

# THE SOCIO-LABOUR INCLUSION OF PEOPLE IN A VULNERABLE SITUATION IN THE SOCIAL ECONOMY'S DNA



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## 1.

### INTRODUCTION

The social economy, with its convergent social and economic objectives for the common good, has historically played a key role in the socio-labour inclusion of people in a vulnerable situation. This article is divided into two parts, a first of literature review and theoretical framework and a second, reflective clues from the empirical analysis of professional practices to support the socio-labour inclusion of people in a vulnerable situation, in nine case studies within social economy organizations in Portugal.

We begin the literature review and theoretical framework with the specialization of social economy organizations in Portugal in the support of the socio-labour inclusion of people in vulnerable situations. It highlights the holistic response of these organizations to communities, acting as intermediaries in implementing public policies and supporting employability. It discusses the historical evolution and the trends of socio-labour inclusion, mentioning the importance of the Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs). We address the difficulty in delimiting the concept of vulnerability, exploring the sociological dimensions of poverty and social exclusion. We highlight the theory of intersectionality to understand the complex interactions between different categories, such as sex, class, ethnicity and disability.

Based on the analysis of regularities found in the nine case studies, we analyse the principles of intervention and the skills necessary for the exercise of the function by the professionals heard and inserted in organizations of the social economy. We verify the multifunctionality of the function, emphasizing coordination, social intervention, case management, prospection and monitoring. The

main competencies needed to perform the function of supporting the socio-labour inclusion were classified into three categories: i) flexibility and adaptability, empathy, proximity and resilience; ii) diagnostic knowledge, processes and monitoring methodologies; iii) dominance of non-formal or informal education methodologies, as well as knowledge of the local labour market.

## 2.

### SPECIALIZATION OF SOCIAL ECONOMY ORGANIZATIONS IN SUPPORTING THE SOCIO-LABOUR INCLUSION OF PEOPLE IN A VULNERABLE SITUATION

Like other European countries, such as France or Slovenia (Greer et al., 2018), the social economy in Portugal that is dedicated to social action is characterized by its holistic response to the communities where it intervenes, often intervening as an intermediary in the implementation of public policies under the responsibility of the State. Within the set of social responses operationalized by the social economy in terms of social work, these organizations also offer answers in terms of supporting employability.

Despite its historical-political context and its cultural specificities, Portugal followed the European tendencies regarding the enlargement and specialization of its intervention in the field of the socio-labour inclusion of people in vulnerable situations. At European level, since the second half of the 70s of the twentieth century, there has been a growing attention to the initiatives of inclusion of people in vulnerable situations, that is, inclusive employment focused on the social economy (Defourny et al., 1998). In the 1990s, in a study promoted by the European Commission (Estivill et al., 1997), the Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) were considered an effective tool to combat poverty and social exclusion. It is in a context of individualized social support that are born initiatives that support companies in their educational and socializing functions (Ebersold, 2001), in a logic of insertion by economic activity. These initiatives seek to combine the inclusion of people considered distant from the labour market with the development of productive activities and generating economic results. At the same time, they are part of a logic of measures to promote local development (Ebersold, 2001). Thus, are born, by different European countries, a diverse set of inclusion responses by economic activity, of people in vulnerable situations.

### 2.1.

#### THE DIFFICULTY OF DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF VULNERABILITY

Being a complex phenomenon, vulnerability can affect social groups that, due to their condition of exclusion/marginality, do not benefit from fundamental human rights. It is a polysemic concept used

in several scientific disciplines (Alwang et al., 2001) that cannot be reduced to institutional and administrative categorizations. Vulnerability can be a condition associated with individuals who are in the labour market and who are nevertheless subject to precarious work situations and low wages. Despite this, individuals who have a professional occupation have a lower risk of social vulnerability (Junior et al., 2021). Thus, the majority of marginalised groups, particularly in relation to the labour market, are categorised as young people, migrants, people with disabilities, NEETs - *Not in Education, Employment or Training*, ex-prisoners, women, etc. These will be the main target groups of the professional integration concerns of Employment Policies.

Bengoetxea Alkorta (2020) presents an analysis of the origin of the concept of vulnerable groups. For the author, the genesis of the concept can be found in the international normative of Human Rights, focusing on the dimension of universality. In addition, the European Court of Human Rights has recognized the jurisprudential notion of vulnerable groups, which focuses on the relative nature, on the particular situation and in the damage suffered – sometimes by *misrecognition* and sometimes by *maldistribution* (Bengoetxea Alkorta, 2020, p. 22).

