

# Vulnerability and Violence. Social Economy as a Form of Social Responsibility

*Poverty is the worst form of violence (M. Gandhi)*

Oana LENȚA, Ph.D. Student

Department of Human, Social and Political Sciences,  
"Ștefan cel Mare" University of Suceava, Romania  
oanalenta@yahoo.com

Cristina CORMOȘ Lecturer Ph. D.

Department of Human, Social and Political Sciences,  
"Ștefan cel Mare" University of Suceava, Romania  
cristinacormos@yahoo.com

## Abstract

*Today's society, marked by a prolonged economic crisis, feels at all levels the "chain" effects of deprivation. In fighting this crisis, certain groups vulnerable to physical, economic and moral violence are analyzed, the solving of this problem being one of the goals of the society, directed towards achieving the collective welfare. The socially disadvantaged classes are among the first facing the high risk of vulnerability to crisis, whereas social business development in this context could be one of the solutions for meeting specific needs. In this article we will focus on the problems faced by certain socially disadvantaged groups, on the methods of social rehabilitation, employability and economic integration, but also on a framework that allows the development of new businesses to meet community needs. Social rehabilitation of vulnerable groups through social economy activities may involve, directly or indirectly, the promotion of collective action by means of social services development, of the local support for specific development policies and of the implementation of public-private partnerships. Consequently, we emphasize the role of social responsibility and, therefore, the necessity of promoting social economy as a relevant factor not only in the integration of vulnerable groups in the local development by generating jobs, but also in terms of life quality, fight against violence and sustainment of social cohesion.*

**Keywords:** *Vulnerability, Violence, Social Responsibility, Social Cohesion, Social Economy, Social Rehabilitation.*

### *Introduction*

The global economic crisis entails the re-elaboration of the entire system of economic organization and social functioning. The European Union – a project of global society - must face the challenges produced both by the new economic and social policies of the superstructure and by the management of crisis effects in the EU Member States. The economic and social rebalancing plans are designed at the macro level, according to the global interest, and they are subsequently adapted and re-assessed by the constituent regions. All these new market economy challenges add new vulnerabilities both for societies, communities as well as for individuals. “Although at the main level the emphasis is on indicators showing features for the individual level, many of the development measures still refer to global features of systems, which are difficult to interpret in terms of the impact on living conditions at the individual level.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, conditioned to quickly adapt to changes in the socio-economic context, the individual often complains that he feels aggression on behalf of state instruments. Although the new regulatory system of transition societies serves as a guide for individual and collective modes of action,<sup>2</sup> a coercive aspect intervenes, that is felt by individuals because they relate to an outdated representation of the welfare status.

Depending on the involvement and on the contribution, efficiency and effectiveness of results over time, a person may receive additional services brought by the development of the society. The compliance with the new standards without a proper understanding, an assuming and an internalization of the socially desirable norms can turn that person into a victim of the system. He / she may be a victim because of some gaps in the process of understanding, learning and adaptation or because of some disabilities / neurological, physical, functional or situational deficiencies (independent of him). Considered in terms of efficiency, utility, sustainability and equally focused on human capital development, the new society, seen as a wealth generator for all its members, reassesses the role of the citizen. It attempts to reduce the number of socially disadvantaged categories and transform social assisted groups in agents actively involved in decision-making. In

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<sup>1</sup> C. Zamfir & L. Stoica, *O nouă provocare: Dezvoltarea Socială (A New Challenge: Social Development)* (Iași: Polirom Publishing House, 2006), 328.

<sup>2</sup> L. Vlăsceanu, *Sociologie și modernitate (Sociology and Modernity)* (Bucharest: Polirom Publishing House), 149: “Nu statul dictează strategiile de viață ale indivizilor, ci aceștia optează pentru deschiderile oferite; adesea forțează deschideri și, prin strategiile personalizate de viață, modelează societatea” (“It is not the state that dictates life strategies of individuals, but they themselves opt for openings offered; they often force openings, and by means of personalized life strategies, shape society”).

other words, it appeals to both social responsibility (in terms of state perspective) and to the rational assuming of the social actor's actions. This implies a more rigorous analysis of the vulnerability state, of inclusion of individuals / families / communities within the category of people requiring specialized assistance from state: “vulnerability is related to individual eligibility to receive services.”<sup>3</sup>

Choosing “vulnerability” instead of insecurity, risk, inequality or poverty was determined by the fact that these notions are already part of the dynamic concept of vulnerability: “In developing a concept of social vulnerability, it (ECLAC<sup>4</sup>) focuses upon both the «perception of risk, insecurity and defencelessness» and also on «the quantity and quality of the resources or the assets controlled by individuals and families» and the opportunities they have to use them in the new economic, social, political and cultural circumstances. These resources and assets include work, human capital, productive resources, social relationships and family relationships.”<sup>5</sup>

The vulnerability affects both individual and society as a whole. With a wide area of coverage, this concept includes all categories with an increased risk of victimization. Between the concepts of violence, power and vulnerability, interdependencies are created.

