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### **THE IMPACT OF THE CURRENT CRISIS ON COMMUNITY'S SUBJECTIVE STATE. DIRECTIONS FOR REBUILDING INDIVIDUAL WELLBEING IN THE POST-CRISIS PERIOD**

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# **The Impact of the Current Crisis on Community's Subjective State. Directions for Rebuilding Individual Wellbeing in the Post-Crisis Period**

Elena ZAMFIR<sup>1</sup>

## **Abstract**

The choice of a lifestyle was and will remain an important part of the way in which we organise our life, certainly in the given socio-economic and cultural conditions. Lifestyle is built in agreement with the wish of each and any of us to achieve satisfaction with life, or in philosophical language, happiness. The concept of subjective wellbeing is a fundamental one in the quality-of-life paradigm. The main indicator of the subjective state is satisfaction with life. Global satisfaction with life is the outcome of the degree of fulfillment of the individual as general average of all fields of life. In this indicator are included important human benefits, results of economic growth in relationship with the wishes and aspirations to happiness and welfare. They express the permanent orientation of the individual towards self-development/self-construction. In fact, satisfaction with life, as subjective state of individual wellbeing depends on both economic personal welfare (living standard, income, employment, financial situation) and on the state of society's organization and governance quality, family situation, type of interpersonal and neighborhood relations, social participation, etc. The lifestyle is also a key-factor here. Sectoral indicators of satisfaction with life cover the main spheres of human existence (family, profession, work, free time, safety, civic and political participation, personal development, interpersonal relationships, neighborhood and friendship relationships, etc.). Subjective wellbeing or "subjective/perceived quality of life" is a critical structural component of the global state of wellbeing. It is the human filter of the objective living conditions. The subjective quality of life is not just the summation of the quality of life's components, but more than that, the synthesis of its results: the state of human balance, tranquility, wellness. And, the result might allow accessing happiness, the perpetual aspiration of the human. By means of the subjective indicators for satisfaction with life, happiness benefits of ways for precise measurement and analysis. The concept of happiness is a key-concept of all philosophical systems, but it entered by operational forms also in socio-humane, medical and economic sciences, etc.

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*Keywords:* quality of life indicators, subjective state of the population, subjective wellbeing, happiness, human security.

## Introduction

The pandemic triggered a crisis not only in the health and healthcare system, as it seemed in the beginning. It expanded swiftly to important spheres of the society (economy, governance, employment system; migration, personal lives, community, work, etc.). Hence, we are witnessing a crisis of proportions aimed at major structures of the social system in its entirety.

### *The current crisis and directions of change*

An extended crisis generates increased interest for solutions of the post-crisis recovery of the severely deteriorated welfare. In this context, the state of the Romanian society poses several questions about the nature of the crisis and about its management. Current explorations of post-crisis solutions are developed into an environment with a high degree of social disorganisation and political confusion. The constructive role of sociology becomes thus, increasingly more, a key-factor in identifying possible answers to the problems of the crisis. Sociological researches might turn into a compass in thinking over the development programme of the country.

Based on statistical data existing in Romania, but also at European and world level, opinion surveys, specialised studies, national and international reports, we might make a realistic assessment of the current situation of the country for identifying possible future directions of action for social-economic and human sustainable development. This constructive process of post-crisis recovery requires the active involvement in the development decision-making process of all social and political actors, and of the civil society.

In this context, next to the economic and social-institutional framework of life, it is important to pay particular attention to the *human problematic of the future: what kind of civilization we wish to build, what cultural life models we want to adopt, what values and aspirations should direct our development, what represents pragmatically the final objective of our live towards which we aspire, happiness.*

Philosophical and scientific wisdom tells us that in any state of profound crisis, with major risks of social disaggregation, the intelligent being “the Human”, the only being in the Universe conscious of its existence” (Pascal), asks itself firstly the question about the causes triggering the disaster. Next, the one about how to control its effects, to eliminate future risks and crystalise a human development programme.

The current crisis is not just a wave encompassing the entire world and, obviously, affecting us as well as part of it. It shows on the background of older

social issues unresolved during the 34 years of transition (Zamfir, 2023; Zamfir *et al.*, 2015, 2018, 2020, 2021; Zamfir, 2022; Pop, 2020; Cace, 2006; Bădescu, 2009; Marginean & Precupețu, 2008; Mihăilescu, 2004, 2012; Voicu, 2005).

