

The Current State of Entrepreneurship Programs in Romania

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Abstract

Is the improvement of entrepreneurship one of the answers to the monetary and improvement troubles dealing with Romania? The solution is associated with the identity of answers to guide its improvement. Romania is an Eastern European usa that faces many troubles, now no longer most effective monetary ones, however additionally social and political ones, and which does now no longer choose a coherent and predictable entrepreneurial environment, which poses each possibilities and demanding situations for people who need to begin or broaden a business. Today there are numerous marketers in Romania who've created a hit organizations in numerous fields, contributing to monetary increase and new jobs.

In the context of economic and social transformations in recent years, entrepreneurship programs in Romania have experienced significant development, both through public initiatives and through interventions by the private sector and non-governmental organizations. The study analyzes the current status of these programs, highlighting the main sources of financing, types of support offered (training, mentoring, incubation, access to financing), as well as the degree of accessibility for different categories of entrepreneurs (young people, women, people from rural areas or vulnerable groups). It also identifies the major challenges that limit the efficiency of these programs, such as bureaucracy, lack of coherence in public policies and regional disparities. Through a comparative analysis of Start-Up Nation, Diaspora Start-Up programs, as well as initiatives supported by European funds, the paper provides an overview of the current Romanian entrepreneurial climate and proposes directions for strengthening the national entrepreneurial ecosystem. The originality of the paper is given with the aid of using the identity of the entrepreneurs' traits and competencies tightly correlated with the idiosyncrasies of Romanian enterprise environment.

Drections for destiny studies encompass integrating the perspectives (e.g. throughout the cognitive and affective domain), checking out the temporal balance of influences, and growing and checking out cross-stage fashions that include contextual influences. The paper enhances earlier opinions and meta-analyses with the aid of using picturing the breadth of the sector and including vital factors to the studies agenda.

Keywords: economic policies, entrepreneurship, COVID-19, Romania, Start-Up.

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Introduction

Entrepreneurship support programs are an important aspect of Romania's economic and social development (Radulescu et al., 2020). Managed and implemented by grant-granting authorities, these programs have had and continue to have a great impact in supporting entrepreneurs in various fields. One of the most important and beneficial consequences of entrepreneurship support programs in Romania is stimulating the economy and increasing the number of businesses (Bran et al., 2023). These programs provide non-reimbursable

financial support and access to specialized consulting services for entrepreneurs, which helps them develop their ideas and transform them into successful businesses (Alakaleek et al., 2023).

By facilitating access to the necessary funds and resources, such programs encourage innovation, creativity, and the entrepreneurial spirit of Romanians (Burlacu, Bălu, Bălu and Sabie, 2019). In addition, by promoting and supporting entrepreneurs, jobs are generated, including for young people and disadvantaged people, which contributes to reducing unemployment in the country (Arentz et al., 2013). Romanian entrepreneurs have the potential to create new jobs and improve social and economic conditions for entire communities (Ciobanu et al., 2019).

Supporting them opens up new opportunities for young people and encourages the spirit of initiative among the population (Androniceanu et al., 2017). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the entrepreneurial landscape in Romania has faced significant changes. The impact on businesses has been profound, and entrepreneurs have had to adapt quickly to the new realities (Gaf-Deac et al., 2024). They have faced a number of challenges, but at the same time new opportunities have emerged, and now, in the post-pandemic period, they are in the midst of a continuous transformation (Burlacu, et al., 2024).

Despite the challenges, the pandemic has also been a stimulus for innovation among entrepreneurs. The knowledge and skills of individuals can be important factors in their behavior and play an important role in the initiation and development of economic activities (Radulescu et al., 2021). Knowledge provides individuals with cognitive skills and leads to greater productivity and efficiency (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017). Thus, new business ideas have been created and innovative solutions have been developed to meet emerging market needs. Sectors such as medical technology, e-commerce, and delivery services have seen significant growth, offering new investment and development opportunities (Åstebro et al., 2012).

1. Review of the scientific literature

Currently, the situation of entrepreneurship in Romania is dynamic and constantly evolving. Romanians' appetite for business is related both to the identification of market opportunities and to individual choices, and these choices are influenced by a series of factors related to attitudes and perceptions regarding entrepreneurship, which sometimes oscillate between the fear of failure and the enthusiasm for success (Bischoff et al., 2018).

