

# ***Social entrepreneurship as a catalyst for addressing inequalities and promoting sustainable development***

**by Saule Okutayeva<sup>\*</sup>, Emin Askerov<sup>\*\*</sup>, Zubirash Smagulova<sup>\*\*\*</sup>, Nurgul Yesmagulova<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>, Saida Kaidarova<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>**

## ***Abstract***

The evolution of socio-economic relations has determined the emergence of such a type of activity as social entrepreneurship, which applies the commercial component to businesses that directly influence the transformation of the social sphere by solving concrete social problems. The purpose of this study was to summarise the theoretical foundations and practical experience of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. The information base for the study was provided by relevant scientific studies in this area, as well as regulations of the Republic of Kazakhstan and official statistical information. The findings reveal a significant increase in the number of social entrepreneurship entities, indicating the dynamism of this sector's development. However, over 43% of these entities fall under category 4, characterized by simplified criteria for inclusion in the register, suggesting limited involvement of socially vulnerable segments of the population. Accordingly, there is a limited involvement of socially vulnerable segments of the population in the economic activity of the country due to the low activity of business involvement in solving social problems, which underlies the functioning of the industry. The study highlights the vital role of social entrepreneurship in addressing inequalities and fostering sustainable development by solving concrete social problems. By providing employment opportunities, access to essential goods and services, and innovative solutions, social enterprises can contribute to reducing inequalities, promoting inclusive economic growth, and creating sustainable communities. Based on the identified problems, to improve the efficiency of social

<sup>\*</sup>High School of Economics, Astana International University, 020000, 8 Kabanbay Batyr Ave., Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan, s.okutayeva@ukr.net.

<sup>\*\*</sup>GreenTAL, 010000, 12A Zhansugurov Str., Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan, emi-naskerov1983@outlook.com.

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>High School of Economics, Astana International University, 020000, 8 Kabanbay Batyr Ave., Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan, Z.Smagulova@hotmail.com.

<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>Department of Quality Assurance, Astana IT University, 010000, 55/11 Mangilik El Ave., Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan, Yesmagulova@outlook.com.

<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>Department of Business and Management, Innovative University of Eurasia, 140000, 45 Lomov Str., Pavlodar, Republic of Kazakhstan, saida.kaidarova@hotmail.com.

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entrepreneurship functioning, this study offered practical recommendations aimed at improving administrative and regulatory mechanisms.

*Key words:* business, entrepreneur, socially vulnerable population, sustainable development, social problems, state support.

## **1. Introduction**

Meeting the needs of socially vulnerable groups these is essential not only for upholding human rights and social justice but also for creating inclusive and cohesive communities that can contribute to a nation's overall progress and prosperity (Polcarová and Pupíková, 2022). Women, migrants, the elderly and individuals with disabilities often have greater healthcare needs and reduced economic stability (Min, 2021). It is imperative to address the needs of these vulnerable groups to advance the Sustainable Development Goals and ensure inclusivity.

Social entrepreneurship is a fast-growing field that combines entrepreneurial principles with a social impact orientation (Kimakwa *et al.*, 2023). By incorporating social and environmental considerations into their business models, social enterprises can help reduce the negative impacts often associated with traditional profit-driven enterprises. Assessing the Kazakh experience of social entrepreneurship, Intykbayeva *et al.* (2021) note that this is a new trend of economic development, which should adopt crowdfunding and fundraising as innovative and used tools in foreign practice of social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan is developing and attracting the attention of both public and private organisations (Aukkenov, 2023). Pritvorova *et al.* (2020) investigated the need to implement a system of support for social entrepreneurship on the part of institutional bodies in Kazakhstan. Okutayeva (2023) substantiated that the development of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan is characterised by insufficient awareness of regional authorities and entrepreneurs in the issues of social entrepreneurship, the lack of infrastructure for its development, as well as an imperfect legislative framework in which not all preferential measures defined by the legislation are fully implemented.

