

# The Quality of Life in Romania Viewed from the Perspective of the Sustainable Development

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## Abstract

*Sustainable development has become a focus both at a world and at an international and national level, in the context of population growth and, implicitly, consumption growth. Sustainable development aims at ensuring a balance between environment preservation and protection, life quality and economic growth. One of the most important aspects refers, of course, to protecting the most important resource, i.e. human resource. To this purpose, the hereby work aims at analysing a range of indicators, thus outlining a strategic direction regarding possible areas of intervention in human capital development.*

**Key words:** sustainable development, human resource, sustainable development indicators, strategy.

**J.E.L. Classification:** I00

## 1. Introduction

The interest for sustainable development dates back to 1970, when environmental issues and the concerns for protecting it from human action were dealt with by international conferences. Human activities, life quality, safety, health and economic balance largely depend on resources and on the environment. The initial definition was asserted by the World Commission on Environment and Development in the report "*Our Common Future*" or the Brundtland report: "Sustainable development is the one aiming at satisfying present needs without compromise to the possibility of future generations of satisfying their own needs". (Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: *Our Common Future*). The concept of sustainable development harmoniously combines a range of elements, based on providing a balance between the social, economic and ecological dimension.

The social dimension mainly refers to life quality, living standards or equity; the economic dimension includes a range of economic indicators that validate growth or efficiency, while the ecological side fights to prevent pollution, protect human resources and biodiversity. Development is generally considered to be sustainable if it is based on the three dimensions: social, economic and ecological.

Sustainable development has acquired an outstanding importance in the latest years, becoming a key goal of the European Union. A strategy focusing on sustainable development and starting from the combination of several indicators has been outlined at the EU level. Some of the most representative are: sustainable transport, public health, social inclusion, climate change, socio-economic development, demographic changes, natural resources, sustainable consumption and production.

The article presents three of the most important indicators of sustainable development (social inclusion, demographic changes, public health) in Romania. The study provides an overall image of our country in terms of the previously mentioned indicators, dealing with aspects such as life expectancy, the employment rate for people aged 55-64 or the status of persons facing poverty or social exclusion.

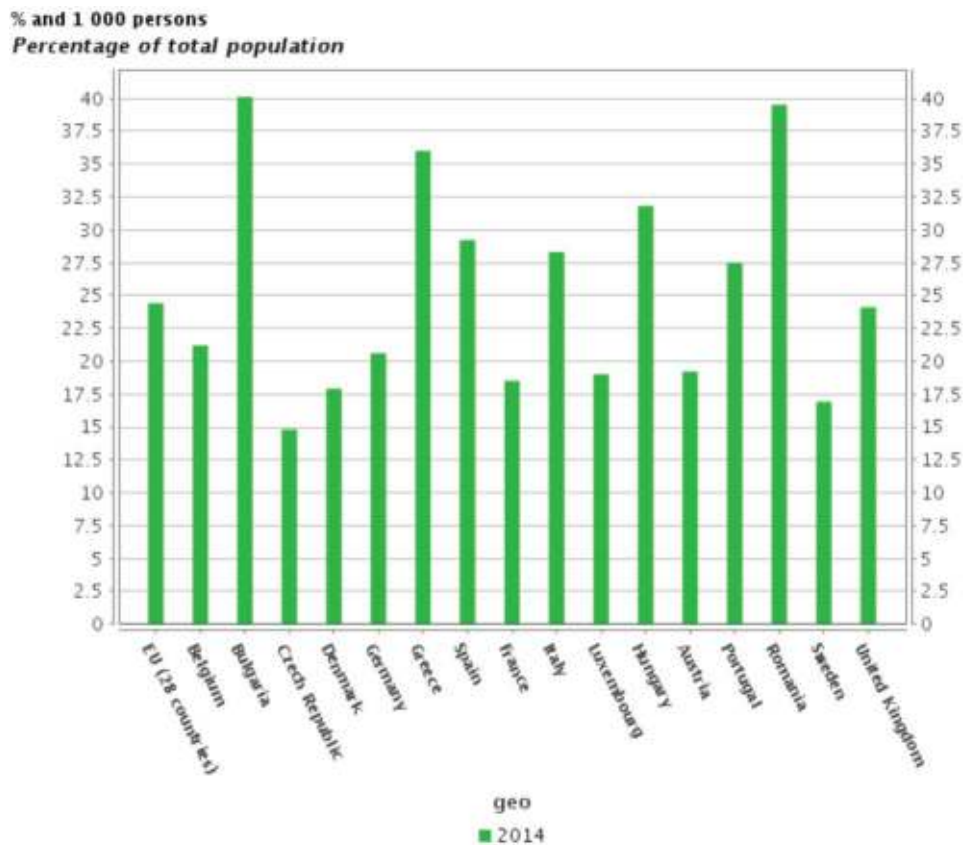
For a more relevant approach, we have also chosen other EU countries, representative for each region, with reference to the EU average for each criterion.