If, until the economic change of the 1970s, the phenomenon of the transition from inactivity to active life, especially for young people, was the main concern for professional integration (Oliveira das Neves & Graça, 2000), the last 50 years represent a complexification of the theme. In fact, globalisation and the consequent restructuring of economic activity have broadened the typology of situations that tend to keep people away from work or from perennial, stable and decent employment. The delimitation of the groups whose situation is disadvantaged is complex and, even within the groups, there is a heterogeneity of situations that enhance or mitigate the situation of vulnerability.

At the end of the twentieth century, in a national study on Disadvantaged Groups in relation to Employment, Capucha (1999) categorizes situations of vulnerability into four typologies, namely: low qualifications and skills, accommodation to established circles of poverty, the adoption of marginal ways of life and different specific handicaps.

The delimitation of the concept of social groups in situations of vulnerability cannot be reduced to simple institutional and administrative categorizations. Not infrequently, this simplification translates into a set of stereotyped traits that do not take into account the diversity of identity and experiential factors of each person (Lima & Trombert, 2017, p. 17). The concept of vulnerability lacks stability and consensus in terms of the indicators that contribute to its classification. Notwithstanding the need to organize the complexity of social reality into categories of analysis, in order to be able to intervene on it, this categorization is still an effective limitation. The conceptual definitions are relative and vary according to the socio-political contexts, as is the emblematic case of the transition from the designs of social exclusion to social inclusion and many

others. Categories such as young NEETs, precarious workers, long-term unemployed, people with low qualifications, single mothers effectively represent a set of constructs that can lead to situations of vulnerability, but are subject to a combination of factors that lead more or less to processes of "social disintegration" (Paugam 1992 as cited in Lima & Trombert, 2017, p. 37). There is no generic legal concept, but there are sectoral concepts for certain purposes. As this is a complex concept, it would be necessary and desirable to have an "all-encompassing legal concept" (Bengoetxea Alkorta, 2020, p. 27) of social groups in situations of vulnerability. Contributing to this situation is the fact that vulnerability is not only changing in time and space, but also depends on the interaction and interdependence between different variables, which are not mutually exclusive.

It is from this perspective that we follow the contributions of the theory of intersectionality used in different contexts of research and intervention to shape the relationships of the different master categories that are sex/gender, class, ethnicity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation and disability (Nogueira, 2017). In fact, we believe that this approach contributes precisely to a better understanding of the processes of social disintegration.

The theory of intersectionality began to be developed by African American studies and black feminists in the 1980s (Nogueira, 2017). This new approach, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, begins by establishing a relationship between female identity and African American identity in order to understand and describe the situation of domination of black women.

Of course, the intersectional approach does not take into account the whole of individual life paths. However, it allows us to bring, from a theoretical and intervention point of view, contributions that integrate the diversity of experiences and the nuances of the various problems under analysis, thus being a holistic and sometimes specific approach (Nogueira, 2017). The theory of intersectionality challenges the dominant way of analysing the increasingly hybrid processes of social exclusion. The social categories that place people as "vulnerable" are seen as social constructions with repercussions on the accessibility of these groups to public policy measures.

The arguments underlying the theory of intersectionality call for a multiple analysis of social inequalities. Given that people can be dominated in one context and dominant in others, categories such as people in vulnerable situations no longer make sense. By way of illustration, let us look at the high levels of schooling that for many years constituted an almost "immunity" to experiencing situations of poverty and that are no longer so. With the worsening of the European and national situation, people with educational capital have become, like any other group, vulnerable and potential beneficiaries of social benefits.

## 2.2.

### THE SOCIO-LABOUR INCLUSION OF PEOPLE IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS IN PORTUGAL

The 1980s and 1990s were marked by the political manifestation of concern with the response to situations of social and professional integration in a context of expansion of social policies, namely active employment policies (Oliveira das Neves & Graça, 2000). With the European guidelines, the resources of the European Social Fund and the formulation of the Employment Strategy, the instruments for the professional integration of people in vulnerable situations are increasing and diversifying. The 1990s were marked by the reduction of unemployment and the introduction of specific policies to combat social and occupational exclusion (Capucha, 2019), such as: the Guaranteed Minimum Income – with the draft Law approved on 28 May 1996 in response to the Recommendation of the Council of the European Communities on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and benefits in social protection systems (Recommendation 92/441/EEC); the Social Employment Market – established in 1996 by the Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 104/96, of 9 July, as a strategy to promote employment among populations with specific vulnerability; the measure of Insertion Companies; and the National Employment Plans linked to the European Employment Strategy.

