

## Evaluation of Social Justice in Europe

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### Abstract

*This paper debates the concept of social justice in Europe and puts it in parallel with economic results. All of us want to live in a fair and just society, where the relationships between individuals are democratic, that includes the same opportunities and social privileges or an equitable distribution of wealth. In this context, is it true that a high level of economic growth has as consequence a high level for social justice? We want to see if this supposition is valid for European countries and also to spot the Romanian position with reference to social justice in conjunction to economic growth.*

**Key words:** social justice, composite indices, regression

**J.E.L. classification:** D63, O52

### 1. Introduction

The concept of social justice is not a new one, but the procedures for measuring it change time to time. The researchers want to include new aspects that reflect social problems in terms of fairness and justice.

In the ancient philosophy the concept of social justice appears in Plato, Aristotle and Socrates. They gave special importance to the idea of justice; for them social justice meant goodness and it was seen like the ideal of perfection in human relations. (Aristotle, 1998) (Plato, 1986) (Plato, 1975)

A remarkable political philosopher, John Rawls, who developed his ideas in the second half of the twentieth century, discussed the theory of justice as fairness. His theory presents the principles of justice required in order to govern a modern social order, taking into account the fact that all persons are free and equal. (Rawls, 2011)

Our contemporary concept of social justice starts from the assumption that the aim of present human structures is to create equal opportunities for a sustainable social market economy. This concept promotes equal opportunities through the development of individual capabilities to the detriment of distributive justice. (Schraad-Tischler, 2016, p.77)

Also, we mention that all religions of the world debate in their doctrine the issue of social justice, but the concept is approached differently from one religion to another.

### 2. Measuring the Social Justice

At the European level, The Social Justice Index is a common tool used for measuring the social justice problems. This is a composite indices, which has the next six main components: poverty preventions, social cohesions and non-discrimination, labour market access, equitable education, intergenerational justice and health.

It comprises 28 quantitative and 8 qualitative indicators. The weight of the six directions is different. So, the dimension of poverty is the most powerful, with a triple weight, followed by access to the labour market and to equitable education with double weight. The other three dimensions are included in indices at the simple weigh. The scores for Social Justice Index are between 1 and 10, where 1 is the worst and 10 is the best.

### 3. Social Justice Index for EU countries – some comparisons

As we mentioned above, the values for Social Justice Index are between 1 for the countries where the social justice is almost absent and 10 for the countries where the social justice is the best.

The latest published Index of Social Justice is calculated for the year 2017. The values index higher than 7 are for Denmark, Sweden and Finland in order. The EU average for index is 5.85, with 0.10 units higher than in the previous year. In the bottom of ranking are in order Spain, Italy, Bulgaria, Romania and Greece with the smallest values of index. Romanian occupies the penultimate position with an index value of 3.99 and it is followed only by Greece. The relative distance for EU average for Romanian is -31.79%. This value indicates that our country still has to work in the field of social justice and a flash analysis indicates that the components that pull us down the rankings are poverty prevention, equitable education and social-cohesion and non-discrimination.

Table no. 1 – Scores of Social Justice Index in dynamics

Country	Social Justice Index (weighted) in 2014	Social Justice Index (weighted) in 2015	Social Justice Index (weighted) in 2016	Social Justice Index (weighted) in 2017	The Relative Distance to EU average (%) for 2017
Sweden	7.48	7.40	7.51	<b>7.39</b>	26,32
Finland	7.08	7.29	7.17	<b>7.31</b>	24,96
Denmark	7.17	7.13	7.16	<b>7.14</b>	22,05
Czech Republic	6.66	6.74	6.85	<b>6.84</b>	16,92
...					
<b>EU Average</b>	5.62	5.63	5.75	<b>5.85</b>	0,00
...					
Spain	4.78	4.75	4.76	<b>4.96</b>	-15,21
Italy	4.69	4.69	4.80	<b>4.84</b>	-17,26
Bulgaria	3.83	3.85	4.03	<b>4.19</b>	-28,38
<b>Romania</b>	<b>3.72</b>	<b>3.54</b>	<b>3.91</b>	<b>3.99</b>	-31,79
Greece	3.58	3.64	3.66	<b>3.70</b>	-36,75