## 2. Social inclusion

The Europe 2020 Strategy promotes social inclusion, with the main target of at least 20 million people leaving poverty and, hence, reducing the social exclusion risk. A person falls within this category if s/he meets at least 4 of the following 9 criteria simultaneously: s/he cannot face unexpected expenses, s/he cannot pay rent or utilities, s/he cannot afford to maintain a suitable temperature in the house, s/he cannot afford to eat meat, fish or any other equivalent protein once every two days, s/he cannot buy a car, s/he cannot buy a colour TV, a phone, a washing machine and s/he cannot pay for a week of holiday outside the residence.

As for the social exclusion risk, according to Eurostat, Romania has a 39.5 percentage, much higher than the EU average (24.4). A similar situation is seen in Bulgaria (40.1), Greece (36) or Hungary (31.8). The opposite is valid for states in Central and Northern Europe, as well as Western Europe (Sweden - 16.9, Austria - 19.2, Luxembourg - 19, France - 18.5, Germany - 20.6, Denmark-17.9, Czech Republic - 14.8, Belgium - 21.2).

Figure no. 1. People at risk of poverty or social exclusion



Source: Eurostat

Social inclusion is dealt with by many national strategies; a very significant step to this purpose is the Sectoral Operational Programme "Human Resource Development 2007-2013", approved in 2007. Such a programme provides for the development of social economy structures likely to facilitate the access of vulnerable groups to the job market. Statistics show that the adoption of such measures may create up to 5,000 jobs, while the number of participants in qualification programmes may rise up to 150,000.

## 2.1. Poverty rate after social transfers

Poverty rate calculated as a ratio of total population in 2004-2013 indicates a negative image of Romania, confirming its modest position within the EU as well. We should remark that the trend is ascending: if poverty rate was 17.9 in 2004, it would reach a peak (24.8) in 2007 and stabilize at 22.4 in 2013. Another aspect to remember is that 2007, when Romania accessed the European Union, is the year when poverty is highest. The years following the accession to the EU are not better either; improvements are almost imperceptible, though one of the most significant indicators in the EU strategy refers to poverty reduction.

Table no.1. Poverty rate

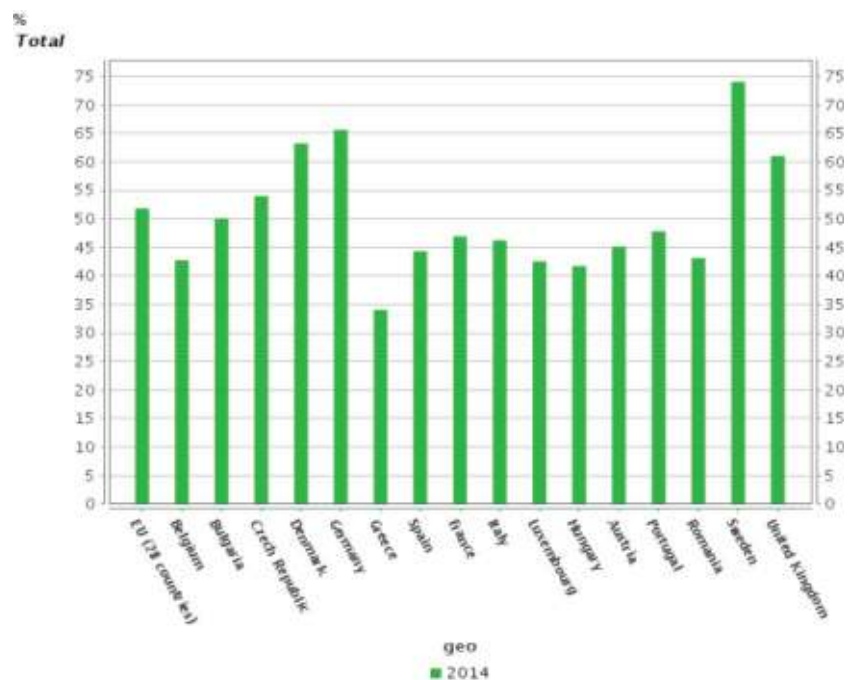
YEAR	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total persons	17.9	18.2	18.6	24.8	23.4	22.4	21.1	22.2	22.6	22.4