The role of sociologists is to analyse the social reality in its (past and present) dynamics and to identify intervention opportunities for exiting the crisis and post-crisis recovery. Firstly, for exiting gradually from the current crises, a clear diagnosis is required regarding social issues. Moreover, the correct prioritisation of the options for an efficient programme of economic and social development of the country. Unfortunately, in Romania, the complex logic of human and social needs imposes itself with difficulty in the new scenario/project of social reconstruction. The individual and the collective with their specific objectives are placed at the periphery, emerge as simple spectators of the reconstruction process, expecting passively the boons of a market economy. On this background, might be explained the first part of the transition and the modest, incoherent, chaotic process of public social policies for “repairing social injustices” inherited from the communist regime. Many of the severe social issues of the past related to poverty, hidden unemployment, lack of access to civil rights, discrimination, etc. have received often a rushed, inarticulate answer under the pressure of street movements and political electoral emergencies. To these were added also the new risks specific to transition: a marked social polarisation, high income inequalities, price escalation, expansion of poverty among children, job insecurity, political alienation of a large part of the population, mistrust in political institutions, lack of decisional transparency, high-level corruption, etc. (Zamfir, Stănescu, & Arpinte, 2015; Zamfir & Precupețu, 2018; Zamfir, Voicu, & Stănescu, 2020). In my opinion, we should not limit ourselves now to just one exclusively historical approach of the descriptive type of the past as basis for the present. We should not search for justifications or excuses for the current socio-economic, political and moral state only in the beginnings of a nebulous transition.

Several volumes have appeared about the controversial contents and character of the transition. Books were written substantiated by empirical data regarding the state of the current economy, about the social policies and their impact on the process of social change and their effects on the quality-of-life. All have highlighted the pros and cons of the measures taken by the post-December Romanian governments. At the same time, numerous pragmatic proposals came from research, from the experience of the other European countries. Sociologists attempt to articulate a possible country model for the future that can be ongoing completed, rectified, and specified. However, we cannot avoid noticing, regretfully, the fact that everything that was reflected on in social research remained in sociology’s archives stirring a way to low interest in the sphere of political thinking.

The changes occurred in Romania over 34 years of transition, with both positive and negative outcomes may be a guide, a compass for understanding the present reality, but also for the future development choices. The strategic options for sustainable development of the country must be linked, however, to the aspirations

of the community, promoting strictly individual liberties of the members of the community.

The conclusion of the study will be focused on one of the imperatives of the present. In searching for a lifestyle, as might be expected, altered by the current changes triggered by repeated crises, the new development model of the country will have to be directed towards preserving/adding gained values, part of the modern civilization. The formal and informal requirements, more or less substantiated, for a world reset under the impact of new changes should not ignore the cumbersome process of building and rebuilding in time the values of modern civilization. Nothing from what was gained up to now in the evolution and progress of mankind should be destroyed or abandoned completely. A nihilistic vision would not help, either. The entire social history of human development directs us now, rather, towards keeping in check the indirect/undesirable effects of the changes caused by the present risks of overlapping crises.

Strategic thinking needs to include next to objectives to be achieved, identifying the issues accumulated in time that paralyse change and recognising risks at local, community, societal and global level. We are faced with a period of confusion in understanding the issues emerged in the context of overlapping crises and, especially, as regards the future directions of action. Objective welfare just as subjective one, are both values, as well as firm milestones for programmes of change.

Romania did not have over the 34 years of transition a coherent development strategy with clear objectives, specific targets to be achieved and stability in social reforms. Ideological platforms of the political parties were centred more on interests and momentary reforms, disjointed by the rush in submitted proposals. Indeed, the decisional process of rebuilding the country eliminated cooperation and solidarity between political decision factors and social stakeholders, experts and civil society as basis for the success of support programmes. Hence, searching for a sustainable country development model with positive effect on increasing satisfaction with life remained a perpetually postponed objective.

The basic sectors of the society – education, health, science – were affected directly by the global imbalance. Labour migration is one of the processes with the most important effects at the level of social disorganisation. Social and human balance was also severely affected. On the background of increasing discontent against the uncertainty of daily living, phenomena of violence became more marked by relativising life norms and cultural values. All these are clear forms of displaying *the estrangement of the individual from his own social essence* in the context of a *serious crisis of human security* (Human Security Handbook, 2016).

