

PUBLIC POLICIES FOR STIMULATING PRIVATE INITIATIVE AND THE PERCEPTION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *The study aims to analyse the impact of public policies aimed at stimulating entrepreneurship among young people, taking into account the Sustainable Development Goals. Three objectives are pursued: (1) correlating the content of Romanian policies on stimulating entrepreneurship among young people with statistical realities; (2) identifying young people's perceptions of entrepreneurship; (3) identifying young people's perspectives on building an entrepreneurial professional life. The methodological approach includes, in the first phase, the analysis of the content of policies on stimulating entrepreneurship and their correlation with the impact produced, respectively the statistical evolution of entrepreneurs among the young population. The second phase presents the results of empirical research based on a sociological survey (using a questionnaire) that captures young people's views on entrepreneurship and their prospects for starting a business. The reference population consists of young people in Romania.*

Keywords: *Young people, entrepreneurship, career prospects, public policies, sustainable development.*

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1. Introduction¹

Considering the entrepreneurial environment as one of the essential drivers of socio-economic development and innovation (Niţu & Feder, 2012), and as being subject to socio-economic and political variations, the present research aims to analyse the entrepreneurial potential of the young population and to correlate it with the public policy objectives of stimulating entrepreneurship. Based on a sociological approach, the first part of the study analyses strategies and public policies in the field of private initiative and the stage of entrepreneurship development in Romania, while the second part presents the results of an empirical study conducted among students, in order to describe their perspectives on entrepreneurship.

The premise of the study is that the outcomes of any strategy aimed at increasing resilience, as well as sustainable development, depend not only on the manner of implementation but also on the opinions and choices made by the population. The latter are, at the same time, both the result of how public policies are implemented and of the collective mindset shaped over time. In the case of young people, future options and behaviours are influenced by a complex set of factors: personal aspirations, opportunities provided by society, prevailing

¹ This article represents an intermediate stage of the research undertaken to describe the professional perspectives of young people. This study presents a specific segment of the research, namely that concerning the perception of entrepreneurship. The sample predominantly covers the eastern half of Romania. The research will continue with further field data collection, aiming to cover all regions and to explore additional facets of employment and entrepreneurship

social trends and movements, public policy actions (strategies, programmes, projects), and, above all, by mindset and trust in society.

From a demographic perspective, in Romania, the resident population aged 19–34 years amounted to 3,296,008 persons as of 1 July 2024. According to the Institutul Național de Statistică [National Institute of Statistics], the total student population (including all age groups) was 568,608 persons (253,532 male and 315,076 female), with the female population accounting for 55.4% of the total number of students. Of the total number of students, 502,950 were aged between 19 and 34 years. The share of students within the population aged 19–34 (3,296,008) is 15.25%. The remaining students (65,658 persons) are aged 35 and over, representing 11.54% of the total student population (out of 568,608).

2. Literature Review

Following the key concepts of the present study, namely young people, entrepreneurship, and public policies, we will present the different facets of private initiative as reflected in the specialised literature. Five major dimensions emerge from the literature, namely: young people and their professional aspirations; the presence of interest in entrepreneurship among students; entrepreneurship as an object of the state–citizen relationship, materialised in public policy; the connection between entrepreneurship and innovation; and perceptions of the entrepreneurial environment (mindset)

The human resource currently engaged in professional activities encompasses several generations: Baby Boomers, X, Y, and Z. Young people currently enrolled in university programmes predominantly belong to two generations: Generation Z (individuals born between 1997 and 2012, currently aged between 13 and 28) and Generation Y (individuals born between 1981 and 1996, currently aged between 29 and 44). S. Raiu describes Generation Z (iGeneration) as having an affinity for social interaction and learning via the internet, challenging authority, demanding independence, and leaving jobs that do not bring them fulfilment, while being responsible and committed to long-term goals. Generation Y (Millennials) is portrayed as individualistic, working smartly, preferring intrinsic work values (autonomy, identity, challenging jobs, and self-expression), seeking flexible career paths, communicating well with supervisors, and performing best in teams (2021).