Source: National Institute of Statistics

## 3. Demographic changes

The employment rate of elderly people is calculated as a ratio between the number of people aged 55-64 who have a job and the total population of this age segment. Employed population is that category which, at the moment when the study was drawn up, performed an activity for salary or profit for at least one hour a day or which did not work, but was on a leave from the job during the reference period.

Figure no. 2. Employment rate of older workers



Source: EUROSTAT

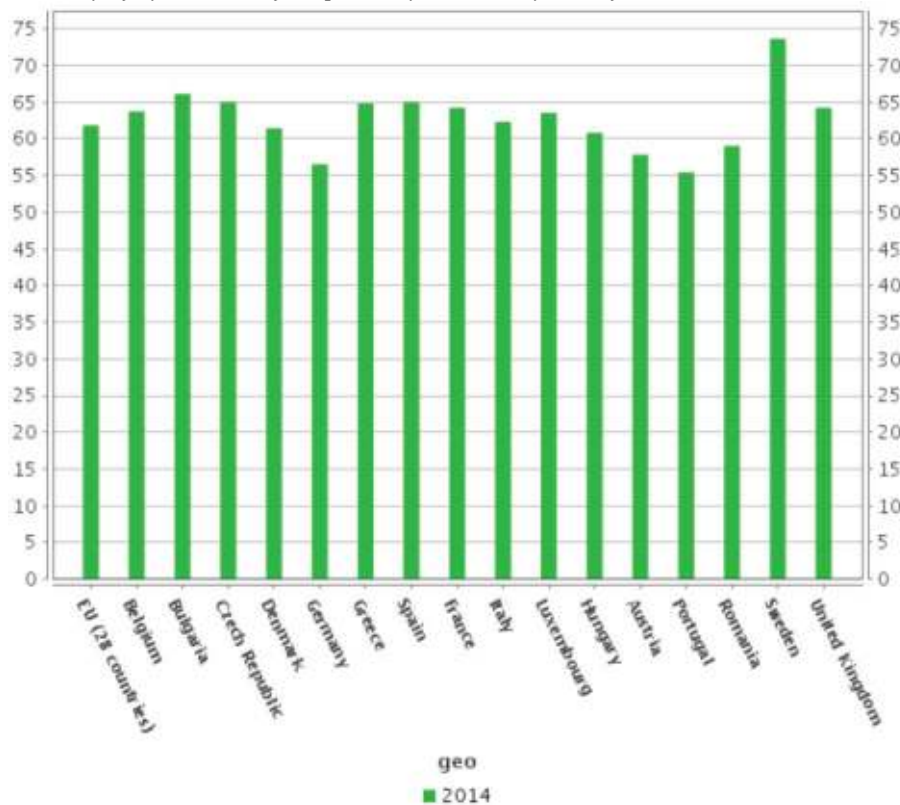
As for the employment rate of elderly people, Romania is still placed under the EU average (51.8), with 43.1%. The same happens in countries such as Portugal (47.8), Hungary (41.7), Italy (46.2), France (46.9), Spain (44.3).

The opposite is seen in Germany (65.6), Czech Republic (54), Denmark (63.2). In most cases, the low percentage is due to the health conditions, which results in early retirement for disease. To this purpose, two other indicators with a direct effect on the employment possibility should be analysed, i.e. life expectancy and life duration in a context of health. Another recommendation would be for persons who reach the retirement age to remain active if possible and if they want to pursue the activity.