### *The subjective state of the population in the context of the current crisis*

The data from sociological researches shows that the concerns of the community against possible crises do not emerge simultaneously with the COVID crisis, but

much earlier. As early as 2015, a IRES survey “*Frightened Romania. Perceptions about national security and incidence of risks*” reveals that Romania is perceived by the Romanians as an unsafe country. On short time, the concerns of the Romanians are linked to the risk of war, and on medium- and long-term by the threat of a chronic economic crisis.

On the background of these threats, the distrust of Romanians in political decision factors increases. The state of anxiety regarding individual and collective safety becomes marked. “*Romanians fear more job insecurity, unemployment risk on long-term, to which are added the threats triggered by terrorism, food crisis, pollution, nuclear accidents, drug trafficking and consumption, or the risk of war in the region. Thus, many Romanians are forced to search for safety in other societies through international migration*” (Sinteza, 2015 [Synthesis, 2015]). To the question “*which do you believe is the most important issue Romania is faced with in this period*”, the answers are structured as follows: corruption is estimated as the most serious issue by 30%, followed by poverty 28%, the state of the economy by 8% and unemployment 7%; the state of the pensions’ system 6% is also a topic of concern to which is added the situation of transports and infrastructure 3%, lacking workplaces 2%, drug consumption/trafficking 2%, cost of fuels 1%; all these are overlapping with the governmental crisis 3%. Actually, all the above data refer to issues more important for the quality-of-life. The emerging differentiation expresses just the relative degree of concern related to all the others.

The IRES survey from 2016 confirms the concern showed by Romanians regarding individual and community’s welfare. Asked to choose the first three factors influencing their personal wellbeing, three factors are mentioned with very close weights: (1) Money/budget; (2) Lacking workplaces; (3) Quality of country’s governance/leadership.

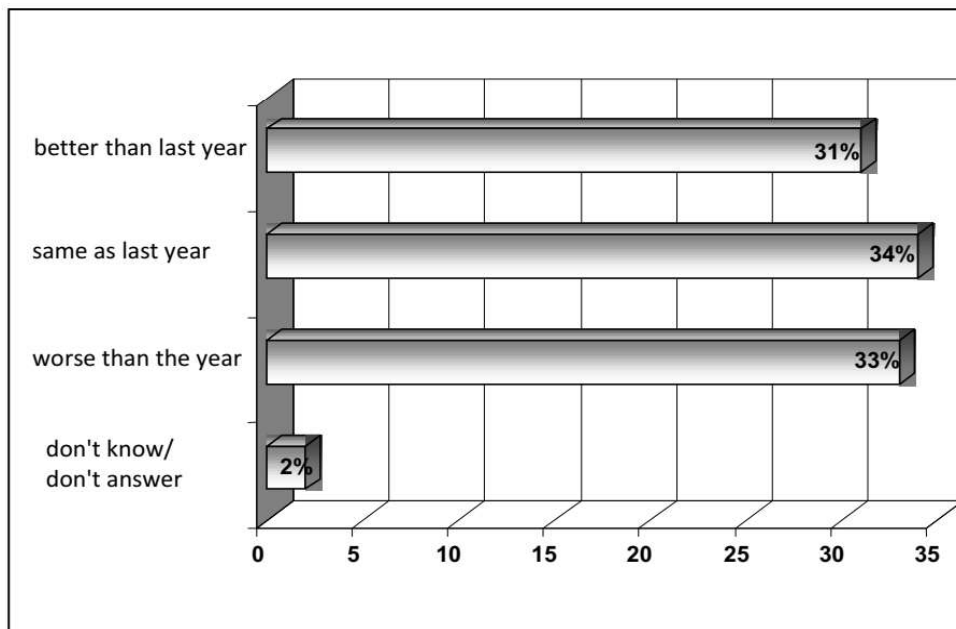
A long list of other factors follows, that are serious enough for the state of the community, and that deserve to be mentioned: the level of corruption, the economic situation of the country, the political system, the state of health, inevitably the issues within the labour system, and of the country’s governance which generates unavoidably tensions and issues in the personal and family life. The worsening of the economic situation to which are added the tensions within the public system have a definite negative effect on satisfaction with life, while the effort of the population to sustain a reasonable level of the living standard has increasingly poorer outcomes: the majority of the population 68 % regards it as average, while 28% see it as very low; only a small share of the community estimate that their living standard is very high 4%. Social polarization is increasingly more obvious: a Gauss distribution shifted massively on its negative slope.

