

Eurolimes

**Journal of the Institute for Euroregional Studies
“Jean Monnet” European Centre of Excellence**

University of Oradea

University of Debrecen

Volume 38

Cross-Border Cooperation – A Tool for Increasing Social Cohesion

Edited by
Constantin-Vasile ȚOCA, Mihai MARIAN, Klára CZIMRE

References by
Edina MÉSZÁROS & Salome DUNDUA



Autumn 2025



Eurolimes

Journal of the Institute for Euroregional Studies
“Jean Monnet” European Centre of Excellence

Founded by d by Professors **Ioan HORGA** (Oradea) and **Istvan Süly-Zakar** (Debrecen)

Editors-in-chief: **Cristina-Maria DOGOT** (*Oradea*) and **Klara CZIMRE** (*Debrecen*)

Autumn 2025

Volume 38

Cross-Border Cooperation – A Tool for Increasing Social Cohesion

Edited by **Constantin-Vasile ȚOCA, Mihai MARIAN, Klára CZIMRE**

Honorary Members

Paul Alliès (**Montpellier**), Iordan Bărbulescu, Adrian Miroiu (**București**), George Contogeorgis (**Athene**), I Frederic SPAGNOLI, Ernő MOLNAR oan Horga (**Oradea**), Anatoliy Kruglashov (**Chernivtsi**), Jarosław Kundera (**Wroclaw**), Ariane Landuyt (**Siena**), Giuliana Laschi (**Bologna**), Ewa Latoszek (**Warsaw**), Thomas Lundén (**Stockholm**), John Mearsheimer (**Chicago**), Frank Pfetsch (**Heidelberg**), Andrei Marga, Nicolae Păun, Ioan Aurel Pop, Vasile Pușcaș (**Cluj-Napoca**), Carlos Eduardo Pacheco Amaral (**Asores**), Daniela Preda (**Pavia**), Richard Sakwa (**Kent**), Dusan Sidjanski (**Geneve**), **Istvan Süly-Zakar** (**Debrecen**), Maria Manuela Tavares Ribeiro (**Coimbra**), Maurice Vaïsse (**Paris**), Alexis Vahlas, Birte Wassenberg (**Strasbourg**)

Advisory Committee

Czimre Klára, Kozma Gábor, Teperics Károly (**Debrecen**), Ioana Bordeianu, Mircea Brie, Alexandru Kiss, Alexandru Ilieș, Sorin Șipoș (**Oradea**), Renaud de La Brosse (**Reims**), Gabriela Ciot, Ovidiu Ghitta, Adrian Ivan (**Cluj-Napoca**), Vasile Cucerescu, Ludmila Roșca (**Chișinău**), Didier Francfort (**Nancy**), Salome Dundua, Teona Mataradze (**Tbilisi**), Tamara Gella (**Orel**), Cătălina Iliescu (**Alicante**), Goran Illik (**Bitola**), Roman Kalytchak, Khrystyna Prytula, Iryna Storonyanska (**Lviv**), Karoly Kocsis (**Miskolc**), Myroslava Lendel, Mykola Palinchak, Yaroslav Drozdovsky (**Uzhgorod**), Stephan Malovic (**Zagreb**), Maria Marczevska-Rytko, Bogumiła Mucha-Leszko (**Lublin**), Fabienne Maron (**Brussels**), Ivan Nacev (**Sofia**), Gabriela Carmen Pascariu, George Poede, Virgil Stoica (**Iasi**), Marcela Șlusarciuc (**Suceava**), Jan Wendt (**Gdansk**)

Editorial Committee

Alina-Carmen Brihan, Mariana Buda, Florentina Chirodea, Dorin Dolghi, Gabriela Goudenhoft, Cristina Matiuță, Mirela Mărcuț, Mészáros Edina, Anca Oltean, István Polgár, Alina Stoica, Luminița Șoproni, Marius Tătar, Constantin Țoca (**Oradea**), Ana Maria Costea (**București**), Nicolae Dandis (**Cahul**), Molnar Ernő, Péntes János, Radics Zsolt (**Debrecen**), Yaroslava Kalat (**Lviv**), Agneska Kłos, Marta Pachocka (**Warsaw**), Lyubov Melnichuk, Nataliya Nichayeva-Yuriychuk (**Chernivtsi**), Emanuel Ploeanu (**Constanța**), (**Oradea**), Silvia Sassano (**Siena**), Dina Sebastiao (**Coimbra**) Nino Tabeshadze (**Tbilisi**), Corina Turșie (**Timișoara**)

