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EU SOCIAL PROGRESS INDEX - SHORT AUDIT OF QUALITY OF LIFE AND SOCIAL WELFARE IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *The EU Social Progress Index is a measure of societal development and quality of life at the regional level. Practically it measures social progress in European regions, at the NUTS2 level, excluding economic aspects, but equally using twelve components described by a total number of fifty-five comparable social and environmental indicators. Even though the global index has increased by 4.63 points since 2011, reaching 65.05 in 2021, the advances are not distributed across all components analyzed. According to data there are a lot of disparities that vary greatly not only across regions but across different aspects of social progress. While the Nordic countries performed quite well, the Southeastern countries lagged behind. Even if in 2020, Romania's GDP per capita increased to 72% of the European Union (EU) average Romania ranks last among the Member States of the European Union concerning quality of life and social welfare (ranks 44th out of 168 countries). Behind the one's countries like Hungary and Bulgaria.*

Keyword: *Advanced Education, Basic Knowledge, Environmental Quality, EU Social Progress Index, GDP per capita, Health and Wellness, ICT Access, Nutrition and Care, Personal Freedom and Choice, Personal Rights, Personal Security, Shelter, Tolerance Inclusion, Water and Sanitation*

JEL Classification: *A14, Z13*

1. General context

The EU Social Progress Index (EU-SPI) was first published in 2016 by the European Commission and builds on the next definition: “*Social progress is the capacity of a society to meet the basic human needs of its citizen, establish the building blocks that allow peoples and communities to enhance and sustain the quality of their live , and create the conditions for all individuals to reach their full potential*” (Annoni and Borsi, 2020, p.3). Practically, the definition regards to three important dimensions of social progress:

- Basic human needs,
- Foundations of well-being,
- Opportunity.

Each dimension has four underlying components as follow:

Basic human needs:

- a) Nutrition and basic medical care (NBMC),
- b) Water and sanitation (WS),
- c) Shelter (S),
- d) Personal security (PS)

Foundations of well-being:

- a) Access to basic knowledge (ABK),
- b) Access to information and communication technologies (ITC),
- c) Health and wellness (HW),
- d) Environmental quality (EQ)

Opportunity

- a) Personal rights (PR),
- b) Personal freedom and choice (PFC),
- c) Tolerance and inclusion (TI),
- d) Access to advanced education (AAE).

The EU-SPI 2020 includes 55 social and environmental indicators, „most of which come from surveys, describing people’s perceptions and needs” (Paola Annoni and Paolo Borsi, p.5):

Basic human needs:

Nutrition and basic Medical Care:

- Mortality rate before 65,
- Infant mortality,

- Unmet medical needs,
- Insufficient food.

Water and sanitation:

- Satisfaction with water quality,
- Lack of toilet in dwelling,
- Uncollected sewage,
- Sewage treatment.

Sheller:

- Burden cost of housng,
- Housing quality due to dampness,
- Overcrowding,
- Adequate heating.

Personal security:

- Crime,
- Safety at night,
- Money stolen,
- Assaulted Mugged

Foundations of well-being:

Access to basic knowledge:

- Upper secondary enrolment age 14-18,
- Lower secondary colpetion rate,
- Early school leavers.

Access to information and communication technologies (ICT):

- Internet at home,
- Broadband at home,
- Online interaction with public authorities,
- Internet acces.

Health and wellness:

- Life expectancy,
- Self-perceived health status,
- Cancer death rate,
- Heart disease death rate,
- Leisure activities,
- Traffic deaths.

Environmental quality:

- Air pollution NO₂,
- Air pollution ozone,
- Air pollution pm₁₀,
- Air pollution 2,5.

Opportunity

Personal rights:

- Trust in the national government,
- Trust in the legal system,
- Trust in the police,
- Active citizenship,
- Female participation in regional assemblies,

Quality of public services:

- Freedom over life choices,
- Job opportunities,
- Involuntary part-time / temporary employment,
- Young people not in education, employment or training,
- Corruption in public services.

Tolerance and inclusion:

- Impartiality of public services,
- Tolerance towards immigrants,
- Tolerance towards minorities,
- Tolerance towards homosexuals,
- Making friends,
- Volunteering,
- Gender employment gap.

Access to advanced education:

- Tertiary education attainment,
- Tertiary enrolment,
- Lifelong learning,
- Female lifelong education and learning.

2. Social Progress Index - Romania

Romania ranks last among the Member States of the European Union concerning quality of life and social welfare (ranks 44th out of 168 countries). Behind the one's countries like Hungary and Bulgaria.