The effects of the instability of the social and economic environment were reflected in the dramatic decrease of the living standard of the population, in deepening economic and social inequalities, in increasing degree of poverty for large and social marginalised groups (Zamfir, E 2021; Zamfir,C 2023).

The deterioration of the living standard is expressed immediately in the savings behaviours: in 2023 a small share of Romanians, 37% succeeded in saving money, against 46% in 2022. “Half of the Romanians do not have savings to face possible crises. 41% of the Romanians have some savings that might ensure decent survival, but only for at most 2 months” (Zamfir, 2023).

Retracing the issue of Romanians’ incomes, IRES highlights over a cycle of three evaluations of public opinion during the pandemic that a swift exhaustion is visible regarding the financial resources accumulated by families because of incomes’ diminishment.

Which is the current state of mind? IRES data (December 2023) shows the expectations of the Romanians for the year 2024 (IRES” Romanians’ Expectations for 2024”).



Source: IRES, December 2023

Figure 1. Expectations of the Romanians for the year 2024

Regarding the perspectives for the year 2024, Romanians are rather reserved: 34% consider that the situation will remain approximately the same; 33% expect the situation to worsen, and somewhat fewer 31% expect it to improve. Hence, the state of uncertainty is slightly biased towards concern.

More optimistic are the persons who are in situations of more social disadvantage, with a low level of education, elderly, and individuals from the rural area. Here are included, however, also part of the youths who hope that they will have better

chances in the future. The pessimists are those in the group of the active persons, with ages between 36 and 65 years, and who live in the Moldova region, where development opportunities are lower, in general.

The war in Ukraine is a source of concern for 53% from the Romanians. They believe that the war will not end in 2024. Only 4 out of 10 Romanians are optimistic and believe in the end of the conflict in 2024. They are a majority, again, in the group of elderly and of those with low education level.

*What would Romanians like to change in 2024?* More precisely, which is the key-factor of all desired changes? 55% from the answers indicate that for improving the current situation, the year 2024 should bring about visible changes in the state of the political system: the political class, the politicians, the governance, the current leadership, including the President, Parliament, and members of the parliament, with more competent politicians, change of the politicians' mentality, more gravitas and responsibility, more concern for the needs of the people, eliminating corruption, and respecting promises. 20% are added who have no opinion (IRES, 2023).. Hence, the opinion of the majority is that unblocking the crisis depends mainly on changes in the functioning of the political system.

Extremely worrying low is the trust in the political decision factors, but also in public institutions, in the strategic management of dealing with current threats and risks.

The major sources of concern for Romanians in 2023 are related preponderantly to price increase 29%, the war in Ukraine 24%, followed by the lack of workplaces 12%, and fear of illness 10%. The concern related to illness decreased in 2023 against the first years of the pandemics, other sources of concern have moved on the first places: living standard, economic and social situation.

From another perspective of pressing social issues, a survey from 2023 highlights a *top of national issues* representing in the vision of the Romanians major sources of concern and discontent. Thus, 80% of Romanians place on the first position poverty and social inequality, followed by inflation 67%, corruption 66%; to this is added also the inefficiency in public money spending, 58%; public health issues 53%; issues related to traffic of influence 47%; services' abuses 45%; framing of civil rights and individual liberties 36%; climate changes and environmental protection 34%; these are followed by issues related to the field of social work, from the field of animal protection, issues related to the education system, etc. (Survey: Baroc Civic Barometer from Romania – A Survey Geeks for Democracy developed with Cult Research over the period May-June 2023). This classification of social issues provides, actually a clearer image regarding the state of mind of the population. In this context it is not asked for classifying “concerns”, but for listing the importance of social issues for the daily life of the Romanians. It is interesting that here can be grouped also concerns with major significance for the quality of life with a preponderant weight, many of them *by over 50%*.



Eurostat data from 2022 as well, place Romania on the first place in Europe, with a high rate for the at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 34.4%, against 21.6% the EU average, It is worrying that in 2022, the at risk of poverty rate and social exclusion increased in Romania by 3.2%, against the year 2019, when Romania ranked on 2<sup>nd</sup> position, after Bulgaria.

