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Social Entrepreneurship in Armenia and Georgia (SEAG) project

Study Tour to Romania, May 9-14, 2022

Within the framework of the EU-supported EU4Youth Initiative, the Armenian NGO Development Principles, in partnership with Mercy Corps International and the Georgian Association of Business Consulting Organizations (ABCO), has been implementing Social Entrepreneurship in Armenia and Georgia (SEAG) project to involve young people in initiating social change through social entrepreneurship.

From May 9 to 14, 2022, a team of 19 Georgian and Armenian social entrepreneurs and development professionals participated in the Study Tour to Iasi city of Romania. The four full days initiative aimed at introducing to the Georgian and Armenian delegation the best social business practices and innovations existing in Romania, sharing experiences, and participating in the Enterprising for Tomorrow - Social Entrepreneurship & Youth Engagement Conference, 2022. The Armenian delegation was composed of 9 participants, including the project manager, three team members, national expert on social entrepreneurship, and four beneficiaries. In the Georgian delegation, 10 people were engaged, including the Mercy Corps Country Director, SEAG Project Director, three team members, and five beneficiaries.

The Host of the Study Tour was ADV Romania Social Enterprises, which is a works integration social enterprise. The organization is led by Angela Achiței, who kindly introduced the company's work and activities on promoting the social economy in Iasi and Romania in general.

The details of the study tour are presented below as follows.

9 and 10th of May

Visiting ADV Romania Foundation

On the 9th of May, both delegations arrived at the Moldova hotel in Iasi city. That day there were no planned activities. De facto study tour started on the 10th of May by visiting the hosting organization.

The ADV Romania Foundation is a non-governmental organization and a social enterprise, established in February 2002 whose mission is the integration of people with disabilities or other vulnerable groups.

ADV Romania is one of the biggest social enterprises from Romania, built around the one-stop-shop principle, according to which a

disadvantaged individual or someone having lived in a placement center can access a package of services





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addressing several issues: social and psychological services, educational services, professional orientation, qualification, employment and assistance at the workplace.

During the meeting, the CEO of the organization, Angela Achitei, kindly presented the organization and work achievements so far, in turn, Georgian and Armenian delegations had a chance to introduce themselves and proclaim their learning anticipations from the study tour. As it turned out during the group discussion, Foundation was established in time 3 social businesses, which Georgian and Armenian delegations had the opportunity to visit, as they were located in the same place.

The UtilDeco is a work integration social enterprise, having created in time more than 150 workplaces, of which more than half have been for people with disabilities and from other groups at risk. The organization offers archiving and document storage services and produces protective and work equipment, printing services, and work protection and safety services.

Another enterprise was JobDirect, the first Agency for Placement and Assistance at the Workplace addressing people with disabilities. It offers services of evaluation, testing, counseling, professional capacity building, mediation and placement on the labor market, and job – coaching for maintaining the workplace.

WISE.travel – a social enterprise in the field of tourism – tour operator. Supports NGOs and social businesses by developing communities.

Since 2019, ADV Romania has been implementing The Social Enterprises Accelerator project, within which around 40 social enterprises were established and developed in Romania, 5 in the Republic of Moldova, and 3 in Ukraine. In the following days, the SEAG team jointly with representatives of ADV Romania was hosted by some of these supported enterprises and were delighted to expose to new practices and experiences.

Lunch in Summasana Social Enterprise

For lunchtime Summasana Social Enterprise was selected. The Owner of the enterprise, Philip Octavian, is a social worker by his background and worked for 20 years for World Vision. In recent years, he quit his job and launched his own dream business. The culinary workshop was set on the premise of his own summer cottage. The social mission of the enterprise is to promote community development through balanced and healthy nutrition. They serve community by preparing and delivering healthy and delicious delicacies. The social enterprise also provides training and





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ensure employment to disadvantage social groups. Due to the COVID pandemic, the enterprise faced certain challenges in terms of market access, though as was mentioned by Philip, they have overcome it recently.