### *Vulnerability and Violence*

On the one hand, the concept of *violence* cannot be separated from the concept of *power*, while on the other hand *vulnerability* is equated to *lack of power*. Peadar Kirby<sup>6</sup> argues: “the term *vulnerability* may be a much more appropriate category to capture the distinctive ways in which the economic, social, political, cultural and environmental changes associated with the term *globalization* are impacting on all of us, especially the poor, while the term *violence* constitutes both a cause of vulnerability and also an expression of it.”<sup>7</sup>

The concept of *vulnerability* includes forms of economic, financial, social and environmental vulnerability. Vulnerabilities can be linked to poverty, age, mental or physical health, work capacity or labor market integration respectively, illiteracy, ethnicity, location – geographical area / territorial affiliation, access to

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<sup>3</sup> Vasile Miftode (coord.), *Populații vulnerabile și fenomene de automarginalizare (Vulnerable Populations and Self-marginalization Phenomena)* (Iași: LUMEN Publishing House, 2002), 52.

<sup>4</sup> The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and The Caribbean, (2000) *Social Panorama of Latin America 1999–2000* (Santiago: ECLAC)

<sup>5</sup> Peadar Kirby, *Vulnerability and Violence. The Impact of Globalisation* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, 3

information, education, health services, to cultural and political life, etc. In assessing the poverty status of individuals, families or groups, one takes into account both the material resources and the cultural and social resources, by reporting them to the minimum accepted level in the society in which they live. Although vulnerability is generally seen as a dimension of poverty, it is not reduced only to affected groups but can affect any group in the society, as long as it restricts the group's access to integration and participation in the economic, social and cultural life.

Both social and cultural standards and the economic context produce specific needs. Consequently, vulnerability may be represented by the exposure to risks and uncertainties and by the reduced ability to cope with them. The lack of any means to satisfy these needs (a longer time), associated with the unemployment, with difficulties in adaptation, may lead to frustration and generate aggressiveness. By means of emotional aggressiveness, the person's actions are directed against the others, with the risk that this accumulated aggressiveness takes extreme forms of expression, such as the anti-social behavior and the violence. The state of vulnerability and risk degree may be perceived differently, while known and real risks may not correspond with peoples' perception on their own vulnerabilities. Consequently, vulnerability can be considered "the incapacity of individuals or groups to act, or failure to adapt their actions to the structural requirements of the social system, caused by inadequate individual interpretations in relation to certain common and socially accepted interpretations."<sup>8</sup> The vulnerability state can also be understood as a state of dependency, domination, in which a person is (or feels) defenseless, helpless or endangered. Whether we talk about incapacity or failure to integrate into a system / or several systems, all these vulnerabilities show as well a risk of discrimination, social exclusion and abuse. As long as these deprivations occur independently of the ability, desire and will of the individual, they can endanger both the physical and mental integrity and the integrity of consciousness.

Any change starting from a system considered dysfunctional or requiring improvement and adaptation to the new global market requirements involves risks, social and psychological costs respectively. "Risk is the mobilizing dynamic of a society which relies on change, which wants to determine its own future rather than leaving it to the religion, to tradition, or the vagaries of nature. Modern capitalism differs from all previous forms of economic system in terms of its

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<sup>8</sup> Ștefan Cojocaru, *Metode apreciative în Asistența Socială – ancheta, supervizarea și managementul de caz (Methods in Social Work – Inquiry, Supervision and Case Management)* (Iași: Polirom Publishing House, 2005), 31.

attitudes towards the future.”<sup>9</sup> The attitude towards the future largely depends on the model and on the value system that society has imposed or generated, on the consistency or inconsistency of economic and social policies. It depends on the respect with which the citizen was educated to pay to rules in general and to society goals, but also on the way the society protects and represents the image and interests of its citizens.