All issues mentioned above, correlated with the visible decrease in the living standard turned even more stressing for the individual and his daily life. On the background of economic and social instability were accumulated gradually discontents, protests, and dissatisfaction with the programmes of economic and social reforms, and for managing the threats of the crisis. For the Romanians, these generate stress, apprehensions, disappointments, dissatisfaction with personal life, disillusion, depression, disconnection from public life, etc. Even worse, they affected to various degrees the mental health state of the population, but also the psychological, emotional and behavioural balance of the Romanians.

The IRES survey from December 2023 provides data, as well, about the impact of the current crisis on the deep emotional state of the population: Romanians were dominated by anxieties and loneliness, have went through states of apprehensions, stress, and emotional tensions. In 2023, 70% from the Romanians have cried at least once, 68% suffered from states of stress, 57% were faced with fears regarding the death of close person, 40% reflected on death, 34% felt lonely, 28% needed help, but did not receive it, 28% felt the need to talk with someone, but did not have with whom, 25% needed help and did not have anyone to call on, 16% maintain they were victim of verbal aggression on the street, 11% went to a psychologist, 7 out of 10 Romanians were to medical investigation, and 22% were hospitalised. These data indicate the frequency of many negative states, dysfunctional for the daily life of the population, with direct impact in decreasing quality of life. The interest of the governing factors for social and emotional support in difficult, uncommon instances occurred over the process of transition and during the Covid crisis was very low. A significant example, in this case: although a very high share of the Romanians underwent states of stress, 68%, just one out of ten Romanians went to the psychologist. Unfortunately, decision factors in Romania showed only minor interest for specialised services of individual therapy, for medical psychiatric offices, and for psychological counselling. These services did not benefit from appropriate financing according to the extent of the risks to which the population was exposed over long periods of major personal difficulties.

Actually, for the last 10 years, the quality of life was affected unmediated by the rapid and uncontrolled changes of the world in both the objective component (illustrated by indicators regarding living standard, income, employment opportunities, unemployment effects, etc.) and the subjective one regarding individual wellbeing. Thus, the rapid decline in the living standard in the subjective satisfaction with life state of the population determined a *severe crisis in the sphere of human security and human identity*. These are the outcome of a period of fuzzy social-economic and political changes based on emergency,

disjointed social policies with a low degree of efficiency. This explains also the current context of repeated crises, the emergence of new worrying phenomena affecting the behavioural balance and mental health. Many Romanians became increasingly more jaded, secluded/inactive, pessimistic, disconnected socially and thus losing their networking, cooperation and communication abilities. Changes in the affective-emotional component were signalled in interpersonal relations, disorders of the human behaviour as result of the long periods of isolation, of physical distance, forced quarantine, of working from home, of failing to properly dissociate between working time at home and leisure time, of daily routines based on activities developed just online, etc. (Zamfir & Zamfir, 2020). During the pandemic, the individual was compelled to bear the strict rules of isolation and loneliness. Hence, the individual immersed himself gradually in loneliness. States of apprehension, depression, anxiety removed the individual from the social reality and his fellow human beings. It is known that a prolonged period of forced isolation leads to alienating the individual from the socio-cultural environment in which he lives and where he was shaped. Thus, the lack of affective support from the community is enhanced. Awareness about the need for the other, especially in situations of danger for him and the community turns into a pressing essential factor for the existence of the human. Severed from the actual issues and from direct communication with fellow human beings, the individual might retain and process only what is communicated by mass-media (press, television, radio, online, etc.) and by social networks. These, in their turn, are also information processed or distorted by authors-anchors. In fact, the individual is no longer present actually in the natural life environment, in the encounter with factual reality. This fact may lead in time to the weakening of the sentiment of social belonging or even, *in extremis*, to a meltdown of the identity as a person associated to the group and community to which he belongs<sup>2</sup>. It is here where the *human crisis of identity and security* emerge as a priority. “Our modern culture evolved lately in a direction that created a world full of turmoil, full of individuals suffering from alienation, full of schools failing to inspire and to relate with the students, in brief, a society lacking moral compass that would help in clarifying the way in which we might progress

- 2 Several experiments of social psychology regarding the answer of the individual to abnormal conditions from his daily life environment had to be discontinued during their development because of some anomalies/unwanted consequences emerged in behavioural change (see Zimbardo, Milgram, etc.). This is, leaving aside the amazing experiment of Jim Jones from 1978 in Guyana, South America that shocked the entire world. Leader of the religious cult the Peoples Temple, he led by isolation and systematic manipulation techniques a group of over 900 people to mass suicide. One third of the dead were children who received lethal concoction (poison) from their mothers who, in their turn, committed suicide thereafter. No rational explanations could be found about how this experiment could cancel the strongest human instinct, the maternal instinct.

within our global community”, tells us Daniel J. Siegel (2022: 13), psychiatrist and professor of psychiatry at UCLA, from USA, co-director of Mindful Awareness Research Centre.