When planning their professional trajectory, most secondary school students aim for employment and consider that professional success is ensured not only by competences but also by the sphere of personal relationships (relatives, acquaintances), a belief present as early as secondary education (Mihail, 2014). Subsequent studies highlight the factors that determine interest in starting a business, namely the desire to bring about change in the world, the aspiration to improve one's economic standard (the accumulation of money/wealth), earning a livelihood (as a constraint generated by limited job opportunities), and continuing family tradition (Szabó et al., 2024).

Analysing entrepreneurial spirit (viewed as a guarantee of success), Dumitraşciuc identifies five descriptive indicators derived from the specialised literature: passion, optimism, continuous improvement, the assumption of calculated risks, and the achievement of set objectives (2020). Based on this research, he constructs a “model of entrepreneurial spirit”, this trait being the one that drives young people to become entrepreneurs and to change the world (Dumitraşciuc, 2020).

Knowledge of the various facets of entrepreneurship among young people enables public authorities to design programmes that support their initiatives. However, a multitude of factors mean that the scale of entrepreneurship among young people remains relatively moderate. It is widely acknowledged that entrepreneurship, as a phenomenon, has the capacity to generate significant change, and that the individual who starts a business is one who assumes risks and develops strategic plans. In 2016, against the backdrop of high unemployment in Europe, it was considered that entrepreneurs must have the courage to cope with a chaotic environment and various obstacles, rely on a social network, and engage in a continuous learning process (Kobza & Mutlucan, 2016).

The development of an entrepreneurial mindset among students is encouraged by student associations, which provide opportunities for personal development and the acquisition of competences, thereby responding to their motivation to change the world. Therefore, entrepreneurship should be fostered at all stages of life, as it has an impact across multiple domains, such as the economy, employment, technology, and society (Kobza & Mutlucan, 2016).

A study on the state–citizen relationship highlights the ways in which governance results both from formal regulation carried out by the state and from the synergies between formal and informal actors, from top-down directives and bottom-up attitudes, as well as from processes of development aimed at adapting to a general context that is not always attentive to the needs of certain segments of society (such as new entrants) (Polese et al., 2022). It is shown that, in cases of low trust in the state, citizens tend to prioritise informal relationships, some at the limits of legality, being motivated by the desire to increase their well-being (informality thus becoming an indicator of distrust in the state), with citizens perceiving the state as inefficient or weak. The importance of informal networks has been demonstrated both through the exploration of the behaviours and attitudes of groups of Romanian emigrants settled in Spain and of ethnic entrepreneurs (originating from other countries) in Croatia. (Polese et al., 2022).

Romanian studies point out that young people, compared to other age groups, are perceived as having the ability to be innovative, to find new ways of doing things, and to become “agents of change.” The young population is both a valuable resource for society and a vulnerable group, and society as a whole has viewed them rather sceptically, as a group that generates problems and conflicts, while recently ignoring their beneficial role (Ceobanu et al., 2020). However, they can generate business and play an important role in professional development through creativity, which is associated with the ability to solve problems and overcome obstacles - including transforming these challenges into business opportunities - skills that have been leveraged in the context of national or international trade fairs, crowdfunding campaigns (though less so in accelerators/incubators, festivals, conferences, workshops, or seminars).

They have business ideas outlined and the willingness to implement them, but they lack resources. Other perceived obstacles included insufficient tax incentives for young people, legislation that does not encourage youth entrepreneurship, poor education in the field, a lack of opportunities for creative young people just starting out, a lack of policies or programs aimed at young people, job instability and the lack of steady income generated by the business, and the feeling that they are not prepared to take risks, etc. Government programs and policies for startups would have the greatest impact on the development of

youth entrepreneurship, as well as workshops, mentoring programs, training sessions, and incubators or hubs (Ceobanu et al., 2020).