Changes in the labor market involve insecurity of both employment and quality of life, and the stress accumulated as a result to these problems subscribes to a vicious cycle of conflict and aggression: “The stress induced by unceasing pressures for greater productivity and worries about job security can heighten tensions in the household and on the street. It would be difficult to demonstrate precisely that flexibilization has fuelled domestic strife, uncivil driving, hooliganism, and other forms of violence; and no doubt other factors have also played their part. However, it seems reasonable to say that insecurity at work has fed insecurity elsewhere.”<sup>10</sup>

Risks posed by vulnerability could also be represented in parallel by exposure to natural disasters, crime, marginalization.

Despite the efforts made by government structures, in partnership with nongovernmental structures, with the purpose to give social stability, new unmanageable forms of certain social phenomena occur. It is the case of increasingly more complex forms of manifestation of the violence phenomenon: “But the «new wars» of a globalised world are only one way in which people's lives are becoming more vulnerable to violence.”<sup>11</sup> Such failures are felt both at intra and interpersonal level, at family, community, organizational level but also in what concerns one's attitude towards power and the understanding of the notion of authority. The aggressiveness, connected to instinct, could be managed by self control. But aggressiveness can turn into violence in a given context which implies: low intelligence, low self esteem, gaps in education, faulty social and behavioral models, reference to a normative value anomic / confusing system, lack of empathy, predisposition to addiction, intolerance to frustration, etc. Accordingly, in addition to the forms of violence that are based on meta-conflicts, the types of structural and cultural violence should also be taken into account.

The antisocial phenomena extend on the background of the lack of individual / family / community prospects, confusing social policies,

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<sup>9</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalisation is Reshaping our Lives* (London: Profile Books, 1999), 24.

<sup>10</sup> Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 223.

<sup>11</sup> Kirby, *Vulnerability and Violence*, 10.

unemployment, poverty, income sources, differential associations, membership to deviant subcultures, and / or of gapped social learning. A concerning increase in interpersonal violence (domestic violence, sexual violence, murder), economic violence (fraud, etc.) has occurred, in the context of a culture that often legitimizes violence – through ignorance and social tolerance. Incongruence of social norms and lack of cultural information is likely to cause confusion between indulgence and tolerance. Tolerance appeals to reason, wisdom and consciousness, to the understanding of human multiculturalism and diversity (including the understanding of physical, psychical and social dysfunctions which are independent of the personal choice) by comparing individual actions to a solid referential framework of values. Indulgence appeals to the emotional side, to the acceptance of the others' behaviors, based on an item it has in common with tolerance – uniqueness of human being, the right to express itself in its most representative way. Thus, making use of this item, not always one does correctly assess the degree of risk that certain individual / group actions put for community and society. What a person considers as good for himself does not automatically imply social, ethical and moral correctitude. The social actor status is not acquired only through membership in a social environment but also involves taking rational decisions, the desire for active involvement in community life and constructive approaches for personal and professional, family and community development (the distinction being made here between people able who are to act and those requiring specialized guidance and assistance). Both roles in the family and in the society are learned. Consequently, the educational policies in society and the promoted social models are defining parameters, and it is equally essential to discourage anti-social actions by means of programs, projects, national and community prevention strategies. Because social cohesion is directly affected by the amplification of some negative phenomena, attention falls on the importance of social responsibility. Responsibility to prevent, manage and bring viable solutions, adapted to problems generating destructive conflicts. Resolution, reconstruction and reconciliation should always be considered. The first one is to resolve the initial conflict, the second one to repair the damage caused by the conflict and reconciliation to resolve meta-conflicts.

Meta-conflicts can arise as retaliation against past aggressions, on the background of suffering that has not been overcome and resulted in the accumulation of frustrations. How to prevent or resolve conflicts and how to manage their effects are issues that have to be learned throughout life. Needs, but also interests, values, principles and cultural referential framework may change in

time, so that intervention methods and techniques must be adapted to the peculiarities of the actors involved. The state, as a social construct, cannot handle all civil society issues, and thus encourages the development of some concepts adapted to new socio-economic needs as well as their implementation. The correct identification of social problems involves improving systems, encouraging decentralization, public-private partnerships, training of professionals, etc. The assessment of vulnerability status of a person / family / local community is performed at the local level, taking into account the national employment standards. Referring to social rehabilitation, employability and economic integration of vulnerable groups, an important role is played by the development of social economy.