In fact, the crisis of human identity and security, by their multiple forms of manifestation, either directly or indirectly, lead to more pronounced interpersonal conflicts, to violent street movements, to chaos inside the community, aggressiveness and social disorder, etc. However, they have also a negative impact on the economic stability. Displays of disinterest in participating to work, of disengagement in the social life and the life of the community, of passivity and pessimism at actional level emerge. These, in their turn, generate distrust in the political system, in the institutions of the state and in governance. Loneliness and isolation, in fact, generate a withdrawal of the individual from its role as main factor of organizing collective life. In certain conditions, the current crisis contains by and in itself also self-perpetuation mechanisms. Thus, the isolation of the individual, his passivity, the lack of interest for collective life associated with fear, panic and anxiety cannot be treated just as strictly individual pathologies. Regarded just from this perspective, they might have as perverted effect, their consolidation over time. In reality, the behavioural disorders are outcomes not only of some personal unpleasant/uncommon life situations. They are strongly influenced, maintained or even triggered by the actual state of the society in which the individual lives. Thus, the handling of these individual pathologies must be compulsory completed by actions of changing the living conditions according to the requirements/needs of personal development of each individual. In this instance, are imposed simultaneously, next to individual or group therapies, also improvements in collective life and in the general social life environment.

The viewpoint of Romanian sociologists during the current crisis is right: the cause of the severe issues of the present individual must be searched firstly in the state of the existing state of the Romanian society, including in the quality of economic growth. The degree of *dissatisfaction with life should not be regarded just as an indicator of some strict individual pathology*, but as the *indication of a social pathology* unchecked in time. The solution should be searched in the efficiency of social changes and in their durability.

The issue of *human security* took centre stage in the concerns of the UN starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948. “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person” (Art. 3); Article 22 underpins “Everyone, as member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to the realization through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the *economic, social and cultural rights* indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality” (Art. 22).

Thereby is opened a new analysis perspective for the “*Human crisis*” and “*the crisis of human security*”. International security, national security, economic

security, security within the community and in interpersonal relations, food security, water security, of the ecological environment, all together become central in current concerns.

If, initially, security priority was associated with military security, with defending national borders, in the present a swift expansion of its interest emerges for major fields of the social and human. The current threats at local, regional and global level have reinforced requirements for ensuring individual's security in the main spheres of life (Human Security Handbook, 2016): (1) Economic security (ensuring the right to work, ensuring decent living standards and support for the poor with risk of social exclusion); (2) Food security by the right of everyone to food and ensuring food quality and security; (3) Health security and protection; (4) Environmental security (water, air, land, etc); (5) Personal security (eliminating violence of any type, the abuse against children, eliminating drugs as destabilizer of behavioural balance and mental health); (6) Digital security; (7) Security in the presence of artificial intelligence; (8) Political security against interstate conflicts and infringements of human liberties.

Human security plays a decisive role in acknowledging and diminishing threats triggered by unchecked changes of the modern world. By its normative aspects and moral requirements formulated explicitly, human security turns into a key factor in reducing and eliminating violence. Chronical turning violence and criminality become increasingly more a collective threat. The export of criminality emerges as a concerning phenomenon at global, regional and local level. All these phenomena must be reconsidered in the wider context of the human security crisis. Combating violence and criminality must begin from strengthening economic, political, social and cultural structures as a living safeguarded community space.

New sources of threats are emerging. The irresponsible use of the new discoveries in the IT sphere might turn into major risks for human security. In scientific debates were signalled the enthusiasm, optimism, and confidence in the world's power of change by means of new technologies and artificial intelligence. However, also scientific controversies occurred, serious reservations regarding the perverted effects of artificial intelligence (Zamfir, E, 1989).