According to the data, in 2020, the first places are occupied by the Nordic states (Sweden, Finland, Denmark), with a high level of quality of life (among the countries in the Central and Eastern European region, Estonia (21) and the Czech Republic (22) hold the best positions in the world):

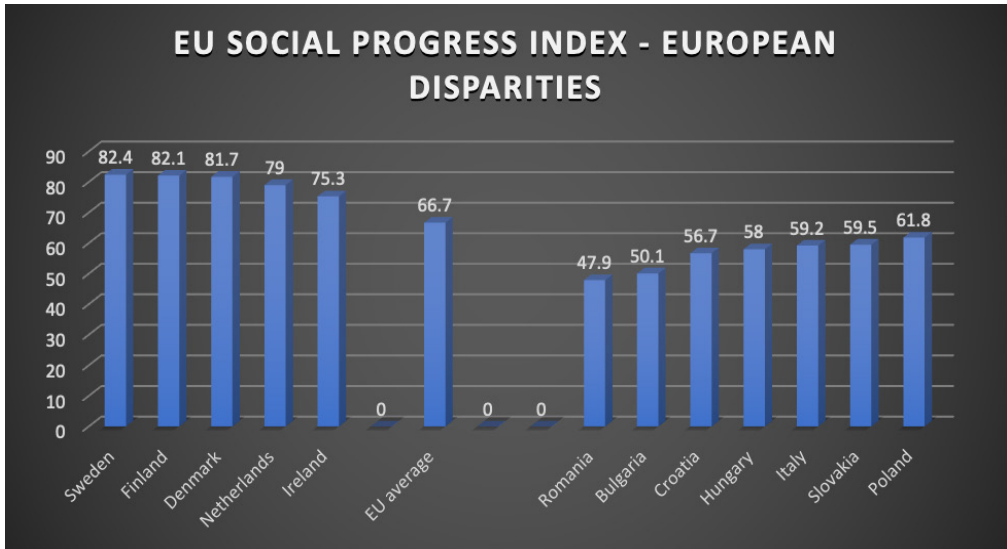


Figure 1. EU Social Progress Index, European Disparities

Source: Author (ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/maps/social_progress2020)

Compared to the European average, Romania is doing quite well in terms of:

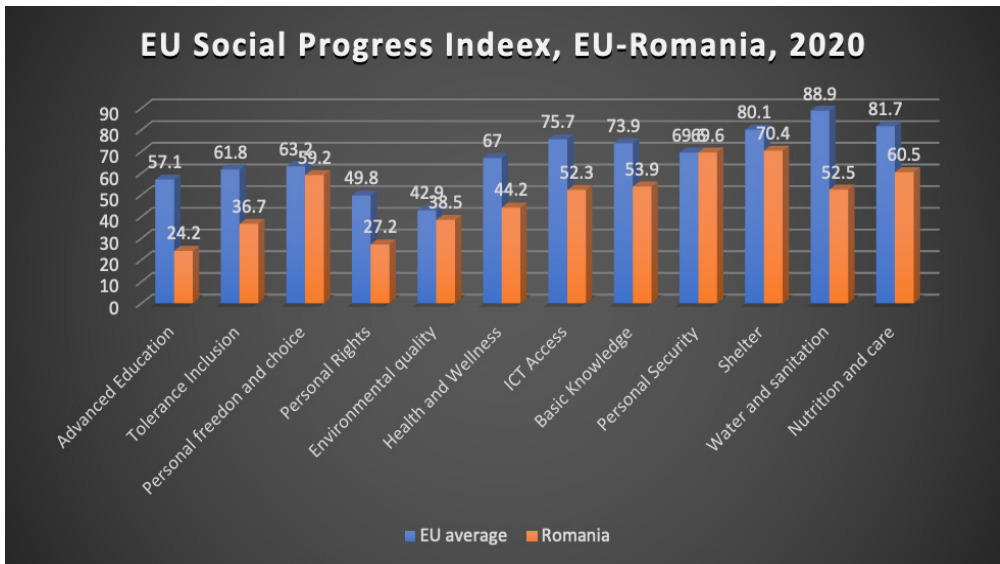


Figure 2. EU Social Progress Index, EU-Romania, 2020

Source: Author (ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/maps/social_progress2020)

- Personal freedom and choice (59,2% vs 63,2%);
- Environmental quality (38,5% vs 42,9%);
- Personal Security.