*Social Economy as a form of social responsibility*

Social Economy is a concept recently introduced in Europe. Depending on life's cultural patterns, the European social economy through specific organizational forms and great diversity, attempts to develop solutions to the current crisis, introducing new offers on the labor market. Thus, social economy aims at: "promoting with priority certain activities that may generate or secure jobs, activities that refer to the employment of increasingly more people belonging to vulnerable groups and not short-term profitability, the promotion of creation of jobs adapted to specific needs of people from vulnerable groups, the development of effective training programs dedicated to people from vulnerable groups and the development of social services customized to increase employability in the labor market of vulnerable people."<sup>12</sup>

Social economy also appears as a boost of innovative entrepreneurship development through continuous training and education required by the labor market and high economic performances. In this context, "any action taken to improve the situation and facilitate inclusion need must be related to the identification of needs, accomplished within an actual frame with clear criteria. This requires an administrative reform, the training of professionals, the development of collaborative networks and the support between public authorities at different levels of administration and between the public and private sectors."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Project Law concerning the social economy, accessed August 17, 2012, [www.mmuncii.ro](http://www.mmuncii.ro).

<sup>13</sup> A. M. Preoteasa, D. Arpinte, I. Hosu, S. Cace and A. V. Georgescu, *Economia socială și grupurile vulnerabile (Social Economy and Vulnerable Groups)* (Bucharest: Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development, 2007-2013, 2010). Project: Participation of vulnerable groups to social economy POSDRU/14/6.1/S/9, p. 124.

In order to define the concept of social economy, the activity concerning this issue is still being carried on at the European level, in order to give it an unitary meaning. Among the specific items of social economy, one can mention the social entrepreneurship and the social enterprises. *Social entrepreneurship* is “the type of private initiative leading to the emergence of new activities, with social impact and/or social mission, but whose organization and development takes place in the entrepreneurial style with regard to innovative practices, leadership, dynamism and efficiency.”<sup>14</sup> Social enterprises involve certain business strategies that are based on social objectives involving beneficiaries who face difficult situations in adaptation and integration into the labor market on the medium and long term: disabled people, unemployed people, mothers from maternal centers, institutionalized youngsters or young people that have left the protection system, etc.

*Social Economy – a way to rehabilitate people and vulnerable groups*

The social economy is seen as a task for organizations that have both economic and social aims, and where social goals prevail. The social economy covers the gap that traditional businesses cannot overcome because of the lack of an adequate profitability. Social economy institutions are businesses or social entities operating in all sectors and which can take different forms: banking cooperatives, mutual insurance, cooperatives, guarantee funds, regional development agencies, associations and foundations. These types of institutions are active in key areas: social protection, social services, healthcare, banking, insurance, farming, handicrafts, household sector, services for citizens, training and education, culture, sport and leisure. Although a variety of legal forms can be identified, one can highlight a group of common features for these entities: “priority of individual and social goals over profit, voluntary and transparent participation, democratic control of members, accomplishment of the members’ or service users’ needs, a management that is independent and autonomous from public authorities; generating profit leads to fulfillment of specific purposes, such as sustainable development, services for their members, etc.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> ASSOC, *Ocuparea persoanelor cu dizabilități. Psihologia angajatorilor cu privire la angajarea acestora (Employment of Disabled People. The Psychology of Employers on Hiring Them)* (2012). Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development) 2007-2013. Bucharest, Project: Integrated social services and vocational formation for disabled people POSDRU/96/6.2/S/ 54702, p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> S. Cace (coord.), V. Nicolăescu and A. N. Scoican, *Cele mai bune practici în sectorul economiei sociale în Grecia și alte state ale Uniunii Europene (Best Practices in the Sector of Social Economy in Greece and other Countries of the European Union)* (Bucharest: Expert Publishing House, 2010), 144.



With the purpose of rehabilitating vulnerable groups, one of the social economy's objectives is the foundation of social enterprises, these institutions being considered primarily as businesses that are based on social purposes. "The social enterprise is an opportunity for innovation, a way to emphasize the corporate social responsibility and an alternative for conducting business activities; the purpose of the social enterprise is oriented towards successful activities with social objectives through various business strategies. Partial solutions to the current needs of enterprises can be given by the long-term unemployed, but also by people with disabilities."<sup>16</sup>

Social enterprises may open new paths towards the employment of people who can be excluded from the labor market. In order to satisfy a wide range of needs of vulnerable groups, social enterprises have diversified their offer, so that while some companies operate temporarily from social to formal economy, other social enterprises provide permanent jobs for people who cannot meet the requirements of the existing labor market.