According to Niţu & Feder, entrepreneurship (a driver of innovation) is the result of individuals willing to take calculated risks, develop economic activities by capitalizing on opportunities, and generate added value. The concept is addressed at the microeconomic level (as a process linking value creation with entrepreneurs' attitudes and skills, and with events related to the creation and exploitation of opportunities) and at the macroeconomic level (the national framework, the business environment context).

An analysis of the conceptual model of the entrepreneurial process in Romania, the entrepreneurial framework, and the effects of innovation on entrepreneurship leads to the fundamental ideas of a research model for the entrepreneurial process (based on the 2008 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Model, subsequently revised), grounded in three main elements: the general conditions of the national framework (which include: institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic stability, health, and primary education), the conditions of the entrepreneurial framework-with two sub-branches: increasing efficiency (higher education and continuing education, product market efficiency, labour market efficiency, and financial market sophistication) and the sophistication of innovation (business sophistication and innovation), and the third element is called entrepreneurship (comprising entrepreneurial perceptions and attitudes and actual entrepreneurial activity) (2012).

Entrepreneurial investment, which is essential for a functioning economy, relies on an entrepreneurial and innovative culture-both of which are underdeveloped in Romania - with the public citing at least two barriers: a business environment perceived as risky and excessive bureaucracy (Institutul European..., 2025). The social environment has a major impact on young people's entrepreneurial decisions, with entrepreneurial networks playing an important role, and the fear of failure being much more pronounced in Romania compared to other countries (Szabó et al.).

3. Methodology

Drawing on international policies, the research question is: How do the Sustainable Development Goals and resilience-related issues connect with the career aspirations and future career projections of young people in higher education (students) with regard to entrepreneurship? To provide an answer, the research aims to map the content of public policies on entrepreneurship and identify young people's willingness to start businesses, as well as the factors that contribute to or hinder entrepreneurial action, so that we can estimate the potential impact of public policies. The objectives are: (1) to correlate the content of Romanian policies on stimulating entrepreneurship among young people with statistical realities; (2) to identify young people's perceptions of entrepreneurship; (3) to identify young people's perspectives on building an entrepreneurial career.

The study's hypothesis is that all objectives established through approaches focused on resilience, sustainability, and sustainable development are directly and strongly dependent on the quality of human resources and the decisions they make.

This research is exploratory in nature. The method used is a sociological survey conducted via a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed in digital format and administered by

sharing a link. The target population consists of young people in Romania who are currently enrolled in educational programs; they are students.

The methodological approach includes, in the first phase, an analysis of the content of policies aimed at stimulating entrepreneurship and their correlation with the resulting impact, specifically the statistical trends regarding entrepreneurs among the young population (focusing on two age groups: under 29 and 30–39). In the second phase, the results of the empirical research based on the sociological survey (using a questionnaire) are presented, which captures young people's perceptions of entrepreneurship and their prospects for starting a business. The target population consists of young people in Romania.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of the analysis of public policy documents provide answers to questions such as: What do Romanian public policies say? How do they frame entrepreneurship and what do they envisage for young people? The content of six public policy documents currently in force in Romania has been analysed. What follows is a presentation of these in relation to items that are significant for the youth population in connection with entrepreneurship.

The National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030, as a document implementing in Romania the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development developed by the United Nations. The principle applied is “no one is to be left behind”. It is worth noting the target set for 2030 regarding “quality education – a substantial increase in the number of young people and adults who possess relevant skills, including vocational skills, to facilitate employment, the creation of decent jobs and entrepreneurship”, which outlines the directions of future approaches concerning young people engaged in entrepreneurial activity. With regard to entrepreneurship, it is acknowledged that the measurement of the economy does not take into account the “potential of the citizen” and that action centred on “innovation, optimism and the resilience of citizens” is necessary in order to develop a culture of entrepreneurship as the foundation for achieving aspirations and material security. Within the Strategy, the existence of a legal framework that stimulates entrepreneurship among students is emphasised (Ordin nr. 3262/2017, which will be analysed in this paper) in order to promote an entrepreneurial culture; the target for 2030 aims to support start-ups, creativity and innovation, and the growth of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. In the chapter on reducing inequalities, it is acknowledged that encouraging entrepreneurship contributes to the development of productive economic activities in rural areas; however, the targets for 2030 are not focused on young entrepreneurs, but rather concern fiscal, wage and social protection policies, the provision of support to non-governmental organisations active in the field of human rights, and the monitoring of sustainable development indicators in order to converge with the European average.