Since social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan has started to develop relatively recently, the practical activities of the subjects of this sphere, the specific features of interaction with the state, as well as the existing problems and barriers are understudied in the scientific literature. The purpose of this study was to summarise the existing theoretical, methodological, and practical as-

pects of the functioning of social entrepreneurship in modern conditions in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

## **2. Literature Review**

Mair and Marti (2006), Chandra *et al.* (2021), Alvord *et al.* (2004) confirm that the probability of social innovation success is higher for innovators associated with commercially orientated companies. Stephan *et al.* (2015), Bonfanti *et al.* (2023), Abbasova *et al.* (2023) emphasise that the state should play a key role in the development of social entrepreneurship. Turner and Martin (2005), Stirzaker *et al.* (2021), Kerimkhulle *et al.* (2023a, 2023b) adhere to the approach that business should be a driving force in eliminating social problems by transforming profits into mechanisms aimed at solving society's problems. Haugh (2005) defines the nature of social entrepreneurship from the standpoint of work related to the development of perspectives and opportunities for the creation of social value and the development of social business structures for their implementation in practice.

Dees (2001) interprets the concept of social entrepreneurship as an activity aimed at upholding social values, searching for new opportunities, engaging in continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning, to meet social needs beyond the available resources, and developing responsibility for people and performance. Thompson *et al.* (2000) note that social entrepreneurs are individuals who recognise that there is an opportunity to meet a need where the public welfare system is unable to do so. Based on the above, it is possible to formulate the author's definition of social entrepreneurship, which can be understood as the activity of a person, organisation, enterprise, and which operates on a commercial basis, is financially independent, self-sufficient, and sustainable, aimed at creating social value for socially vulnerable segments of the population, based on an innovative entrepreneurial model of behaviour.

## **3. Materials and Methods**

The authors analysed the scientific papers of scientists from the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Italy, Spain, Norway, the Czech Republic, as well as the studies of Kazakh scientists investigating socio-economic activity in the Republic of Kazakhstan. In the basis of the study of the specific features of formation, functioning, and development of social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan is the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Changes and Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneurship, and

Compulsory Social Health Insurance” (2021), the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Approval of the Rules for Maintaining the Register of Social Entrepreneurship Entities” (2021a).

A comparative analysis of the measures of state support applied in practice and measures provided for by the regulatory framework was carried out: Order of the Minister of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Approval of the Rules for Supporting Social Entrepreneurship Development Initiatives by State Bodies, National Holdings, National Development Institutes and Other Organisations” (2023) and Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Some Measures of State Support of Private Entrepreneurship” (2019). Based on the information provided by the “DAMU” Entrepreneurship Development Fund (2023), the main measures of direct financial support provided by the state to entities operating in the field of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan were identified. Statistical information was used from the Order “On Amending the Order of the Minister of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 40 “On Approval of the Register of Social Entrepreneurship Entities” (2023).

The changes that were made in the above-mentioned order, a tendency of growth in the number of business entities that received the status of social business and were included in the state register was established. Using the methodology for calculating the specific weight indicators, the share distribution of the spheres of activity of social entrepreneurship entities included in the state register of social entrepreneurs of Kazakhstan was presented.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

Social entrepreneurship refers to the activity of doing business in which, apart from making financial profit, the entrepreneur solves the social problems. Kazakh legislation clarifies the criteria for classifying organisations as social entrepreneurship entities: ensure employment of socially vulnerable groups of the population prescribed in the law; promote the sale of goods produced by socially vulnerable groups of the population; produce goods designed for persons with disabilities; carry out activities to achieve socially useful goals (Table 1). In Kazakhstan, social entrepreneurship began its formation and development from the beginning of 2022, after the entry into force of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Changes and Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneurship and Compulsory Social Health Insurance” (2021), related regulations (Resolution of the Government ..., 2021a). The criteria for

selecting the category of a social enterprise entity are based on the classification of socially vulnerable populations (SVP) as stipulated in the Social Entrepreneurship Act (Table 2).