Visiting Creative Dwarfs Education Club Social Enterprise

The third destination was Creative Dwarfs Education Club Social Enterprise. The club contributes to raising the level of equity and reducing discrimination in the city of Lasi by providing high-quality non-formal educational services and opportunities for the personal development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The educational system of the club is based on the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Howard Gardner) and the Montessori Pedagogical Methodology and provides children with quality education services by applying non-formal methods of education. Children with different backgrounds learn to co-exist in a cooperative and non-discriminative manner by practicing tolerance empathy and respect toward each other regardless of ethnicity, race, or parental economic status.

The Club offers 3 types of services:

- kindergarten and nursery education services
- parties for children
- holiday camps for children and young people



Visiting Tia Dent Help Social Enterprise

Another exciting destination was Tia Dent Help Social Enterprise. The Dental clinic relies on innovation, quality performance and the latest equipment in the medical and dental industry. The clinic has operated for twenty years but recently with the support of ADV Enterprise Accelerator project, it was reframed as a social business with aim to offer children and young people from three placement centers and from other vulnerable categories free complementary dental services - orthodontic treatments,





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primary surgical treatments, radiology, orthodontics, prophylaxis activities As it was mentioned by owner of the clinic recently they also launched new initiative of free emergency dental services for families fleeing from Ukraine.

11th of May

Visiting Flair Scent Social Enterprise

The day started with a visit to the universe of scented candles- The Flair Scent Social Enterprise, the place which makes you forget about everyday problems. Flair Scent produces and sells scented soy wax candles and organizes candle workshops, where you can pour your own candle, have tea until it hardens, and then go home with it. The social enterprise was created by a young lady Alexandra, that transformed her hobby into a profitable business. By being exposed to beauty and



harmony, she also strives to make her contribution to the creation of a more beautiful and better world. To this end, she decided to engage in her business people with disadvantaged backgrounds and create creative jobs for them to share joy where it is most needed.

With the support of ADV The Social Enterprises Accelerator project, Alexandra managed to hire 3 people with disadvantaged backgrounds, from placement centers and a single mother of five kids. She also offers free workshops to children in placement centers to expand their opportunities for earning for living. For the future, Alexandra is planning to enlarge a community around scented candles and employ as many disadvantaged people as possible with the growth of the business.



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Visiting The Navigator Educational

Center

The next destination was The Navigator Educational Center which provides afterschool educational services for primary school children to engage them in useful afterschool activities that contribute to their physical and personal development. As other social enterprises it provides three of charge services to children with special needs such as those with autism and down syndromes. They



organize diverse special art and craft events and already have in their portfolio such prestigious projects as a World Records. In a modern location, NAVIGATOR ACADEMY places at disposal of children state-of-the-art technology, areas for relaxation or gaming, a mini-salt mine, planetarium, a science area with a microscope, musical instruments, a stage equipped for talent hunting, and last, but not least, a lot of passion, many other activities and workshops.

Visiting ADIR Association Social Enterprise

Further, we visited the enterprise with a similar social goal. The ADIR Association was born from a dream, about the right to equal treatment and opportunities for all children. The main goal of social enterprise is to create an environment where children with Down Syndrome can reach their maximum potential in their development from their infancy, to reach the optimal level in later development. The process of education is supported by their social, and professional integration, in the order for they could feel themselves as an integral part of the community they live in. In 2021, the organization obtained the certificate of social enterprise and also employed 50% of employees with the vulnerable background. From the entrance to the enterprise we were warmly greeted by a small girl with Down Syndrome, she approached each of us and hug as a symbolic sign of gratitude for accepting and allowing her being different in this world. As it turns out later, she was the daughter of Viorica Ilich, who told us that her daughter was the main





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driving force for her to set up this enterprise to create a better world for her child and other children with similar peculiarities.

Visiting Dream Art Social Enterprise

Dream Art Center Social enterprise is a cultural multifunctional center serving as hub where people of different age groups and background can come to learn traditional Romanian arts and crafts. The Center is the only private cultural structure in Iasi and do not have any support from local authorities. Though center is self-sufficient, the owner of the center mentioned that they would be glad to have some structural support from the government to ensure further sustainability. Dream Art Center Iasi is a meeting place for people with



initiative and valuable ideas. A real community has been created here - artists, talented young people, entrepreneurs or specialists in the cultural, educational and professional fields, are involved in the cultural activities of the center.