Oliveira das Neves and Graça (2000) identify seven categories of specific groups to which these policies are addressed. A first category is that of people with disabilities and incapacity, associated with the political-legislative response of the legal regime of the Protected Employment Centres, through Decree-Law no. 40/83, of 25 January. In Portugal, policies aimed at "creating opportunities for the socio-professional integration of people with disabilities [... (are)] quite late" (Oliveira das Neves & Graça, 2001, p. 19). The first initiatives date back to the 1970s, but the Legal Regime for Protected Employment was only adopted in 1983. In addition to disability, the remaining six categories of potential people excluded from the labour market are the Long-Term Unemployed, Young People, Women, Drug Addicts and Ex-Drug Addicts, Prisoners and Ex-Prisoners and Ethnic and Cultural Minority Groups (Oliveira das Neves and Graça, 2000).

At the turn of the millennium, Portugal experienced very low unemployment rates alongside historically very high levels of employment. Throughout this period of growth, the policy option was mainly to increase economic competitiveness and support the flexibilization of the labour market (Capucha, 2019). In 2003, there was an economic recession with negative growth of the national economy and a deterioration of cohesion and stability indicators began to be observed, worsening unemployment rates and prolonging the time to return to the labour market (Capucha, 2019). With this negative dynamic, there will be setbacks in the positive dynamics that had been

registered in the 1990s of insertion policies aimed at vulnerable audiences and regional development with loss of vigor or even disappearance of community initiatives such as the Leader, Urban, EQUAL programs (Capucha, 2019). The international economic crisis, which occurred between 2008 and 2012, and the resulting political and financial structural adjustment programme - the Financial Assistance Programme (2011-2014) called "Troika" and implemented in Portugal - had significant impacts on social policies in general and on labour and employment in particular. This period marked changes and impacts in terms of poverty and social exclusion (Hespanha & Caleiras, 2017).

In the current global paradigm of a clear common orientation for the development of more active social policies, and despite some backwardness of the countries of the South, (Bonoli, 2013), it is also possible to verify in Portugal the "resumption of a social policy guided by the principles of investment and not only of passive protection and minimums" (Capucha, 2019, p. 36). Examples of this orientation towards active social policies are, on the one hand, the return of the qualification measure of the Qualifica Programme and the respective creation of the Qualifica Centres (Ordinance No. 232/2016, of 29 August) and, on the other hand, the deepening of youth education policies (Joint Order No. 453/2004, of 27 July). Based on a model of activation of the labour market and unemployed people, the support of people away from the labour market is of increased importance. With a tradition closer to countries that do not follow the liberal model of the Welfare State, Portugal follows the activation approach based on the idea of reciprocity between the State and the beneficiary, in a logic of right-duty insertion (Bonoli, 2013).

Although poorly structured compared to other European contexts, Portugal has shown greater attention to the issue of integration of people with complex needs into the labour market. In the image of the international current, expansionist signs of the theme have emerged, with policies oriented to the supply side, namely Law No. 4/2019, January 10, which is paradigmatic of this approach. This law defines employment quotas in the private sector for people with disabilities and disabilities with a degree of disability equal to or greater than 60%, covering medium and large enterprises (more than 1% in medium-sized enterprises and more than 2% in large enterprises).

### 2.3.

#### THE DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE EXERCISE OF THE FUNCTION OF SUPPORTING THE SOCIO-LABOUR INCLUSION OF PEOPLE IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

Historically, several studies point to the inadequacy of resources for direct intervention workers. In the 1980s, Lipsky (1980) already analysed the uncertainty of workers who intervene directly with users, mainly due to the complexity of the object of study, which are people. One of the dilemmas

that the author reflected on is the difficulty of balancing the specific needs of each client with the structural and bureaucratic system to which social service providers must respond. In the 1990s, Hasenfeld (1992) analysed that professionals who provide social services – namely to support the socio-labour inclusion of people in vulnerable situations – are, above all, human service workers. For the author, this specificity of the work implies commitment and dedication, as it has implications for the quality of life of the people supported. It also argues that this responsibility and ethics define the practice of providers to support inclusion in the labour market, through mutual respect and trust (Hasenfeld, 1992).