The key areas where social economy has developed its interest in opening social enterprises are the ones linked to the field of social inclusion policies for vulnerable population. These areas directly target "health and medical social services like health, social insurances and social security insurances, education and training services, agriculture, banking and cultural environment services, leisure activities, neighborhood services for the poor and for those with marginalization risk or for those who want a safe, profitable business for them and the community."<sup>17</sup> Going into the depth of the social economy development area, we mention the existence and importance of sheltered workshops. They represent the space properly adapted to the needs of vulnerable people, in which they conduct work activities in accordance with people's professional skills and capacity.

Social Economy opens up punctual possibilities for policies of employment and social inclusion for vulnerable people. These include:

*the launch, at the national level, of a combined package of alternative economic development strategies responsive to social problems, directly related to social inclusion policies; the imposition of punctual measures, actively focused on social policies, with proper support of priorities in the field of occupation, education and professional training; labor market integration of disadvantaged groups by stimulating their motivation for employment and decreasing welfare services dependency; the creation of complex services*

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, 132.

<sup>17</sup> E. Zamfir and S. Fitzek, *Economia socială o soluție la incluziunea socială pe piața muncii (The Social Economy a Solution for Social Inclusion on Labour Market)* Social Innovation Magasine no. 2 (Bucharest: Life Quality Research Institute, Romanian Academy ICCV, 2010), 4, [www.inovatiesociala.ro](http://www.inovatiesociala.ro).

*from the viewpoint of diversity and social utility, by means of the modern mechanisms of social economy, the promotion in the decision making process of experts / technocrats, as well as of political democracy representatives; the formulation of active measures to reduce the serious phenomena of social exclusion, with the concern of their eradication in time, the development of a modern infrastructure in the social economy based on organizational constructions socially oriented and on an adequate legislative framework which should support them, the stimulation of certain human resources and superior human capacities which should propose successful models for economic development, with direct social and human impact in the process of social inclusion.<sup>18</sup>*

In other words, social economy can play an important role in solving problems related to the socio-economic integration of vulnerable groups, by promoting active citizenship and solidarity, democratic participation respectively. It takes care of the local dimension of development, focusing on the social, individual and collective welfare, aiming to surpass the situations generating social exclusion or other forms of violence. Thus, social economy appears both as a boost of entrepreneurship development through professional training and continuous education, as well as a product that imposes a new policy of social inclusion of vulnerable people. In this context we can refer to a possible model for sustainable economic development at the local, regional, community and family level, close to normal living environment requirements of the individual, thus imposing a certain behavior and a different approach in what concerns the reintegration of disadvantaged people and the perception of their condition. Organizational forms of social economy can take in time a significant amount of the paternalistic state's welfare and social protection obligations, thus becoming a real support for the social inclusion policies of vulnerable people and groups.

### *Conclusions*

Globalization has the effect of reshaping national systems and human life implicitly. Global policies and implementation of the proposed standards should be also adapted to national peculiarities: at the economic, cultural, educational and demographic level, etc. Legislative coherence and the proper application of work methodologies on the one hand and of sanctions on the other, gives a sense of safety, predictability, continuity and sustainability to the social actor, who feels that he is an active part in the progress of society. Thus, having the motivation, he is likely to assume more responsibly his roles in society, fight against discrimination and marginalization of social disadvantaged groups and support social cohesion.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, 16.

The anomy of transition societies produces increased vulnerability to forms of violence. Not only does it cause economic, financial and social vulnerabilities but also moral ones. Any economic crisis implies a social crisis which in turn produces a moral crisis difficult to quantify and manage. The relationship to the other risks to be established depending on the utility it implies or on the help and assistance it requires. Discrimination and labeling based on real dysfunctions, on the medium or long term, are forms of abuse and violence. Provided that vulnerability can be represented by the exposure to risks and uncertainties and a reduced ability to cope with them, education plays an extremely important role in development: personal, familial, community, organizational development... The lack of education and personal will, the lack of education and constructive desire of those who stand for the image of the citizen generate an actor likely to be both victim and abuser. Social economy measures are not sufficient without change in mentalities, without consistent support from the state, without developing support networks. Social economy is just a form which appeals to social responsibility.

Any person can be at a time not only vulnerable but also a victim of some form of violence. Even more, this would require awareness, the understanding of real problems of society and the Other, the reassessment of interpersonal and intergroup relations, the reevaluation of the personal role in the development of community and society. Cultural poverty, educational and awareness poverty are reflected in the individual, the community and nation as much as the forms of economic poverty. Starting from the perception of the Other as equally important as yourself, new strategies might develop, referring to conflict prevention, social inclusion, human capital development, understanding of what social responsibility essentially is.

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