Planul Național de Redresare și Reziliență (PNRR) [The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)], designed to ensure an optimal balance between the priorities of the European Union and Romania's development needs in the context of recovery following the COVID-19 crisis (...) has as its general objective the development of programmes and projects that support resilience, preparedness for dealing with crises, adaptation, as well as the enhancement of Romania's development potential, with reforms and investments being encouraged (through funding from the Recovery and Resilience Facility). Part VI – Policies for the New Generation. Component 15: Education is particularly noteworthy; however, it

may be observed that the emphasis is placed on objective indicators (number of schools, number of trained teaching staff), rather than on subjective indicators concerning impact measurement, the encouragement of initiative, and the creative and proactive approach to systemic challenges, etc.

The document also includes Pillar III – Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth, specifying that reforms and investments target growth potential and are intended, among other things, to support entrepreneurship and the social economy, in order to reduce the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Objective 1.3 – Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities aims to increase women’s participation in the labour market, supporting the reduction of gender pay gaps and facilitating career progression, including through the assumption of entrepreneurial or managerial roles. A criticism that may be levelled at this NRRP is that it does not mention concrete actions aimed at stimulating entrepreneurship among young people or at developing an entrepreneurial culture.

The document that explicitly targets young people is the *National Youth Strategy 2024–2027*. Under the general objective OG3, *Increasing youth employability and supporting entrepreneurship*, two specific objectives of relevance to our analysis are identified, namely: OS.3.1 – *Reducing poverty among young people, combating all forms of discrimination, and facilitating and ensuring social inclusion and cohesion*, and OS.3.2 – *Increasing the employment rate among young people and supporting work–life balance*. The emphasis is placed on employment (youth hiring). No specific objective is defined for stimulating youth entrepreneurship; however, it may be inferred that OS.3.2 addresses the current issue of the “lack of entrepreneurial spirit among young people”.

The Strategy refers to two programmes aimed at young people: the “*StudentInvest*” Programme, which seeks to support individuals aged between 18 and under 31 who are enrolled in higher education institutions that are either provisionally authorised or accredited. The programme places emphasis on increasing access to higher education, reducing university dropout rates, and lowering unemployment among young graduates. The “*FamilyStart*” Programme aims to support individuals aged between 18 and under 45 who are establishing a family or are in the process of forming one, by providing loans and state-funded financial support to cover specific needs. Both programmes have a socio-educational character, aiming to increase access to higher education, reduce university dropout rates, and decrease unemployment among young graduates, among other objectives. The expected outcomes of the *National Youth Strategy* include increasing employability rates and fostering entrepreneurship through measures involving information provision, training, counselling, and career guidance. These measures are intended both to facilitate the transition from the education system to the labour market and to develop an entrepreneurial culture among young people, as well as to promote entrepreneurship in rural areas and social entrepreneurship.

Another public policy document that contains concrete references is the *Programul de educație și ocupare pentru tineri* [Youth Education and Employment Programme]. From this, we highlight Priority 2 – *Harnessing the potential of young people in the labour market (youth employment)*, which also includes measures aimed at stimulating entrepreneurship. We further note section 2.a.3., the text of which is reproduced verbatim below:

Action 2.a.3. *Activating the entrepreneurial potential of young people* through:
(a) the development of entrepreneurial competences, tutoring/mentoring, assistance/counselling/coaching for young individuals with initiative within

organisations, the promotion of role models, training in project, organisational, or strategic management, and exchanges of experience with Romanian youth from the diaspora; (b) the provision of grants for the creation of new jobs through business start-ups, including within the social economy sector, as well as business incubators for which premises will also be made available within unused buildings owned by local administrative units (LAUs); (c) post-establishment assistance and consultancy (Programul..., p. 4).