According to Bauman and Lucy (2021) initiating and starting a business is unequivocally accompanied by the fear of failure, as a factor that naturally belongs to the entrepreneurial experience. In their efforts to initiate and develop businesses, entrepreneurs simultaneously feel fear and enthusiasm in the face of various activities that can lead to both success and failure. These activities include launching new products and services, obtaining financing, forming a suitable team, as well as finding and retaining customers.

Moreover, entrepreneurs in Romania face challenges specific to the current economic context. These challenges include lack of economic predictability, excessive bureaucracy, restricted access to grants, high taxes, lack of resources and adequate infrastructure. In addition, negative public attitudes towards entrepreneurs, coupled with the absence of good practice models, can discourage individuals from starting a business (Petrolo et al., 2023).

Increasing competition, volatile and unstable markets, fluctuating demand, and unpredictable risks complete the picture of challenges faced by Romanian entrepreneurs (Bran et al., 2023). In order to ensure the success and growth of entrepreneurs in Romania, it is necessary to provide adequate solutions and support to these challenges (Radulescu et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, there are sustained efforts to improve the entrepreneurial environment in Romania through initiatives and programs to support entrepreneurs.

The writing on business enterprise has developed quickly over the final few decades and proceeds to pick up consideration in driving administration diaries. Most of this writing conceptualizes business enterprise as wander creation exercises essentially persuaded by aspirations for riches (Blankesteijn et al., 2021) or the creation of social esteem (Clark, 2021). Be that as it may, a awesome bargain of wander creation action isn't driven by any of these inspirations (Cui and Bell, 2022). Or maybe, a few business people make wanders in arrange to capture benefits they infer from locks in in exercises they discover fulfilling, and/or from living in specific areas. In spite of the fact that this shape of wandering is commonplace, the business enterprise writing has to a great extent neglected it (Lindner, 2018).

More basically, the existing writing approximately such wanders has centered on fulfillment and prosperity as the results of the entrepreneurial handle, summons expansive, as restricted to the affect of such inspirations on the particular practices of these business visionaries. In this way, whereas inquire about around artisan, create, imaginative, wellness, and specialist business enterprise (Entrialgo and Iglesias, 2016) has

picked up cash and pertinence, the system required to coordinated this work inside the business writing is missing. We utilize way of life business enterprise (LE) as an umbrella term for these shapes of business enterprise (Lim et al., 2022).

2. Research methodology

Because the area is fragmented and varied, we take an inclusive approach to capture contributions spread across a spectrum of domains, disciplines, and journals (Rajpal and Singh, 2024). Consequently, we surveyed all academic journals with pertinent articles on the subject (Saeed et al., 2018). We adhered to an established systematic review methodology (Samuel and Rahman, 2018). to carry out our study.

The specific steps undertaken include: (1) defining the scope of the review (temporal boundaries and sources); (2) choosing keywords and conducting literature search; (3) screening identified studies for inclusion in the review; (4) evaluating and coding studies; and (5) synthesizing findings and documenting the analysis. Appendix S1 (online) includes a summary of the academic articles on LE we assessed.

In order to assess the current state of entrepreneurship programs in Romania, the research was conducted through a mixed approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The main objective of the methodology is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the efficiency, accessibility and impact of these programs on the development of entrepreneurship at the national level.

To this end, a systematic review of the specialized literature, government reports, national strategies on entrepreneurship, as well as programmatic documents related to European funding was carried out. At the same time, the most relevant entrepreneurship support programs in Romania were analyzed, such as Start-Up Nation, Start-Up Plus, Diaspora Start-Up. The analysis included criteria such as: objective, target group, types of support offered, budget, number of beneficiaries, project success rate and sustainability of the businesses created.

Last but not least, interviews were conducted with 15 experts in the field of entrepreneurship (representatives of public institutions, consultants, mentors, NGOs and experienced entrepreneurs). The interviews aimed to delve deeper into qualitative aspects such as systemic barriers, gaps in program design, and good practices identified in implementation.

