer section on the MHSP website, where some of the difficulties encountered by NPOs during application processes are explained and answered, in order to serve as a reference point for NPOs who will apply and have the same questions and problems.

Recommendation 11:

Creation of an online platform (portal) for the application processes for obtaining the SE status and for applying for funding from the Social Enterprise Fund. Through the portal, organizations will have the opportunity to complete the entire application process and submit all the documentation online. The creation of the platform would unify the process and facilitate the application process for the organisations.

Recommendation 12:

Periodically holding info- sessions with organizations interested in obtaining the SE status and funding from the Social Enterprise Fund, regarding the procedures to be followed and the documentation to be submitted. Providing more information, workshops, training and mentoring programs to organizations aiming to start a social enterprise.





ANNEX

ANNEX 1. BYLAWS PURSUANT TO LAW 65/2016 "ON SOCIAL ENTERPRISES IN THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA"

The complete list of Bylaws issued pursuant to Law 65/2016 "On Social Enterprises in the Republic of Albania" are as follows:

DECISION No. 716. dated 1.12.2017

- The Determination of the Procedures for Performing the Control of the Activity of the Social Enterprise

DECISION No. 16, dated 12.01.2018- The Approval of the List of Activities Exercised by Social Enterprises

DECISION No. 56, dated 31.01.2018
- The Determination of Specific
Categories of Disadvantaged
Groups

DECISION No. 85, dated 25.6.2018 -Authorization of State Aid for the Creation of the Social Enterprise Fund

INSTRUCTION No. 677, dated 27.09.2018 - Determination of the Forms, Deadlines and Methods of Periodic Reporting, for Activities Performed and Categories of Persons Employed by Social Enterprises

ORDER No. 636, dated 03.09.2018 -For the Approval of the Model Regulation on the Functioning of Social Enterprises

INSTRUCTION No. 677, dated 27.09.2018 - Determination of the Forms, Deadlines and Methods of Periodic Reporting, for Activities Performed and Categories of Persons Employed by Social Enterprises

DECISION No. 789, Date 26.12.2018
- Creation of the Fund to Support
Social Enterprises and Forms of
Support Through Subsidy for Social
Enterprises

INSTRUCTION No. 02, dated 04.01.2019 - Creation of the Register of Social Enterprises and Rules for Maintaining it

INSTRUCTION No. 376, dated 18.06.2020 - On the Granting Criteria and Monitoring Mechanism of State Aid to Social Enterprise

INSTRUCTION HAS NOT BEEN
ISSUED - Necessary Procedures and
Documentation for Stopping the
Activity of a Social Enterprise and
Removing the Status of a Social
Enterprise

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