*Table 1 - Characteristics of entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship*

| <i>Unique characteristics of profit-oriented entrepreneurship</i>  | <i>Characteristics common to both businesses</i>   | <i>Unique characteristics of social entrepreneurship</i>  |
|--|--|---|
| Exceptional focus on profitability; speculative (buy cheaper, sell more expensive); risk appetite; understanding the importance of all resources; strategic thinking; value creation | Innovativeness; dedication; initiative; leadership; search for opportunities; perseverance; responsibility | Purposefulness (mission-oriented); emotionally charged; change orientation; opinion leader; social value creation; finding and solving social problems; visionary brilliance; high degree of responsibility |

*Source: Bornstein and Davis, 2010; Dickel and Eckardt, 2021, Kruse et al., 2021.*

*Table 2 - Classification of categories of social entrepreneurship entities in the Republic of Kazakhstan, depending on the specific features of interaction with SVPs*

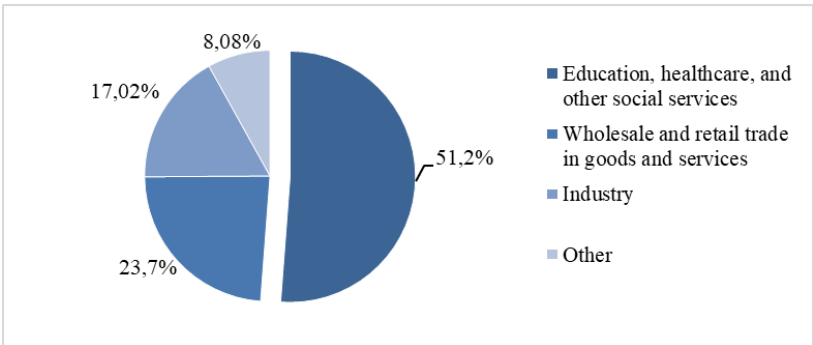
| <i>Socially vulnerable populations (SVP)</i>  |  |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Persons of pre-retirement age and pensioners.</li> <li>Persons without a concrete place of residence.</li> <li>Persons who have been treated for drug dependence.</li> <li>Guardians as well as parents of children with disabilities.</li> <li>Former prisoners (persons released from prison).</li> <li>People with disabilities.</li> <li>Graduates of orphanages under the age of 29.</li> <li>Women from single-parent, low-income, and large families.</li> <li>Kandas.</li> </ol> |  |
| <i>1st category</i>   | <i>2nd category</i>  |
| 50% of the total number of employees; 25% of the total payroll should be attributable to the SVP  | 50% of the income received must be from the sale of goods and services created by the SVP.   |
| <i>3rd category</i>   | <i>4th category</i>  |
| Production of goods and provision of services for persons with disabilities to overcome or compensate for their disabilities, as well as for other categories of SVP: revenue from such activities must be at least 50% of total revenue.   | Functioning in socially useful areas (psychological and pedagogical activities, training of volunteers of socially oriented NPOs, implementation of educational training programmes in schools). |

*Source: Law of the Republic ..., 2021; Resolution of the Government ..., 2021a.*

After entering the register of social entrepreneurship subjects, a social entrepreneur can count on the measures of state support (Order of the Minister..., 2023; Resolution of the Government..., 2019; Resolution of the Government ..., 2021b). The Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan supports entrepreneurs and allocates money for the creation and development of businesses. The maximum amount of the grant is KZT 5 million. According to this grant programme, the key conditions are the necessity to be included in the list of priority areas of the economy, according to the classification of economic activities and to be a relatively new business (not more than 3 years from the date of registration).

As of 4.10.2023, there are 221 organisations in the state register of social entrepreneurship entities in the Republic of Kazakhstan Order “On Amending the Order of the Minister ..., 2023). The structural distribution of the spheres of activity of social entrepreneurs in the Republic of Kazakhstan is presented in Figure 1.

*Figure 1 - Share distribution of spheres of activity of social entrepreneurship entities included in the state register of Kazakhstan, as of October 2023*

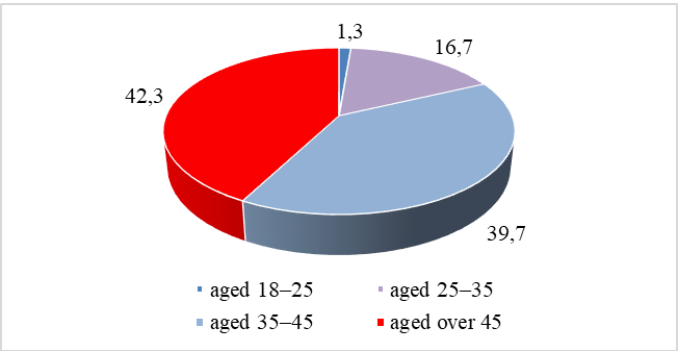


Source: Order “On Amending the Order of the Minister ..., 2023.