At the international level, there are several authors (Lima & Trombert, 2017; Castra, 2003) that recognize, on the one hand, the existence of a specific professional profile linked to the area of social inclusion of people in vulnerable situations, and, on the other hand, the need for professionalization of the monitoring of target groups, social and employment policies.

In Portugal, from a formal point of view, given the Portuguese Classification of Professions (INE, 2011), there is a lack of recognition of specific professional profiles for the work of accompanying people in vulnerable situations. The lack of recognition of such a profession implies, on the one hand, a lack of definition of specific roles and responsibilities and, on the other hand, the absence of specific initial qualification or structured training aimed at these professionals (A3S Association, 2016).

This trend is part of a national context in which this field remains poorly structured, and there are no public policies directed to this specific area of intervention. In Portugal, there is a paradox "since despite the consolidation and political and academic recognition of the field of socio-labour integration at European level, there is some inadequacy of the existing mechanisms and, above all, a setback of specific public measures for the field, namely with the extinction of the measure of Insertion Companies" (Martinho, 2022, p. 169).

### 3.

#### EMPIRICAL CLUES OF INTERVENTION PRINCIPLES AND COMPETENCIES FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF THE FUNCTION OF SUPPORTING THE SOCIO-LABOUR INCLUSION OF PEOPLE IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

We present the analysis resulting from the empirical work carried out in nine case studies, focused on the work developed by different professionals (human resources managers, Social Integration Income technicians, vocational and/or professional guidance professionals, employment technicians) involved in the counselling and socio-labour monitoring of people away from the labour market. These professionals work in social economy organizations located in the

Metropolitan Area of Porto-Portugal. We chose to collect data through interviews (having consulted a total of 34 different professionals), which we later transcribe. In addition, we carried out observational work, namely during the visits to the case study sites and participation in the working meetings of the different teams. We also consulted official documents, such as the organization's website, its statutes and documents of systematization of the activities developed, in addition to the documentary analysis of the work instruments used by the interviewees in their work to support socio-professional integration. The fieldwork for the data collection for the case studies took place between March 2019 and May 2021.

Regarding the composition of the sample, given that this study is fundamentally qualitative and exploratory in nature, a convenience sample was chosen. This sample followed criteria of heterogeneity in the practices presented, as well as representativeness of the work practices of social and professional insertion with people in situations of vulnerability. In fact, the case studies were selected based on the researcher's prior knowledge and proximity and/or were recommended by a key informant, following a snowball sampling logic. For each case study we used a code: Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Kapa, Lambda, Omega, Iota, Zeta.

### 3.1.

#### PROFILE AND STRUCTURE OF THE SOCIAL ECONOMY ORGANISATIONS THAT FRAME THE CASE STUDIES

If we look at the general profile of the case studies, we find that 7 were born within the framework of social economy organizations that were already developing more generalized interventions and after a few years created specific responses in the area of employability. In fact, only Alfa and Lambda pre-existed the host entity, having been founded as projects.

The entities that frame the case studies were born between 1926 (Alfa) and 2008 (Lambda), presenting themselves with different dimensions in terms of paid workers, from none (apart from those integrated in Alfa) to more than 100 (Omega). Mostly with an associative legal form (with the exception of Lambda, which was constituted as a cooperative), all these entities that frame the case studies have the status of Private Institution of Social Solidarity - IPSS or equivalent and two (Beta and Kapa) accumulate with the status of Non-Governmental Organizations of People with Disabilities - ONGPD.

With the exception of Alfa and Iota, which are exclusively dedicated to the work of monitoring the professional integration of people in vulnerable situations, the remaining cases are part of more comprehensive responses for these people and/or for other target audiences. Thus, the funding used by the monitoring team to be able to respond to employability issues is not specific. It



is, in fact, a more generic funding for social support and/or intervention to combat social exclusion, as is the case of the RSI (Social Integration Income) protocols, the CLDS (Local Social Development Contract) or the POAPMC (Operational Program to Support the Most Deprived People). In these cases, the entities framing the cases under study develop responses that we can classify as multi-services aimed at various audiences, from children and young people to the elderly. However, the Alpha, Beta and Kapa umbrella associations specialise in intervening with people with disabilities and disabilities, particularly with people with experience of mental illness.

### 3.2.

#### COMPLEX AND HETEROGENEOUS PROFILES OF THE PERSONS BEING MONITORED

With regard to the general profile of the target audience of the cases, Table 1 represents a simple classification of the main target groups, identified from the analysis of the legal status of the host entity in each case. For six of the cases, the main target group is unemployed people, four are aimed at people with functional diversity (disability and/or disability, including people with experience of mental illness) and one at people with addictive behaviour.