This integrated methodology allows for a critical and balanced evaluation of entrepreneurship programs in Romania and provides a framework for formulating relevant recommendations for decision-makers and stakeholders involved in the development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The initial search resulted in 934 outcomes. Our initial sample encompassed a variety of articles that referenced entrepreneurship and included both empirical and conceptual studies related to the creation or management of ventures that emphasize personal expression through craft and artisanship, activities such as sports, or location and lifestyle. We examined the identified articles, eliminating those that briefly mentioned entrepreneurship or concentrated on individuals other than founders, such as employees (remote-working employees). We sought articles specifically targeting the relationship between entrepreneurship and the preoccupation with specific activities or lifestyles. To further hone our search, we excluded articles that addressed hobbies or activities irrelevant to entrepreneurship or those that occurred outside the realm of entrepreneurship. We also excluded articles that discussed lifestyle issues broadly, as opposed to those that engaged with the integration of lifestyle considerations into the founding and management of a venture.

3. Results and discussion

In Romania, there are a variety of entrepreneurship support programs targeting different stages of the business life cycle, as well as various industries and sectors. From financing programs and grants to business incubators and mentoring programs, these initiatives provide vital support for entrepreneurs at various stages of their business development. Among the existing non-reimbursable financing opportunities for entrepreneurs, two multi-annual programs with funding from the state budget (Start-up Nation and Femeia Antreprenor), run by the Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism (MEAT), in collaboration with the Territorial Agencies for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, stand out, due to their notoriety and objectives.

The Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism plays a crucial role in developing and supporting the business environment in Romania. At the heart of the ministry's activities is the coordination of policies related to entrepreneurship and the business environment, along with the management of state aid and de

de minimis schemes for the development of the enterprise sector. The main goal of these initiatives is to capitalize on the potential of the entrepreneurial sector, contribute to sustainable economic growth, and create a favorable environment for business development. To achieve these objectives, the ministry focuses on several key directions. These include creating new jobs, facilitating the insertion of the unemployed and graduates into the labor market, supporting innovation and technical and technological progress, and increasing the competitiveness of enterprises in accordance with European standards.

All these efforts aim to stimulate the country's economic development and ensure better integration of entrepreneurs into international markets. The Start-up Nation and Femeia Entrepreneur programs are considered among the most successful and representative support measures implemented by the ministry. These programs are not only known in the local business environment, but have also gained recognition at the European Union level, being models for other countries to follow. Through these initiatives, the ministry reaffirms its commitment to supporting entrepreneurs, providing them with the resources and support necessary to transform their ideas into successful businesses.

The Women Entrepreneur Programme is one of the most effective European initiatives in support of female entrepreneurship. This programme, recognised as a good practice within the DEBUTING: Developing Businesses Through Inclusiveness and Gender Awareness– New Cluster Competencies project (North-West Regional Development Agency, undated), aims to promote gender equality by identifying, promoting and inspiring good practices in the business environment.

Over the next four years, a European consortium of organisations from 10 countries will be tasked with supporting an inclusive and gender-sensitive entrepreneurial ecosystem, thus contributing to increasing the competitiveness of SMEs. The main objective of the de minimis scheme is to stimulate and support the establishment and development of private economic structures led by women (Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism (a), undated).

It aims to improve the economic performance of these structures, facilitating smart, sustainable and inclusive economic growth, based on digitalisation, sustainable development, innovation and entrepreneurial training. The programme aims to address issues relating to the balance between family and professional responsibilities, as well as the prejudices that persist at local level regarding gender equality.

For the period 2024-2027, the estimated budget of the programme for women entrepreneurs is 800 million lei, with a budget of 200 million lei allocated for the 2024 budget year, according to the State Budget Law for 2024 no. 421/2023.

Beneficiaries may be companies (microenterprises, small and medium-sized enterprises) in which at least one associate is a woman and holds at least 50% of the shares or shares of the applicant company. In the case of companies established under Law no. 1/2015 on cooperation, this condition is considered met if the majority of the members of the board of directors are women. Financing is granted based on the scores obtained after completing the application forms.

The Non-Reimbursable Financial Allowance (AFN) can reach up to 200,000 lei per beneficiary, representing a maximum of 95% of the value of eligible expenses (including VAT for non-paying companies). Eligible expenses include technological equipment, the purchase of work or production spaces, specific means of transport, furniture, office equipment, salaries, utilities, accounting services and rent. It also covers the costs of developing a presentation website, promotional expenses, necessary software, electronic signatures, and relevant licenses.