### *Subjective wellbeing and happiness*

Concepts such as *subjective wellbeing*, *satisfaction with life*, *perceived quality of life* enjoy particular consideration in current thinking. The concept of *happiness* which takes centre place in philosophical meditation is taken over in the systematic analysis in scientific thinking. We witness here a historical event: taking over the topic of *happiness* in the analysis of modern sciences. The explosive development of the system of indicators for the quality of life opened new ways for measurement and for individual wellbeing, subjective wellbeing/happiness. Taken over in the new theoretic and methodological framework for the quality of life, the concept of happiness obtained rational consistency (Zamfir, 1984; Zamfir, 1989; Voicu, 2005,

Băltăţescu, 2009; Diener, Lucas & Oishi, , 2002; Land, & Spilerman,1975). Such an understanding of happiness will direct to large extent both studies regarding quality of life, and the psychological-sociology ones (Băltăţescu, 2009).

The theme of happiness assumed in sociology generated a paradigmatic freedom: economic good is not the ultimate objective of human's life. It is *human* only integrated in the paradigm of the quality of life. The old issue of the *relationship between economic profit and happiness* is reconsidered. The conversion of *Economic good* in *Human good* is not automated and not just a topic of strict theoretical interest. It becomes, in this context, a practical issue of social policy. The relationship between economic resources and human wellbeing is more complex than believed. For a long time, it was considered that an economic plus generates automatically also a plus in individual wellbeing and, hence, also subjective satisfaction with life. The degree of happiness/satisfaction with life, however, does not correlate directly with economic performances. Even the question emerges whether not somehow in some phases of the process of human development we are faced rather with a negative correlation: higher economic welfare, higher human crisis. In time, economic priorities are replaced by other life priorities that take necessarily centre state as needs, new aspirations/expectations for the fulfillment of the human (Zamfir, 1989). Other types of growth arise. A human and social growth is presupposed and required by the future evolution of man: equality of rights and equal opportunities, tranquility, security, equilibrium in development, civilized relationships, competence and responsibility, elimination of corruption, and institutional chaos, etc. (Argyle, 2001; Hauck,1994; Siegel 2022.)

Even economists got involved also in measuring happiness associating it with a *quality increase in GDP* which pursues economic welfare and subjective satisfaction with life. Lately, western literature tends to be dominated by a vision shift in the sphere of economy: for diminishing social inequalities a social-inclusive direction is required in economic growth (Piketty, 2014; Stiglitz 2016).

The topic is assumed increasingly more in earnest by social researches and surveys. Just some examples: Very recently European and world surveys (2023) implement measuring the degree of happiness as constant concern for the quality of life. Yearly, at world level, a ranking of happiness on countries is attempted starting from the selection of some items considered relevant for the subjective satisfaction with life. *The World Happiness Report 2023* is based on the data of a global survey realised with respondents from over 150 countries. The countries are grouped in the hierarchy of happiness based on the average evaluations of life in the three preceding years, in this case 2020-2022.

The selected indicators for happiness are: (1) gross domestic product per capita; (2) healthy life expectancy; (3) generosity; (4) social support; (5) freedom to make own choices; (6) corruption perception.

In selecting these items, are included also highly relevant components for the satisfaction with life: (1) human generosity and solidarity by mutual, collective

support; (2) trust of population in the relationship with State's institutions; (3) the freedom degree of the population in participating to important institutional decisions for its life.

In 2023, the happiness score for the countries of the world is evaluated by indicators for the quality of life in each country in relationship to the objective living conditions, to expectations/aspirations of the population. The objective conditions, though representing the assuring framework for achieving individual and collective wellbeing, are not enough for calculating the happiness degree.

As result of evaluating the countries of the world, the World Happiness Report 2023, Finland ranked first as the happiest country in the world for the last 6 years. In this ranking, Finland is followed by Denmark, Iceland and Israel.

Table 1. World Happiness Report 2023

Rank	Country		■ Avg Life Eval
1.	Finland	7804	
2.	Denmark	7586	
3.	Iceland	7530	
4.	Israel	7473	
5.	Netherlands	7403	
6.	Sweden	7395	Note: Countries with a * do not have survey information in 2022. Their averages are based on the 2020 and 2021 surveys.
7.	Norway	7315	
8.	Switzerland	7240	
9.	Luxembourg	7228	
10.	New Zealand	7123	
11.	Austria	7097	
12.	Australia	7095	
13.	Canada	6961	
14.	Ireland	6911	
15.	United States	6894	95% confidence interval is show in the grey-shaded are at the end of each life evaluation bar.
16.	Germany	6892	
17.	Belgium	6859	
18.	Czech Republic	6845	
19.	United Kingdom	6796	