Source: Social Justice in the EU – Index Report 2017 and own calculation

For the year 2017, the ranking shows us that for three countries the values are over 7, such as Sweden, Finland, Denmark, countries with the highest level for social justice. These are followed by other ten countries with a level of index comprised between 6 and 7. The average of indexes for all 28 European countries is 5.75, and this value divides the countries in two parts: 14 countries with values of Social Justice Index higher than European average and 14 countries with values below the European average.

A deep analysis of the components highlights the fact that between European countries there is a separation between northern countries and southern countries in terms of social justice, a considerable differentiation between them can be noticed. For example, when we analysed the components of Social Justice Index we discovered that the risk of poverty still represents a threat in the case of countries such as Greece or Spain. In this specific case the percentage of people being currently exposed to the risk of social exclusion and to the threat of poverty are in order 35.7% and 28.6%. [Index Report 2016]. In the case of young people or children, the situation is even worse. It is also worth mentioning the case of Romania and Bulgaria, here the situation is not favourable, the values 1.77 and 1.39 are much closer to 1 value, a fact which indicates serious issues regarding relative poverty and social exclusion.

In terms of equitable education access, the highest score is recorded for Denmark with a value of 7.84, followed by Sweden, Finland and Slovenia. The performance of these countries is explained by high level of public expenditure on early-childhood education and by efficient reforms in education. For other countries the low values demonstrate the need for reform in the

field of education in order to reduce the gap and to assure an equitable education. For example, Romania's score is 4.91 and this value ranks it 27th out of 28 countries.

The access to labour market is also an important aspect of social justice. The score for this component is highest for Denmark, Germany, United Kingdom and Austria. These countries have a high level of employment rate, around the value of 75%. Romania is situated on the 21th position, and the aspects considered are: employment rate (61.6%), unemployment rate (6,1%), youth unemployment rate (20.6%), older employment rate (42.8%), involuntary temporary employment rate (76,8%), low-skilled unemployment rate (7.3%), long-term unemployment rate (3.1%), in-work poverty rate (14,3%) and the ratio disabled/non-disabled for the employment rate (0.78 ratio).

Table no. 2 – The main Components of Social Justice Index in 2017

Country	Poverty Prevention Score 2017	Equitable Education Score 2017	Labour Market Access Score 2017	Social cohesion and non-discrimination score 2017	Health Score 2017	Intergenerational justice Score 2017	Social Justice Index (weighted) in 2017
Sweden	6.62	7.77	7.03	7.50	8.16	7.97	<b>7.39</b>
Finland	7.03	7.62	6.73	7.46	6.99	7.20	<b>7.31</b>
Denmark	7.00	7.84	7.63	7.31	7.43	7.19	<b>7.14</b>
Czech Republic	7.81	6.35	6.46	6.11	7.61	5.66	<b>6.84</b>
...							
<b>EU Average</b>	<b>6.33</b>	<b>6.28</b>	<b>6.07</b>	<b>5.96</b>	<b>6.37</b>	<b>5.47</b>	<b>5.85</b>
...							
Spain	4.35	5.32	4.10	5.88	7.04	4.75	<b>4.96</b>
Italy	4.16	5.40	5.17	4.88	5.79	4.10	<b>4.84</b>
Bulgaria	1.39	6.23	5.44	4.02	5.20	5.20	<b>4.19</b>
<b>Romania</b>	<b>1.77</b>	<b>4.91</b>	<b>5.50</b>	<b>4.33</b>	<b>4.21</b>	<b>5.18</b>	<b>3.99</b>
Greece	2.53	5.27	3.46	4.36	3.99	3.60	<b>3.70</b>

Source: Social Justice in the EU – Index Report 2017

Social cohesion and non-discrimination score take into consideration aspects like gender discrimination against people with disabilities, equality in parliament, the share of youth that are not in education, employment or in training, the employment rate of immigrants and their descendants. The performance is noticeable for Netherland, Sweden, Finland and Denmark. Poor performances are registered for Hungary, Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania and this reflects considerable difficulties in preventing discrimination for the vulnerable groups: adults and children infected with HIV, people with disabilities or the persons of Roma minority.