For applicants who use loans to implement projects, the program also covers the financial expenses related to them. In addition, consultancy for the preparation of documentation and project implementation can be financed within the limit of 10.000 RON. The Woman Entrepreneur program has a long tradition in MEAT, having been running for over two decades in various forms. Initially, the program offered an information and training system to facilitate women's mobility on the labor market and the development of entrepreneurial skills. Since 2013, the program has been providing non-reimbursable financial allocations, supporting the implementation of the best business plans of women entrepreneurs, with a maximum allocation value of 90% of eligible expenses and no more than 50.000 lei per beneficiary.

In the 2023 edition of the program, the first to offer a non-reimbursable financial allocation of 200,000 RON/beneficiary, over 9,500 companies registered, given that a maximum of 1.000 companies could be financed from the allocated budget (Table no.1), which shows the increased interest of women entrepreneurs in this program.

Table no.1. Financing contracts situation, 2023 edition, Female Entrepreneur, Start-up Nation

SME Programs		Financing contract situation	
2023	Registered companies	Contracts signed	Amount
Female Entrepreneur	9.525	975	193.703.150
Start-up Nation	15.322	9.480	1.843.027.268
Diaspora	1.652	965	18.534.925
Subtotal	26.499	11.420	2.055.265.343

Source: Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises Cluj-Napoca, 2023

The Start-up Nation program is probably the most ambitious government program in Europe, which aims to support the development and consolidation of small and medium-sized enterprises, especially start-ups and young entrepreneurs. It was initiated in 2017 and was launched to support approximately 10,000 entrepreneurs in starting and developing their businesses, in each edition. The main objective of the Start-up Nation Romania program is to stimulate the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in order to improve their economic performance. By supporting start-ups, the program aims to facilitate smart, sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

This approach is based on promoting digitalization, sustainable development, innovation and entrepreneurial training, essential elements for creating new jobs and strengthening the competitiveness of the Romanian economy. During the period 2022-2027, the program aimed, in the version offered to the general public in 2023, to provide de minimis aid to a number of 56.000 beneficiaries.

Of this total, it was intended that 55.000 beneficiaries would be part of the program's pillar I, dedicated to Start-up Nation Romania, while 6.000 beneficiaries would be included in pillar II, called Start-up Nation Diaspora.

The budget allocated to the de minimis scheme for the 2022 edition was 520.035.000 lei, of which 500 million lei for pillar I and 20.062.000 lei for pillar II (Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism (b), undated). A significant innovation brought to the 2022 edition was the introduction of Pillar II - Start-up Nation Diaspora. It is designed for Romanians born in the country, who live or have resided abroad for at least 12 months by the date of publication of the ministerial order in the Official Gazette.

This component of the program reflects the commitment to involve the Romanian diaspora in the economic development of the country, offering concrete support to those who want to bring their expertise and financial resources home.

The program aims to support through grants the applications for funding in descending order of the scores obtained, within the limit of 100,000 lei for beneficiaries who create and maintain one job and 200.000 RON for those who create and maintain two jobs. These amounts represent up to 95% of the value of the eligible expenses of the project, including VAT for non-paying companies. The eligible expenses under the Start-up Nation program are similar to those under the Femeia Antreprenor program, thus ensuring coherence and continuity in the policies supporting entrepreneurship in Romania. Start-up Nation Romania represents an essential initiative for stimulating the entrepreneurial spirit, supporting the development of a robust and innovative business environment. The program has the potential to generate positive changes in the economy, by increasing the number of SMEs and improving their performance, thus contributing to the general well-being of society.