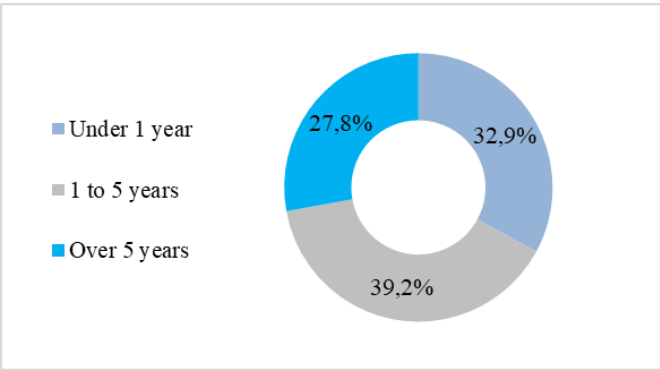
Most social entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan are between the ages of 31-40 and 41-50 (Aukkenov, 2023). More than 84% of entrepreneurs have higher education. It is also interesting that about half of the social entrepreneurs surveyed consider themselves part of a socially vulnerable group. Thus, in 2022, the Association of Social Innovators was established to provide financial, informational and advisory support to start-up and existing social entrepreneurs. To date, 70 social entrepreneurs have been involved in the Association. The authors of this study, together with the subcommittee on the development of

social entrepreneurship at Atameken NPP, as well as the Association of Social Innovators, conducted a survey of existing social entrepreneurs from 27 March to 2 April 2023 to investigate the state of development and existing problems of social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Women are substantially dominant in social entrepreneurship, accounting for almost 81% of the business. Age of the social entrepreneurs is shown in Figure 2. The average age of social enterprises does not exceed 5 years (Figure 3).

*Figure 2 - Age structure of those employed in social entrepreneurship*



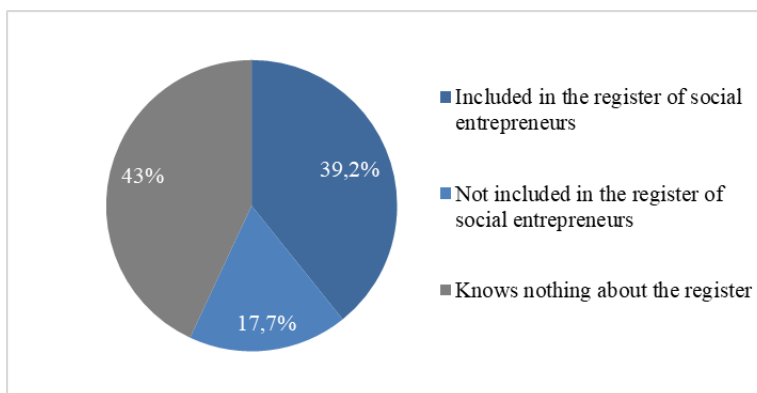
*Figure 3 - Equity distribution of experience in social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan*



The analysis has shown that almost 50% of respondents refer to social entrepreneurs by virtue of the fact that they employ people from socially vulnerable categories of population. Over 30% of respondents are involved in inclusive education, while more than 25% of social entrepreneurs are engaged in

socially beneficial activities. Practically all subjects of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan are small enterprises with, as a rule, up to 50 employees and profitability that does not exceed KZT 20 million per year. However, about 35% of enterprises get profitability up to KZT 1.5 million, more than 55% – from KZT 1.5 to 6 million, and only about 10% – over KZT 6 million per year. Salaries received or paid by the interviewed entrepreneurs vary depending on output and working hours and range from KZT 64,000 to KZT 300,000 per month. In the 8 months from February 2023 to October 2023, the number of social enterprise entities entered in the relevant state register increased considerably, with a percentage increase of more than 130%. The main share of socially oriented business falls into the 4th category, which makes provision for activities in socially useful directions (psychological and pedagogical activities, training of volunteers, socially oriented non-profit organisations). The smallest number of social entrepreneurship entities sell goods and services that were produced by socially vulnerable groups of the population. The survey showed that not all social entrepreneurs are aware of the Register of Social Entrepreneurs and how to apply for it (Figure 4).