It is further stipulated that:

Action 2.a.3 will be implemented through administrators of youth entrepreneurship schemes (public and private accredited higher education institutions; doctoral and postgraduate schools with legal personality, including partnerships between these and the private sector/research and development centres; accredited research institutes/centres, including research institutes of the Romanian Academy; the Romanian Academy; professional associations; chambers of commerce and industry; institutions and organisations that are members of Regional Pacts and Local Partnerships for Employment and Social Inclusion; authorised public and private providers of continuing vocational training; trade unions and employers' organisations; members of Sectoral Committees and Sectoral Committees with legal personality; non-governmental organisations). The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH (Do No Significant Harm) principle, given that, by their nature, they are not expected to have any significant negative impact on the environment. (Programul..., p. 44)

Furthermore, for students, a system to promote entrepreneurship has been established through public administrative action, confirmed by an order of the Ministry of National Education. This system involves the organisation and operation of *Student Entrepreneurial Societies*, which promote entrepreneurship within universities and provide financial support for entrepreneurship projects developed by students (Ordin nr. 3262/2017). In support of students under the age of 30 who establish a business, the normative framework provides exemptions from taxes and fees related to company registration (Hotărâre nr. 166/2003).

These public policy documents reflect the directions towards which the Romanian public system seeks to guide society, including emphasising the role of entrepreneurship and enhancing the attractiveness of this career path for young people.

To correlate public policies with the state of entrepreneurship development in Romania, we examine the impact of these policies and programmes as reflected in statistical data. As of February 2026, the total number of companies established by students amounts to 20,032, of which 7,574 are currently operational (plus other statuses). At the same date, at the national level, active professionals (authorised natural persons/individual enterprises/family enterprises) total 455,635, of whom 57,348 are under the age of 29 (12.58%). The total number of partners/shareholders is 1,719,237 natural persons, of whom 7.97% are under 29 years of age, while the total number of legal entities amounts to 1,297,988 (Oficiul Național...).

The level of entrepreneurial development in Romania is positioned at the midpoint of the Romanian Entrepreneurship Index, reaching a score of 49.5 (out of 100) at the end of 2025, representing an increase of 0.5 points compared to 2024. This places Romania in the category of moderate entrepreneurship (the Index comprises four levels: critical entrepreneurship - 0-25

points, moderate entrepreneurship - 25-50 points, emerging entrepreneurship - 50-75 points, and solid entrepreneurship – 75-100 points) (IMM Romania, 2025).

Empirical Research Results

The empirical research was conducted through the administration of a questionnaire designed in digital format and distributed online. The reference population consists of young people in Romania who are currently engaged in the educational process (students) across various higher education institutions in the country.

The convenience sample comprises 389 students who completed the questionnaire by accessing the distributed link (within university centres, through lecturers, or via student associations). The gender distribution favours female respondents, who account for 67.9% (264 students) of the total sample. Male respondents total 125 students (32.1%). In terms of residential background, 285 students (73.26%) come from urban areas, while 104 students (26.73%) come from rural areas.

The age distribution of the sample is presented in Table 1. In the sample, the proportion of respondents aged between 18 and 30 years is 82.78% (322 students). Among the students in the sample, there are also individuals aged 36 years and above, representing 15.16% of the total. These participants were retained in the study, as it was considered that completing a university degree provides diverse perspectives regarding professional trajectories.