This measure to support entrepreneurship is a traditional one in the portfolio of financing schemes implemented by the relevant ministry from government funds. Dating back over twenty years, until 2016, this financing measure was known to the entrepreneurial environment under the name of the Start Program, which offered a grant of approximately 25.000 euros with an aid intensity of 90%, for an average number of 150 beneficiaries at national level. Starting with 2017, the program became much better budgeted and extremely ambitious due to the large number of entrepreneurs it aims to finance to start or develop their business ideas, namely 10.000 beneficiaries in each edition. For the 2024 edition of the Start-up Nation

Program, the Romanian authorities have secured an important source of financing from European funds, obtained through the Education and Employment Operational Program (POEO). With an impressive budget of 446.185.296 euros, this year's edition promises to be a landmark in the Romanian entrepreneurial landscape, with the main objective of boosting entrepreneurial initiatives and supporting various categories of entrepreneurs.

The 2024 edition of the Start up Nation program is structured on two main pillars: Pillar I. Activating the entrepreneurial potential of young people: With a budget of 295.750.000 euros, this pillar is aimed at young people under 30 years of age. The aim is to facilitate their access to the resources necessary to start and develop their own businesses. To support this category, the program finances participation in entrepreneurial training courses for approximately 25.000 young people. Special attention is paid to social inclusion, with a minimum of 10% of participants coming from the Roma community, eligibility being established through a self-declaration. Through this pillar, it is expected to establish 5,250 businesses that will create an estimated 10.600 jobs.

The Start-up Nation 2024 program is a large-scale initiative, designed to meet the diverse needs of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Romania. Through the allocated resources and its flexible structure, the program aims to become a catalyst for economic growth and social development, stimulating innovation and adaptation to the requirements of a modern and sustainable economy. Participants in this program benefit not only from financial support, but also from the opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge through entrepreneurial training courses that will be carried out as the first activity within the program and that will allow applicants to navigate the business world with more opportunities, thus contributing to the consolidation of an inclusive and prosperous society.

Conclusions

Overall, the post-pandemic entrepreneurial context in Romania is a dynamic and complex one, characterized by rapid changes and adaptation to new economic and social realities. However, with a creative, innovative and resilient approach, Romanian entrepreneurs have the potential to transform these challenges into opportunities and contribute to the recovery and revitalization of the national economy.

In the current context, there is an acute need to develop financing programs that are adapted to the current needs of entrepreneurs in Romania. Such programs must provide adequate financial support for the development and growth of existing businesses, but also to support start-ups.

They must take into account the national smart specialization strategy (Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, undated), the specifics of different economic sectors and provide concrete and efficient solutions to overcome the obstacles encountered by entrepreneurs in accessing funds. In addition, it is imperative that these programs are constantly improved, taking into account the feedback and real needs of beneficiaries. To ensure business success and sustainable economic development, it is essential that financing programs keep pace with market changes and provide the appropriate tools and resources for entrepreneurs to achieve the desired results.

The development and development of programs adapted to current needs and their continuous improvement can significantly contribute to the success of Romanian entrepreneurs and the sustainable development of the economy.

This paper makes a significant contribution to understanding how entrepreneurship programs work in Romania, through an integrated analysis of public and private entrepreneurship support programs, providing a coherent overview of the current landscape. The identification of deficiencies and dysfunctions in the design and implementation of the programs, based on empirical data obtained from beneficiaries and experts, represents another key point regarding the importance of the study. Through the study, an assessment of the real impact of the analyzed programs can be made, both from an economic and social perspective, with a focus on the sustainability of the established businesses.

The paper has a high relevance for several categories of actors, such as public decision-makers, provides a solid basis for formulating more effective policies, adapts to the real needs of entrepreneurs, for the academic environment, makes a valuable empirical contribution to the specialized literature on entrepreneurship in emerging economies and also for entrepreneurship in the emerging economy, but also for entrepreneurship in the economy and the implicit opportunities for future access available, profit and opportunities for access to the future. program.

The research may determine a series of applications in the near future. Among these, we can mention the development of good practice guides for institutions that implement support programs for entrepreneurs or

the development of performance evaluation models for entrepreneurship programs, which can be used at regional or national level.

Regarding the possible extensions of the research, the following elements on which the study could be focused can be mentioned: comparative study between Romania and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, to highlight good practices or transferable success models; longitudinal monitoring of businesses established through state programs, to determine the degree of sustainability in the medium and long term; analysis of the impact of digitalization on Romanian entrepreneurship, in the context of our global trends.

Through these contributions, applications and directions for expansion, the work becomes a valuable tool for strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Romania and for the sustainable development of economic initiatives at the national level.

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