20.	Lithuania	6763	
21.	France	6661	
22.	Slovenia	6650	
23.	Costa Rica	6609	
24.	Romania	6589	

Source: World Happiness Report 2023

Romania ranks on the 24<sup>th</sup> position in 2023, on increase in the World Happiness Report against the year 2022. Romanian are less happy than the Czech or Austrian, but are positioned better as compared with the Spanish or Italians. Lithuania moved upwards constantly in the happiness ranking for the last six years, from the 52<sup>nd</sup> position in 2017, to the 20<sup>th</sup>. The other Baltic countries had improved in the ranking, with Estonia on position 31 and Latvia ranking 41. In turn, France is no longer in top 20, dropping on the 21<sup>st</sup> position in 2023.

How is this ranking explained in the happiness top? The authors suggest a couple of factors: small countries with high social and economic homogeneity, and high developmental level (rich countries) rank on the first positions. Other factors are called upon in this context, as well, such as genetic ones called also "*biomarkers*" of happiness, a higher degree of human tranquility and fulfilment, satisfaction with own life. Some estimate that Northerners seem to be genetically programmed to be happier.

It becomes increasingly clearer that happiness is multiple conditioned. It cannot be reduced to strict economic development factors (Zamfir, E 1989; Băltăţescu, S. 2009). Hence, this explains why very rich countries of the world are not placed among the first positions in the Happiness ranking. While countries showing democratic openness of public institutions, with open dialogue with the population and ensuring a balanced climate of human security and solidarity within the community are in the top in the happiness ranking.

The positioning of the countries of the world in the happiness hierarchy is explained by the authors of the report based on the most varied arguments. John Helliwell, one of the authors of the report, in an interview with CNN stated: "Benevolence shown to others, especially in aiding strangers, which increased significantly in 2021 maintained high levels in 2022". He notices that global happiness was not affected during the three years of the COVID-19 pandemic even if its effects were distributed unequally at the level of the countries of the world. For the countries included in top 10 as the happiest in the world, a lot more mattered the feeling of solidarity, the low degree of corruption during the crisis, medical security and concern for the health of the population, factors that were correlated

positively with trust in those responsible with managing the crisis. “Even during these difficult years, positive emotions remained twice more outspread than the negative ones, and the feeling about positive social support were twice as strong as the loneliness ones”, estimates Helliwell in a press release.

All these data prove the complexity and fragility of the methodology. Not always the conclusions of the opinion surveys at world and European level focused on satisfaction with life and happiness reach to the same results as national ones. It just so happens that surveys use in measuring the degree of happiness differing methodologies, the data might be collected at different times, and the questions of the same type might vary as formulation, while the conclusions represent the opinions and current states, valid only at the time of their recording. Their results cannot be transferred in time, nor can they be used in another framework of reference.

In fact, achieving happiness was and will remain linked closely to the need of an own secured space for the freedom of thinking and action of the individual (Zamfir, E, 1989; Zamfir, E, Maggino, F, eds 2013). It will reference to a moral of a together action substantiated on an ethic of collective responsibility (Morar, V, 2011). And, last but not least, it requires actual, consolidated democracy versus a noisy and extremely fragile one.

## **Conclusion**

The future process of rebuilding the country will have to consider also the results of the social researches accumulated over time. They, with certainty, by their pragmatic proposals can be a guide for the political decision factors in elaborating the post-crisis strategies.

Social policies and future country programmes will need to provide for in point answers to the human identity and security crisis with emphasis on recovering the state of behavioural normality and maintaining the mental health.

The modest intervention of the social state in ensuring individual wellbeing and decent living standards for the vulnerable groups brings back to the forefront of human security the issues of poverty and social exclusion. The weak State is a critical variable of the current programmes of promoting human needs and human security.

Human solidarity, by the involvement of all social stakeholders in elaborating collective decisions turns into an imperative of the present in the fight for diminishing current risks and threats. The collective space of living supported by values of the modern civilization represents the warranty for the human balance and security of the communities.

Political decision factors will need to become aware about the necessity of directing economic policies towards increasing individual and collective wellbeing.



The support programmes for disadvantaged groups must be focused on the actual needs of the beneficiaries. Here, harmonising sectoral policies cannot take place but by an integrating vision of the sectoral policies in the framework of a unitary national strategy.

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