#### 4. Public health

The HLY (Healthy Life Years) indicator measures the years a person lives in a context of health. Good health conditions refer to the absence of any disabilities. It is also referred to as disability-free life expectancy (DFLE). The indicator is calculated separately for women and men.

Figure no. 3. Healthy life years and life expectancy at birth, by sex – females

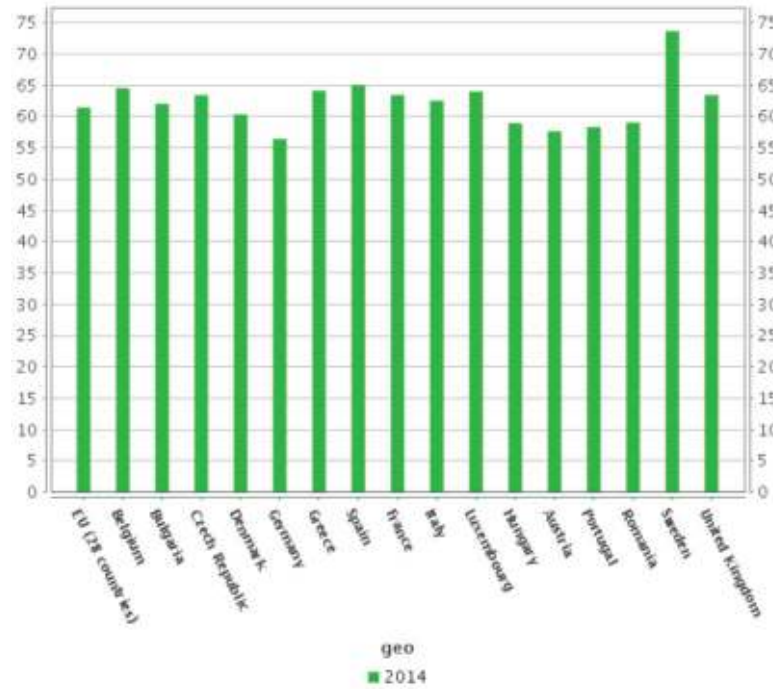


Source: EUROSTAT

As for the HLY indicator for women, Romania indicates an age of 59 years as the limit for living in health conditions, also below the EU average (61.8). Countries with a lower age than Romania are: Portugal - 55.4, Austria - 57.8, Germany - 56.5, while all other countries have a higher age: Great Britain - 64.2, Sweden - 73.6, Luxembourg - 63.5, Italy - 62.3, Ireland - 67.5, even Bulgaria - 66.1.

As for men, the situation does not change in Romania: men have a life expectancy of 59 years in conditions of health, just like women. The leader in the EU is also Sweden - 73.6, followed by Ireland - 66.3, Spain - 65, Belgium - 64.5, Greece - 64.1, Luxembourg - 64, France - 63.4. Lower values than Romania are seen in Portugal - 58.3, Austria - 57.6, Hungary - 58.9, Germany - 56.4.