*Figure 4 - Share distribution of social entrepreneurs in the register*

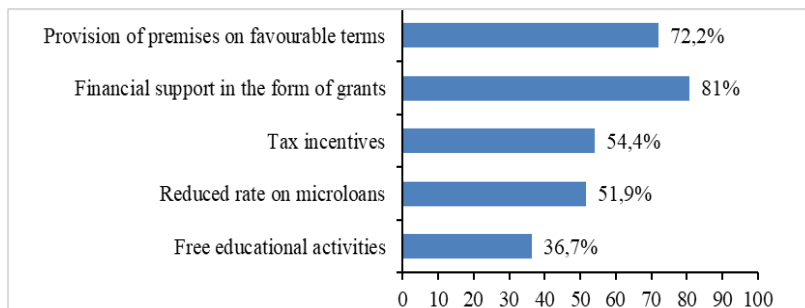


Social entrepreneurs count on the intensification of state support for their activities, prescribed by the regulatory framework (Figure 5). In addition, over 50% of social entrepreneurs believe that the following factors hinder the development of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan: insufficient grant programmes for social entrepreneurs – 68.4%, poor awareness of local executive bodies about social entrepreneurship – 60.8%, ineffective preferences and



measures of state support for social entrepreneurs – 54.4%, poor media coverage – 43%.

*Figure 5 - Desirable government support measures for social entrepreneurship*



Social entrepreneurship plays a significant role in addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, education, and access to healthcare (Hora *et al.*, 2023). The key component, as Peredo and McLean (2006) rightly point out, that distinguishes social entrepreneurship from other types of business is social goals and social problems. These are real situations or events that are recognised by individuals or significant segments of society as threatening certain values that are important to them and that require immediate change. Social problems include not only socio-economic challenges such as poverty and unemployment but also environmental issues like biodiversity loss, anthropogenic disasters, and pollution. These environmental problems can have severe consequences for vulnerable communities that rely heavily on natural resources and lack the resilience to adapt to environmental degradation.

Social entrepreneurship solves the problems of the collective rather than the individual and leads to the development of society (Lall and Park, 2022; Tsaurkubule, 2022). Social enterprises manage to build a mechanism of investment in human capital based on attracting financing, which can be particularly impactful for vulnerable populations that often lack access to education, training, and employment opportunities. It can also be argued that it is impossible to solve people's problems in isolation, as many social and environmental issues are interconnected and require a holistic, systems-thinking approach. The next critical point is to establish collaboration with other organisations including non-governmental organisations, government institutions, businesses and communities (Samer, 2012; Adamenko, 2022). The need to develop

social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan emerged as a result of the combined effect of various objective factors, the main of which is the rapid increase in the number of people in need of various kinds of social support, specifically, low-income families, orphans, persons with disabilities, victims of various kinds of domestic violence.

Even though social entrepreneurship is at the initial stage of its formation and development in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the law regulating this sphere was adopted at the end of 2021, the dynamics of the number of business entities in this segment of the national economy demonstrates rapid growth. From 31 December 2022 to October 2023, the number of business units in the country that received the status of social entrepreneurship entities increased almost eight times from 25 to 221. However, in the overall structure of enterprises, the largest share is accounted for by social entrepreneurs of the fourth category (43%).

Out of nine legislative directions of support and stimulation of social entrepreneurship development in Kazakhstan, only two at the regional level have practical application at the national level; support for business is implemented mainly in the form of providing the opportunity to rent communal premises at a reduced fee. The existing and working in practice support measures stimulate the development of social entrepreneurship solely through the possibility of preferential lending and receiving grants, which forms a limited support, the need for additional documentary support, effort, and time. This makes provision for the amount of expenses incurred to pay for vocational training for persons with disabilities, pensioners, ex-prisoners, but not more than 120 times the amount of the monthly calculation indicator established by the Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 120-VI ZRC “On Taxes and Other Obligatory Payments to the Budget (Tax Code)” (2017), effective as of 1 January of the relevant financial year, per employee for the tax period.