Dream Art Center Iasi organizes creative workshops (crafts, handmade, painting, photography, etc.), classes in singing, learning to play musical instruments, dance or foreign language classes, other types of training, as well as counseling and vocational guidance, integration on the labor market, teambuilding and other types of events for the capacity building of young people from Iasi.

Visiting “At Time” (La Timp) Association Social Enterprise

The La Timp Association supports and promotes the importance of early intervention in the recovery of the child with special needs and the human, creative, social potential that it has for society.

The La Timp Association offers therapy services to children with special needs and/ or delays in the general development of the personality in order to integrate them in the community and their families in the form of counseling and psychotherapy.





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Being a social enterprise, the La Timp Association offers free therapy services to children with severe disabilities and limited financial means, psychotherapy for parents from poor or single-parent families, conducts workshops with parents on various topics.

12th of May

The meeting with representatives of local and national authorities

The day started by the meeting with representatives of the local and national public institutions, social entrepreneurs and business environment from Iasi. They presented their vision regarding institutionalization of social economy in Romania, key challenges and achievements so far.



Welcoming speech was done by Costel Alexe, President of Iași County Council & Angela Achiței, President of ADV Romania. Further members of SEAG delegation presented themselves, their activities and expectations from the meeting. Gabriela Vasilache, Executive director of the Iasi Country Agency for Employment, presented legislative context of social economy existed in Romania so far and upcoming reforms. Further, Ilona Vitan described the existing models of local development through partnership schemes of social and classic businesses. Angela Achitei spoke about suitable ecosystem for the development of the social economy and legislative initiatives which have been elaborated by ADV Romania and currently pending for implementation at the Government of Romania.



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Visiting Posh Academy Social Enterprise

Further we visited POSH ACADEMY, which is a unique combination of training academy and professional hair salon.

POSH Academy collaborates with the “Ion Holban” Technical College from Iași, offering free courses to students from vulnerable groups. After graduating from POSH Academy training courses, they have the chance to integrate into the labor market and to develop their professional skills by participating in internships in the salon. And because the biggest challenge for vulnerable people is finding a job, POSH Academy supports those looking for a job by offering them free haircuts and hairstyles, before participation in a job interview.



Visiting Veronica Moraru Nails Social Enterprise

Our final destination that day was Veronica Moraru nails Social Enterprise. The enterprise offers everyone, from any social environment, the possibility to learn and practice in the field of manicure. It organizes certified training courses for future nail stylists - prosthetists, together with training courses for those who want to keep up with the latest techniques and trends. Accredited as a social enterprise, VERONICA MORARU NAILS ACADEMY has undertaken the mission of help disadvantaged people to integrate on the labor market, offering them free training courses, reserved employment or free services.





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13th of May

Enterprising for Tomorrow - Social Entrepreneurship & Youth Engagement Conference, 2022

On May 13, within the announced month of “promoting the social economy”, the ADV Romania Foundation once again hosted the largest event in Romania and the Eastern Partnership countries dedicated to the social economy - **Enterprising for Tomorrow: Social Entrepreneurship & Youth Engagement-2022**. Distinguished leaders from European institutions and organizations were present in Iasi, which became the capital of the social economy for a day. The European-wide event brought together state-of-the-art data, trends, and opportunities for social economy players - the sector in which 10% of EU businesses operate. With the launch of the Social Economy Action Plan in December 2021, the European Commission has expressed its firm commitment to supporting the sector, which generates around 8% of the European Union's GDP and accounts for 10% of all businesses. More than 2.5 billion euros will be allocated to the development of this sector in the coming years. **Enterprising for Tomorrow 2022** included conference sections with 12 speakers, workshops with 14 social entrepreneurs from Romania, Rep. Moldova, and Armenia, and two national premieres - Cinematheque of Social Economy and Buy for Good Expo. From the SEAG delegation, Ms. Gohar Mkoyan, an Armenian social entrepreneur who runs **the International Academy on Social Entrepreneurship**, was the speaker. She presented the mission and goals of her school, activities implemented so far, her future plans. Gohar described in details the online operations of the International Academy of Social Entrepreneurship, which was established within the framework of SEAG project.

To sum up, the social economy conference on 13 May was an opportunity to shed light on the most important initiatives and programs that will support social economy enterprises in the coming years; statistics, case studies and stories that inspire the development of human, environment and community friendly businesses.