Table 1. Age distribution of respondents

Age groups	Number of respondents	Percentage of total respondents (%)
18-22 years	265	68,12
23-25 years	40	10,28
26-30 years	17	4,37
31-35 years	8	2,05
36 years and older	59	15,16
Total	389	100

Source: generate by author

Although regionally unbalanced, the coverage reflects a sample representation of the eastern half of Romania. The numerical distribution of respondents by development regions is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by development region of residence (number of individuals)

Nord-Est	Nord-Vest	Sud-Vest	Sud-Muntenia	Centru	Sud-Est	Bucureşti-Ilfov	Vest	Total
74	2	21	57	7	126	98	4	389

Source: generate by author

The composition of the sample by field of study/specialisation includes students from the polytechnic field (112 participants), economics/marketing (50 participants), social sciences (45 students), agronomy (38 students), transport (38 students), human resources (25 students), natural sciences (17 students), medicine/health (10 students), political science (7 students), psychology/education (7 students), law (6 students), public administration (6 students), and other specialisations (28 students).

Young People's Perceptions of Identification with Entrepreneurial Status. The prospect of becoming an entrepreneur was analysed in relation to its perceived attractiveness (the possibility of achieving a high financial standard), the associated risk (the risk of losing the investment), and the perceived misalignment with personal style and resources (skills). Table 3 presents the distribution of responses from the study participants.

Table 3. Identification with Entrepreneurial Status

Item: The idea of being a businessperson currently seems to me...	Number of students	Percentage of total students (%)	Number of female students	Percentage of female students (%)	Number of male students	Percentage of male students (%)
Attractive (appears to offer many opportunities for economic development)	207	53.21	127	48,11	80	64
Risky (possibility of losing invested money)	93	23.91	69	26,13	23	18,4
Unsuitable for me (I lack the skills; I would not manage to run a business)	69	17.74	52	19,7	17	13,6
Don't know	20	5.14	16	6,1	5	4
Total	389	100	264		125	

Source: generate by author

The study findings indicate that participants predominantly perceive entrepreneurship as attractive (53.2%), though a notable proportion also regard it as risky (23.9%). Approximately 17.7% of respondents consider the role of a businessperson unsuitable for themselves, while 5.1% were undecided.

The fact that half of the surveyed students are attracted by the prospect of becoming entrepreneurs corresponds with the presence of human capital that could potentially generate private initiatives to support the functioning of the economic mechanism. At the same time, we consider that the portion of young people who perceive the idea of being an entrepreneur as risky does not automatically preclude the possibility of starting a business. The perception of being unsuitable for this type of activity, due to a lack of inherent skills, is more frequently observed among female respondents than male respondents.

Young People's Perceptions of Entrepreneurs. Based on the premise that the choice to become a "businessperson" may be driven by a desire for identification (following the example of a successful role model), we employed four descriptive items (two items with a positive connotation and two items with a negative connotation) to characterise entrepreneurs, drawing on various images captured from informal contexts. Table 4 presents the distribution of responses, which allows for the identification of how the surveyed youth perceive the entrepreneurial population

Entrepreneurs are predominantly perceived as individuals who work diligently, devote substantial time, prepare thoroughly to expand their businesses, and uphold the principles of the market economy, with 75.6% of young people expressing this positive view. This perception is notably stronger among female respondents, who place particular value on effort and honest work, compared with male respondents.

Table 4. Young People's Perceptions of Entrepreneurs

<i>Item: Those currently engaged in business are:</i>	Number of students	Percentage of total students (%)	Number of female students	Percentage of female students (%)	Number of male students	Percentage of male students (%)
Individuals who work hard and honestly to increase both business and personal profit	153	39.33	106	40,15	47	37,6
Individuals who dedicate considerable time to preparation and who believe in the principles of the market economy	141	36.25	95	35,98	46	36,8
Individuals who resort to risky practices, attempting to circumvent the law, as they would otherwise be unable to run the business	47	12.08	31	11,74	16	12,8
Individuals who are lucky and become wealthy, sometimes through deceit	28	7.20	18	6,82	10	8
Don't know	20	5.14	14	5,3	6	4,8
Total	389	100	264		125	

Source: generate by author

Nonetheless, a portion of young people still hold a negative perception of entrepreneurship, associating it with risk, circumvention of the law, and even immoral practices – 19.2% of respondents. This view is more prevalent among male respondents (20.8%) than among female respondents (18.6%).