	<b>Key target audiences</b>
<b>Alfa</b>	People with functional diversity
<b>Beta</b>	People with experience of mental illness
<b>Gama</b>	People who are unemployed and at risk of social exclusion
<b>Delta</b>	People who are unemployed and highly socially vulnerable
<b>Kapa</b>	People with functional diversity + People with disabilities and/or disabilities
<b>Lambda</b>	Unemployed people
<b>Omega</b>	People who are unemployed + People with functional diversity + People who are addicted
<b>Iota</b>	People who are unemployed and at risk of social exclusion
<b>Zeta</b>	People who are unemployed and at risk of social exclusion

**Table 1**

Key target audiences for the case studies

Source: adapted from the statutes of the case studies

Despite the general profile presented in Table 1, the characterization of the target audience of each case is more complex, with multiple variables. In fact, and focusing only on the predominant

characteristics of the people being monitored, we can draw a typical profile that integrates several characteristics for each case study. As an illustrative measure, we see, for example, that Delta accompanies people with a predominantly male profile, over the age of 40, and that in Gama the profile of the people monitored is mostly female, being mothers, and may present some problems in terms of mental health. Despite a profile described based on formal categories, such as age, gender, and health situation, other characteristics are also identified, such as school and professional life paths, often based on experiences of precariousness and back-and-forth between employment and unemployment. Emphasis is placed on the painful relationship of the people supported with education and training. In addition, socio-emotional skills are common characteristics of the different target audiences, such as lack of confidence in the labour market, in social work and in themselves. Low self-esteem and a negative self-image are also common characteristics of the people followed in the different case studies. Associated with life paths marked by different situations of disadvantage, these target groups present a profile that reveals some emotional fragility. In some cases, these people do not have a support system, including family members. Thus, gender issues also constitute a cross-cutting dimension, insofar as, on the one hand, some of the cases under study follow mostly men (e.g. Delta, Omega) in a situation of great family disintegration. On the other hand, precariousness in both school and professional paths is exacerbated in the case of women, whose school and professional paths are interrupted by successive pregnancies.

Aggravated by the multi-problems of the people monitored, the long periods of inactivity seem to represent a common characteristic of the target groups monitored by the cases under analysis, as well as an obstacle to the process of socio-labour reintegration.

### 3.3.

#### FUNCTIONAL PROFILES TO SUPPORT THE SOCIO-LABOUR INCLUSION OF PEOPLE IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

The function of supporting the socio-labour inclusion of people in vulnerable situations is characterised, across the different cases, by coordination, social intervention, case management, prospecting and monitoring. These professionals are "*a kind of chameleon*" (Zeta) by accumulating responsibilities with different degrees of complexity and autonomy (*multitasking*). This multi-task deployment was further accentuated with the adjustment of remote intervention (by phone, video call or restricted and scheduled face-to-face sessions) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The main responsibilities were categorized into four areas, associated with the follow-up cycle of people in vulnerable situations: i) Diagnosis and definition of a follow-up plan; ii) Skills development; iii) Vocational/vocational guidance/counselling; iv) Referral and mediation with different interlocutors.

The competences inherent to the exercise of these functions can be classified into three categories of analysis: i) flexibility and ability to adapt to different areas and contexts of monitoring; ii) empathy, closeness and resilience; iii) technical knowledge of diagnosis, processes and monitoring methodologies.

With regard to the first category of analysis, the interviewees refer to the need to "*have a more refined waist game*" (Delta). The ability to adapt to different situations and people implies a willingness to meet the needs in different circumstances and schedules. This flexibility - mentioned by the majority of the interviewees - is part of the follow-up process and is a determining condition for a feeling of greater confidence in the insertion agents and in the work they are developing.

Empathy, proximity and resilience skills are identified as essential for the performance of the functions under analysis. Resilience and resistance to frustration, and it is necessary to know how to persevere and not give up in the face of various daily difficulties.

The last category concerns more technical skills, associated with knowledge of diagnostics, as well as the processes and methodologies for monitoring the target audience. Competencies in the field of non-formal or informal education methodologies are identified. At the same time, skills are mentioned that have to do with knowledge of the functioning of the labour market and the local employer fabric.