The main problems and advantages of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan were identified based on the analysis of scientific literature, case studies, and based on the findings of this study (Table 3). The SWOT analysis shows that social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan has the following opportunities for development: 1. Introduction of tax incentives for social enterprises. 2. Making finance more accessible to social entrepreneurs. 3. Introduction of training courses and programmes on social entrepreneurship in educational institutions. 4. Mentoring is an essential prerequisite for the development of social entrepreneurship. 5. The creation of an electronic multilingual platform for social enterprises, incubators, clusters of companies.

*Table 3. SWOT analysis of social entrepreneurship development in the Republic of Kazakhstan*

| <i>Strengths</i>  | <i>Weaknesses</i>   |
|---|---|
| <p>Positive scaling dynamics</p> <p>A high proportion of educated people who can contribute to the development of social entrepreneurship.</p> <p>High potential of able-bodied unemployed: people with disabilities, people from social category.</p> <p>Social entrepreneurship is defined in business legislation.</p> <p>Introduction of tax incentives for social enterprises.</p>   | <p>There are no benefits for social enterprises. More time resources are needed to train people with special needs and low-skilled workers.</p> <p>Labour productivity of workers with disabilities is lower; as a result, employers are not interested in hiring them.</p> <p>Lack of entrepreneurial human resources in the regions and access to infrastructure.</p> <p>Weak methodological approaches to business model design.</p> <p>Labour laws are more complicated for people with disabilities.</p> |
| <i>Opportunities</i>  | <i>Threats</i>  |
| <p>Making finance more accessible to social entrepreneurs – social investment funds, interest-free loans.</p> <p>Introduction of training courses and programmes on social entrepreneurship in educational institutions.</p> <p>Engaging business incubators in mentoring and counselling social entrepreneurs.</p> <p>Development of tools to familiarise and popularise social entrepreneurship (electronic multilingual website, publicly accessible database of social entrepreneurship initiatives).</p> <p>Enterprises solve socio-economic problems that the state cannot solve alone.</p> | <p>Introduction of tax incentives can lead to the risk of fraud.</p> <p>Tax breaks and privileges for social enterprises can distort the market:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• distorted understanding of the essence of social entrepreneurship;</li> <li>• the difficulty of starting a social enterprise due to lack of funding.</li> </ul>   |

## 5. Conclusions

Thus, social entrepreneurship in modern conditions forms an integral part of socio-economic relations, the emergence of which is caused by objective reasons and the need to ensure sustainable development for the state as a whole. The key components of social business are social problems and solutions, innovation, social values, community engagement, and entrepreneurial business model. This means that social enterprises should focus on ensuring their own survival, just like other enterprises, but in addition they can count on concrete support from the state, which may include direct funding, tax incentives, grants, compensation of some costs.

The study found that in Kazakhstan, the development of social entrepreneurship actually began in 2022, following the adoption of the relevant law and additional regulations. To obtain the status of a subject of social entrepreneurship it is necessary to work with socially vulnerable groups of the population, to choose one of four categories with certain criteria. From January to October 2023, the number of enterprises in the register of entities engaged in social entrepreneurship increased almost 8 times. The largest share is for category 4 social entrepreneurs, as the conditions of the criteria of this category for inclusion in the register are the simplest. This strongly suggests that at the current stage, the socially vulnerable segments of the population of Kazakhstan are still poorly involved in socio-economic processes, as it is the remaining categories that provide for rationing of jobs, wage fund, as well as income from the production of goods and services directly by representatives of the SVP. As for state support measures, less than half of those provided for by law are implemented in practice. Thus, within the framework direct financial assistance, the state partially compensates the payment of interest for the use of credit funds for investment activities of social entrepreneurs and replenishment of their working capital. This is implemented through the fund “DAMU”; there is also an opportunity to receive a grant under the National Project for Entrepreneurship Development for 2021-2025. The remaining support measures are either not implemented or are small in scope.

Future research should focus on developing practical strategies to stimulate the growth of social entrepreneurship and strengthen the effectiveness of public authorities in supporting the sector. By creating an enabling ecosystem that provides access to finance, capacity-building, and supportive policies, Kazakhstan can utilize the transformative potential of social enterprises to drive inclusive economic growth, social progress, and environmental sustainability. This will ultimately contribute to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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