Young People's Perspectives on Starting a Business. The willingness to start a business depends on a range of conditions. Table 5 presents various situations that may encourage engagement in business, along with the distribution of responses received. This allows for an assessment of whether young people currently consider themselves prepared to manage their own businesses.

Table 5. Key Conditions Influencing the Decision to Start a Business

<i>Item: I would start a business if... (multiple responses could be selected)</i>	Number of students	Percentage of total students (%)
I considered myself sufficiently prepared	286	73,52
I knew the market/economy better.	267	68,63
I learned more about entrepreneurship in high school	76	19,53
I learned more about entrepreneurship at university	96	24,57
It would give me a high social status (appreciation from others).	39	10,02
It would provide me with a lot of money, allowing me to buy many things and feel wealthy	73	18,76

Source: generate by author

It is evident that respondents feel the need to be adequately prepared, which corresponds to well-developed psychological factors capable of supporting the effort required to face the challenges of the market economy. They also require knowledge of the market and market economy.

The prospect that private initiative could ensure personal prosperity does not appear to be a strong motivator for the sample under investigation, and the social status conferred by entrepreneurship exerts the least influence. The need for knowledge of the market economy is indicated by 68.63% of participants, while 75.52% would take this step if they felt sufficiently prepared. Young people require training programmes beginning in secondary and higher education; this can be achieved through the introduction of entrepreneurship courses.

Starting a business requires adequate preparation. A society committed to maintaining a functional economic environment that adheres to the principles of the market economy invests in programmes targeted at the public, whether provided by government institutions or non-governmental organisations. The perceptions of young participants in the study regarding this aspect are summarised in Table 6.

There is a relatively even distribution among young people regarding their awareness of societal resources - such as programmes offered by the state, non-governmental organisations, or family support - that could assist them in entrepreneurial activities.

Nevertheless, the 33.9% of respondents who believe that only their family would provide support is notably high, suggesting low confidence in society's capacity to support young people. This may act as a constraint on private initiative, particularly for those from families with limited financial resources.

Conversely, more than half of the surveyed youth recognise the existence of programmes promoting and supporting entrepreneurship, indicating a satisfactory level of awareness and a strong interest in accessing these opportunities.

Table 6. Young People's Perception of Society's View on Entrepreneurs

Item: I believe that in Romanian society: (only one response may be selected)	Number of students	Percentage of total students (%)	Number of female students	Percentage of female students (%)	Number of male students	Percentage of male students (%)
There are entrepreneurship programmes developed by public institutions that support young people in starting a business	130	33,42	93	35,22	37	29,6
There are entrepreneurship programmes developed by non-governmental organisations that support young people in starting a business	127	32,65	85	32,2	42	33,6
Young people are supported only by their family if they want to start a business	132	33,93	86	32,58	46	36,8
Total	389	100				

Source: generate by author

Society's Image of Entrepreneurs through the "Eyes" of Young People. Considering the influence that public opinion (relatives, acquaintances, the media, etc.) can exert on individual decisions, the study examined students' beliefs regarding how others perceive entrepreneurs. Respondents were therefore asked to indicate what they believe people around them, and society in general, think about entrepreneurs. The distribution of responses is presented in Table 7.

At the level of the student group under investigation, the positive image of entrepreneurs appears relatively limited, with only 57.58% of students selected descriptions in positive terms - people dedicated to their work, personal inclinations and enjoyment of conducting business. In contrast, the proportion of students endorsing negative perceptions - associating entrepreneurs with succeeding through illegal practices and/or enriching themselves at the expense of others' work - rises to 42.42%. Notably, 33.68% chose the description "people who exploit others and their work to enrich themselves," an item that may be associated with a perspective shaped by a communist philosophy, the remnants of which are still present in Romanian society.