However, compared to the European average, Romania still records poor results in terms of:

- Advanced education (24,2% vs 57,1%);
- Tolerance inclusion (36,7% vs 61.8%);
- Personal rights (27.2% vs 49,8%);
- ITC Acces (52,3% vs 75,7%);
- Water and sanitation (52,5% vs 88,9%).

3. Social Progress Index – regional disparities

On the one hand, if we compare the data obtained for each region in Romania with the EU average data we notice important differences. And for at least three regions the gap in terms of social progress is very large (EU average = 66.7 vs Southeastern Region = 43.6, South Muntenia Region = 43.7, Northeastern Region = 44.8).

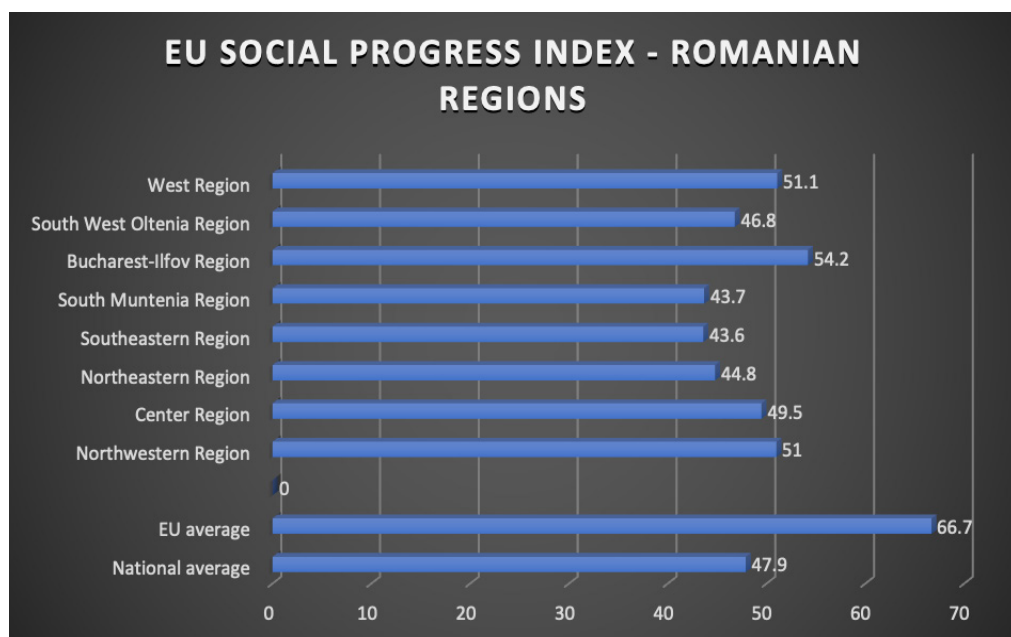


Figure 3. EU Social Progress Index, Romanian Regions, 2020

Source: Author (ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/maps/social_progress2020)

On the other hand, we notice a lot of disparities within the regions. And the biggest differences are in terms of advanced education and basic knowledge:

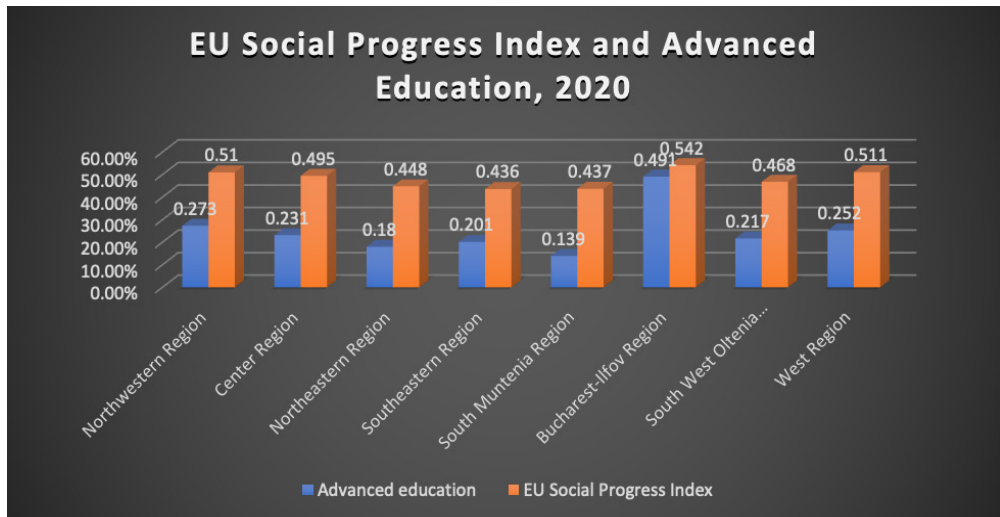


Figure 4. EU Social Progress Index and Advanced Education, Romanian Regions, 2020