### 3.4.

#### ASSUMPTIONS OF THE INTERVENTION OF PROFESSIONALS TO SUPPORT THE SOCIO-LABOUR INCLUSION OF PEOPLE IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

With regard to the conditions for intervention, there are tendencies common to all cases, with regard to a close, humane and egalitarian approach between professionals and persons being accompanied. In fact, the trust established and developed is considered by the interviewees as essential to achieve an effective individualized approach focused on the needs and specificities of each person accompanied. Thus, self-determination represents a common assumption in the cases under study, namely through the exploration of potential areas of work in order to assess the capacities and appetites (e.g. Alfa, Kapa) of each person accompanied, adapting the itineraries in terms of duration, response, type of accompaniment. The developmental and holistic view and perspective (e.g. Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Iota, Zeta) also represent a pillar of the intervention of the cases under analysis. In fact, in order to be able to work on employability, it is necessary to ensure, upstream, other basic needs such as housing, or consumption control issues.

In this co-construction of work processes, professionals seek to break with the rigid structure, considered ineffective and usually established in social work. In this sense, the cases are intended to

be facilitators in the access to the different responses that the accompanied person may need (e.g. Delta, Gamma, Lambda), in an approach of respect for individuality and privacy (e.g. Zeta). This is also embodied in a strong articulation between colleagues and partners (e.g. Omega, Lambda, Kapa).

All this individualized approach, resulting from the search for a response tailored to the multiple needs of each person accompanied, requires dedication and time. Indeed, the monitoring teams are looking for sustainable and decent work responses, despite the limitations of public policies and the funding available in this area. Accompaniment is based on the idea of walking a path with the person, being by their side, and not presenting a standardized answer.

#### 4.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Both by its definition and by the practices developed by professionals working in social economy organizations, we demonstrate that the inclusion of people in vulnerable situations is, in fact, in the DNA of the social economy. As we have seen, since their inception, social economy organisations have consistently played a crucial role in combating poverty and social exclusion, reflecting an unwavering commitment to promoting the general interest. The empirical data presented reinforce these designs and commitments to the social dimension of the sector's intervention. The close relationship between the social economy and the State in Portugal, resembling models from other European countries, can be observed in the cases under study. In fact, we observed a holistic intervention on the part of the social economy organizations studied, acting as intermediaries in the implementation of public policies aimed at social inclusion.

The empirical analysis of the discourses of the professionals interviewed corroborates the theoretical discussion on vulnerability, emphasizing its complexity, going beyond institutional and administrative categorizations. In fact, the professionals surveyed mainly identified other dimensions to characterize the people with whom they work, such as low self-esteem, long periods of inactivity, intermittent school paths, emotional fragility, daily lives and times marked by survival strategies, among others. Identified by the insertion agents that not only corroborate some of the tangible variables, but also reveal other elements that characterize these target groups. This propensity is much more evident through the crossing of variables, using an intersectoral perspective. This discursive focus beyond the administrative dimensions also stems from the argument that these dimensions can be changeable. Acknowledging the diversity of contexts, the concept of vulnerability is approached as a condition that can affect diverse social groups, including those who are inserted in the labour market, but subject to precariousness and low wages.

Considering the empirical results presented, the complexity and diversity of the challenges faced by professionals who provide support to the socio-labour inclusion of people in vulnerable situations is reinforced. The study reveals the multiplicity of profiles of the framing entities, the target audiences and the characteristics of the people accompanied, illustrating the complexity of the interventions carried out.

Both theoretically and empirically, we can affirm that there is an intersection between the social economy, socio-labour inclusion and vulnerability, highlighting the importance of social organisations in promoting a comprehensive and effective approach to dealing with complex social challenges.

From the analysis of the discourse of the professionals interviewed, options for an individualized approach, of proximity and that values the self-determination of the person accompanied, which are aligned with the ideals of the social economy sector, stand out. The intervention of professionals is, in fact, permeated by fundamental assumptions, such as the construction of a relationship of trust, the promotion of self-determination and a holistic and developmental approach. Indeed, the empirical evidence highlights the crucial importance of the individualised approach, focusing on the specific needs of each person, and underlines the need for flexibility and adaptation on the part of professionals. Resilience, empathy and proximity are identified as essential skills for the effective performance of functions supporting socio-labour inclusion.

Thus, based on these results, it is possible to conclude that the socio-labour inclusion of people in vulnerable situations requires flexible approaches, adapted to individual and multifaceted contexts. In addition, it highlights the importance of more comprehensive public policies and investments that allow the sustainability of responses, considering the complex realities faced by these audiences.

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