Table 7. Societal Perceptions of Beliefs About Entrepreneurs

Item: I believe that those around me (society) consider entrepreneurs to be: ...	Number of students	Percentage of total students (%)	Number of female students	Percentage of female students (%)	Number of male students	Percentage of male students (%)
People who work hard for their business	150	38,56	102	38,64	48	38,4
People who are fascinated by or inclined towards managing a business	74	19,02	54	20,45	20	16
People who exploit others and their work to enrich themselves	131	33,68	88	33,33	43	34,4
People who succeed through illegal practices	34	8,74	20	7,58	14	11,2
Total	389	100				

Source: generate by author

It was considered important to identify the differences between these two perspectives in order to highlight divergences of opinion and to reflect on the conditions under which the perception of others exerts a stronger influence on a young person's decisions and behaviour when organising their career. Public sanction - the idea that others might describe them in negative terms - could serve as a deterrent to initiating a business.

5. Conclusions

The effect of public policies is relative, placing Romania within the sphere of moderate entrepreneurship. Although there are support measures for young people, including students, these are insufficiently utilised. A further study could explore this aspect in greater depth, particularly the extent to which these policies are known and whether information campaigns are being conducted.

The sociological perspective on entrepreneurship among young people highlights the direction in which they are heading: they are attracted to the idea of becoming entrepreneurs, yet they take into account the risks involved, which directs their choices more towards employee status and less towards entrepreneurship. This may affect the long-term resilience of society, as well as the achievement of sustainable development objectives within the occupational sphere, through the imbalance between the number of economic entities providing jobs and the high supply of labour.

From a gender perspective, given that the student population shows a slight predominance of females, it is to be expected that attention should be paid to women's entrepreneurship and to programmes dedicated to this category, in order to overcome attitudinal barriers and stereotypes. This is all the more relevant as the present research has revealed a lack of confidence in their own abilities among female students.

The collective mindset regarding the entrepreneur can be both stimulating and inhibiting for students. In the context of a negative public opinion towards the business environment - rooted in a socialist-type mentality, transmitted particularly through interpersonal relations within the family (e.g. "the employer exploits the work of others in order to enrich themselves") - society faces resistance from a segment of the population to the adoption of a liberal model (based on private initiative and the market economy), alongside an increased demand for state intervention (reflecting adherence to a social model centred on state protection). This may provide an explanation for the moderate level of entrepreneurship in Romania.

The resilience of the state, and implicitly of society, is being put to the test, particularly in the context of pressures arising from demographic ageing, the ageing of the workforce, geopolitical threats, and the diminishing capacity of the state to provide social protection. Thus, the Sustainable Development Goals - particularly those related to sustainable development (Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, specifically the component concerning the promotion of development-oriented policies that support productive activities, the creation of decent jobs, entrepreneurship through start-ups, creativity and innovation, and that encourage the formalisation and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services), as well as those concerning recovery and resilience - can be achieved under the conditions of a population willing to assume risks, invest in education, and devote time and effort to attaining economic independence and active socio-economic participation.

Under conditions where adequate public or private support mechanisms are in place to provide training and preparation for business life (beginning in secondary education and continuing into higher education), the majority of young people would opt for private initiative. The development of entrepreneurial competences is necessary and should be incorporated into public education policies and programmes supporting independent economic activity and young entrepreneurs (Institutul European..., 2025). In the absence of young people's origins in an entrepreneurial environment that encourages the decision to start a business (Dumitrasciuc, 2020), policies aimed at shaping an entrepreneurial mindset and supporting businesses initiated by young people are essential, so that the youth population can increase its level of resilience in situations of economic and social crisis.

The development of an entrepreneurial culture at the population level is necessary in order to reduce the gap between Romania and other European countries, thereby fostering increased employment through both job opportunities and entrepreneurial activities

(Institutul European..., 2025). Under these conditions, society may aspire to resilience and sustainable development.

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