Regarding of health we remark that the highest ranks are for Sweden, Denmark and Luxembourg. The last places in the rankings are occupied in order by Romania, Greece and Latvia. This part includes problems like healthy life expectancy and qualitative indexes for measuring the health policy or health system outcomes.

Sweden, Denmark and Finland also lead the top of countries with the highest level of intergenerational justice, with score values higher than 7 and at the end of the list we find in order: Italy, Cyprus and Greece. So, once again, the Northern countries proved to be successful example in this continuous concern of maintaining the interests of younger generations and, at the same time, not diminishing the efficacy of their policies for the young and old alike. In the rankings Romania is on the 17th with score value of 5.18, the EU average score being 5.47.

#### 4. Testing the Relationship between Social Justice Index and Economical Results

In practice, there are a lot of indicators for measuring the economical results, at the macroeconomic level and microeconomic level. Here we refer at the performance on the macroeconomic level and to the specific indicators which highlight it.

One of the main macroeconomic aggregates, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) synthesizes the results of economic activity produced, on the specific country territory during a time level, usually one year. It includes the total value of final goods regardless the contribution of the internal or foreign subjects. We use here GDP at current prices, measured in euro per capita, because we consider that it is more relevant for comparisons.

Statistics have numerous tools to emphasize the relationship between the variables and we have chosen the regression analysis to study the relationship between social justice and GDP per capita. The regression studies the relation between two or more variables, as well as the discovery of the law relative to the form of the relations between variables (Jaba, 2002)

Here, the regression model is the simple factorial linear one. The mathematic relation is:

$Y = \alpha + \beta X + e$ , where Y is the dependent variable, X is the independent variable, and e is the error or residual variable, which is the sum of the influences of the other variables not included in the model on the variable Y.

$\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are the parameters of the regression equation, and  $\beta$  indicates the degree of dependence between the variables, that is by how much Y increases or decreases when variable X increases or decreases by a unit.

In our case the independent variable is the GDP per capita in Euro at current prices and the data sources for this indicator are Eurostat Databases. The dependent variable is Social Justice Index, with values between 1 the worst and 10 the best.

We investigated the regression analysis for two indicators, with values for 2016: GDP per capita and Social Justice Index. We started from the supposition that a high level of GDP determines a high level of social justice in Europe.

We have used EViews 7.1. to estimate the parameters of the regression model. The regression equation has as the factorial variable the value of the GDP per capita and as resultant variable the Social Justice Index (SJI). At the same time, we have considered that this model will include a free term, c and we used least squares as estimation method for parameters.

The EViews 7.1. processing provided the following results:

$$SJI = 4.87 + 0.000031227 * GDP$$

Using the T-Test, we found that the estimators of the regression equation parameters are significantly different from zero, and the results are guaranteed for a probability of 99%.

The value of adjusted  $R^2$  is 0.29, therefore, the intensity of the relation between the variables is low and we can conclude that the pecuniary aspect is not one of the most important elements that ensure the social justice.

## 5. Conclusions

Even if significant progress has been made at EU level with regard to social justice, practical reality shows that inequities persist within each member state and also between member states.

We also observe the separation between southern and northern countries in the field of social justice. There are some countries which occupy the first places for all Social Justice Index components: Finland, Denmark, Sweden, and Netherlands. In opposition, there are some other countries that consistently record low values of Social Justice Index components: Spain, Italy, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece.

For Romania, despite the high economic growth, the general level for social justice is low. The areas with the most serious problems are poverty prevention and health, areas that require profound reforms.

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