Source: Author (See https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/maps/social_progress2020)

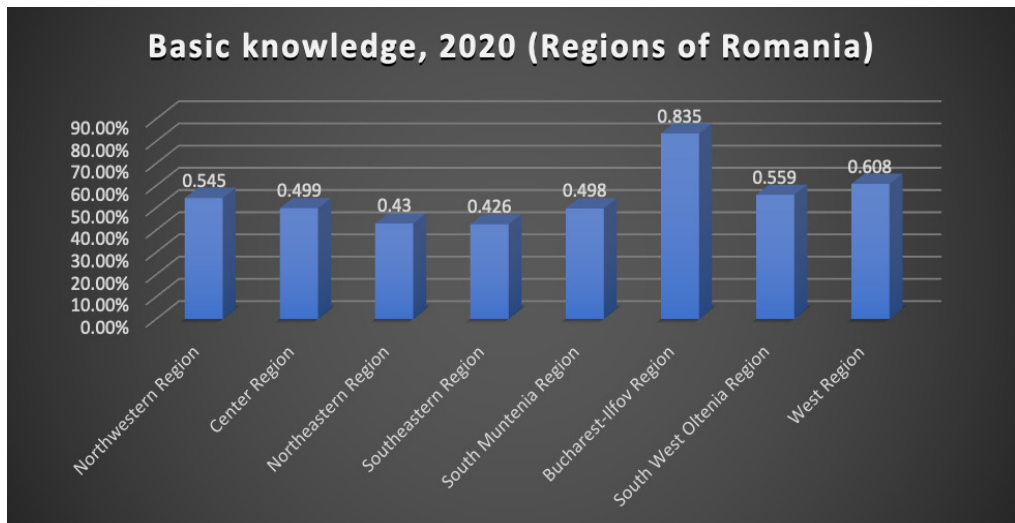


Figure 5. EU Social Progress Index and Advanced Education, Romanian Regions, 2020

Source: Author (See https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/maps/social_progress2020)

Otherwise the Table 1 is edifying in this respect:

Table 1. Social Progress Index / Social and environmental indicators
– Romanian Regions

	<i>NBMC</i>	<i>WS</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>PS</i>	<i>ABK</i>	<i>ITC</i>	<i>HW</i>	<i>EQ</i>	<i>PR</i>	<i>PFC</i>	<i>TI</i>	<i>AAE</i>
Northwestern Region	63.2	60.1	73.6	71.3	53.5	58	44.1	42.9	28.3	64.9	39.4	27.3
Center Region	66.4	62.7	67.7	72.4	49.9	54.6	47.7	41.3	28.5	57	37.4	23.1
Northeastern Region	57.5	47.3	68.5	68.7	43	43.3	41.7	44.8	27	59.2	34	18
Southeastern Region	50.6	53.3	68.1	65.8	42.6	47.4	39.7	41.4	24.6	53	30.7	20.1
South Muntenia Region	57.2	32.9	70.8	71.9	49.8	47.3	42.1	36.5	29.9	56.9	34.8	13.9
Bucharest -Ilfov Region	66.7	62	72.1	66	83.5	64.5	51.5	23.8	23.8	63.4	43.6	49.1
South West Oltenia Region	60.2	44.8	71.1	68.4	55.9	52.6	43.8	35.4	27.3	59.1	36.6	21.7
West Region	66	65.2	71.7	72.4	60.8	56.6	44.4	40.1	27.4	60.2	39.3	25.2

Source: Author (ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/maps/social_progress2020)

4. Conclusions

- Nordic countries remain the perform quite well concerning Social Progress Index;
- Generally, EU Member States are at the top in the ranking, with a high quality of life;
- Unfortunately, there are some exceptions. From this top are missing Croatia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania with a low quality of life;
- Compared to the EU average, Romania obtained better scores in terms of:
 - Personal security,
 - Shelter,
 - Personal freedom and choice.

- Compared to the EU average, Romania obtained the lowest scores in terms of:
 - Advanced education,
 - Personal rights,
 - Tolerance inclusion.

- We could notice a lot of disparities within the Romanians regions in terms of:
 - Advanced education,
 - Basic knowledge.

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