Figure no.4. Healthy life years and life expectancy at birth, by sex- males

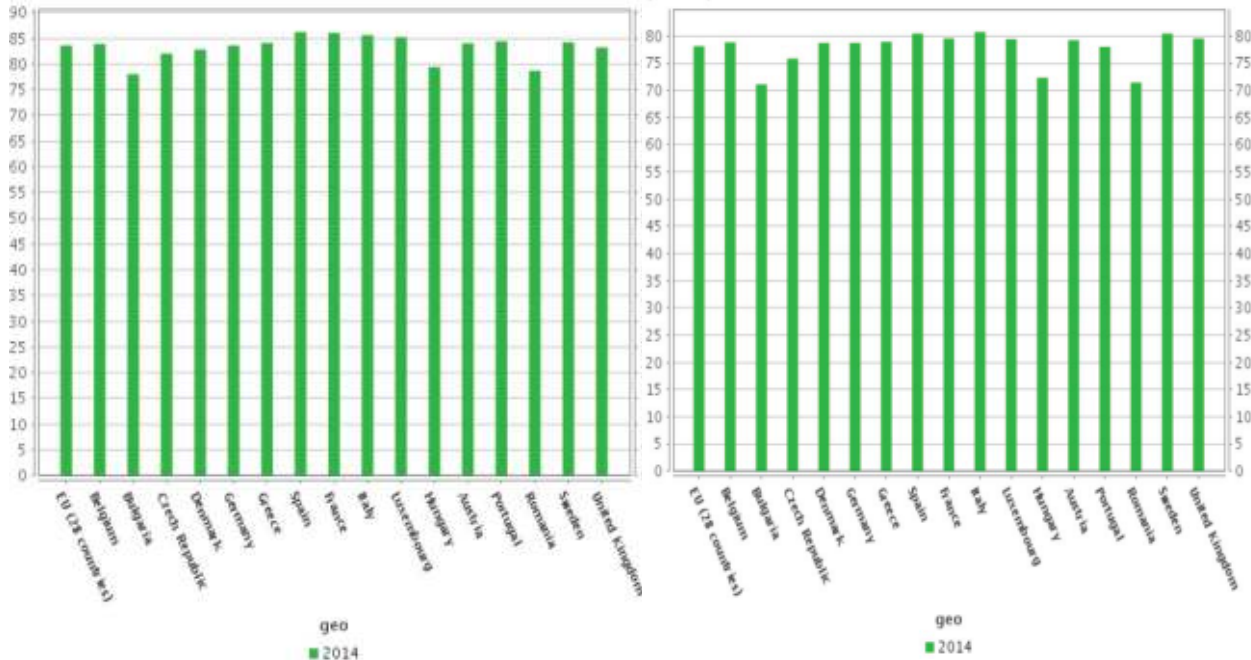


Source: EUROSTAT

### 4.3. Life expectancy

Life expectancy as of birth is defined as the average number of years a person lives since s/he is born, if exposed to current mortality conditions along his/her life. This indicator is also calculated separately for women and men.

Figure no.5. Healthy life years and life expectancy at birth, by sex –female vs males



Source: EUROSTAT



Life expectancy for men in Romania is much lower than that of women, with statistics showing a difference of almost 7 years (71.4), and a EU average of 78.1. Only Bulgaria has a lower lifetime than Romania (71.1). A smaller difference is seen compared to Hungary (72.3), while countries such as Great Britain (79.5), Sweden (80.4), Portugal (78), Luxembourg (79.4), Italy (80.7), France (79.5), Spain (80.4), Denmark (78.7) are visibly farther away, above the EU average.

Life expectancy for a woman in Romania is 78.7 years, under the EU average of 83.6. For the group of analysed countries, only Bulgaria has a lower life expectancy for women than Romania (78). The other countries are better off than Romania, and some even exceed the EU average: Spain 86.2, France 86, Italy 85.6, Luxembourg 85.2, Sweden 84.2 and Great Britain 83.3, Hungary 81. Eurostat data reveal a troublesome situation, with negative effects in the long run. Thus, national forecasts suggest a considerable decrease, as the population of Romania will reach 20.8 million in 2020 and 19.7 million in 2030.

We may think that this data is actually optimistic since it does not take into account the possibility that migration would increase even further, resulting into a vertiginous decrease of population in the years to come. A somewhat darker forecast combines the natality rate with migration effects, so that Romania might reach 18.6 million inhabitants in 2030. Generations after 1989 will strongly feel the burden of these effects, as they will represent the active and, implicitly, productive segment of population.

## 5. Conclusions

Sustainable development is a very important indicator for assessing gaps between EU member states, as well as a method to assess life quality. To this purpose, Romania should align its strategy to that of the European Union and implement a value added-generating development plan.

Considering the elements presented for each indicator, we may state that drawing up a strategy on the population of Romania should be a priority for the recovery of natality, the reduction of mortality, the increase of average lifetime and an enhancement of the health state.

Therefore, a suitable healthcare system should be developed for elderly people, and those in the rural environment should also benefit from such a system, along with an ever more intense development of information campaigns on sports activities and balanced nutrition.

Another most significant aspect refers to workers who have reached the retirement age, but they want to keep working, thus helping balance the dependency ratio in the pensions system. Last but not least, the migration phenomenon should be mitigated, since it will enhance the decrease in Romania's population in the long run, with negative effects on all the fields of social and economic life.

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