Executive Editor: *Constantin-Vasile ȚOCA*

Assistant Editor (English): *Ioana BORDEIANU*

Editorial Assistant: *Elena ZIERLER*

The full responsibility regarding the content of the papers belongs exclusively to the authors.

Address: University of Oradea

1st Universității Street

410087-Oradea/Romania

Tel/fax: +40.259.408.167

E-mail: cdogot@uoradea.ro, www.iser.rdsor.ro

***Eurolimes* is a half-yearly peer-reviewed journal. Articles and book reviews may be sent to the above-mentioned address. The journal may be acquired by contacting the editors.**

Journal of the Institute for Euroregional Studies (IERS) is issued with the support of the Action Jean Monnet of the European Commission

Oradea University Press

ISSN-L: 1841-9259

ISSN 2247 / 8450

Cuprins ♦ Contents ♦ Sommaire ♦ Inhalt ♦ Tartalom

Constantin-Vasile ȚOCA, Mihai MARIAN, Klára CZIMRE ⇔ Cross-Border Cooperation – A Tool for Increasing Social Cohesion – Introduction.....	7
I. Cohesive society and regional development.....	19
Claudia-Ana MOARCĂȘ ⇔ The European Social Model: Social Cohesion and Inclusion	21
Stoica Ionuț PETRE ⇔ Evaluating the Impact of E-Government on Social Cohesion in EU Border Regions.....	37
Zsolt-Botond BOTTYAN, Delia-Georgeta BEKESI, Csaba-Lajos BEKESI ⇔ Economic Growth, Demographic Decline and EU Cohesion: Employers’ Perspective on Labour Shortages in Bihor County, Romania	59
II. Cross-Border Cooperation – tool for increasing social cohesion	75
Alexandra COLȚA, Ludmila ROȘCA ⇔ The Role of Youth in the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in a Democratic Society.....	77
Yaroslav DROZDOVSKYY ⇔ Ukraine – EU Integration: Cross-Border Cooperation During Wartime	83
Simona FER ⇔ When European Identity Speaks English: Multilingualism and Social Cohesion in the European Space.....	89
III. Investigating the social support network.....	103
Aurora-Elena GAVRIȘ ⇔ Volunteering as a Quick Way to Achieve Social Solidarity ..	105
Reza TAVALLA ⇔ Beyond Harm: Exploring the Paradoxical Benefits of Health Misinformation on Instagram During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Iran.....	117
Johanna FARKAS, Kund REGÉNYI ⇔ Adolf Eichmann’s Psychological Examination Findings	135
Focus	143
George ANGLIȚOIU ⇔ Weimarisation of the European Public Space	145
Book reviews.....	155
Carmen UNGUR-BREHOI ⇔ Conflict Management and the Future of EU Foreign and Security Policy	157
Ioana BORDEIANU ⇔ Law, Migration, and the Construction of Whiteness: Mobility Within the European Union.....	163
Cristina-Maria DOGOT ⇔ The New International Challenges, some Inflection Points....	169
The Voice of Students	173
Tamás Kádár ⇔ Peace. EU and Peace. Between Aspiration and Reality – Interview.....	175
About authors.....	179

The papers presented in this issue of the journal were presented at the International Conference **“Solidarity, cohesion, and social support in the international context,”** held in Oradea on May 29-30, 2025, as part of the Jean Monnet Programme no. 101127134 – ERASMUS-JMO-2023-MODULE, Solidarity, cohesion, and social support at the border regions in Central and Eastern Europe.

Cross-Border Cooperation – A Tool for Increasing Social Cohesion

– Introduction –

Constantin-Vasile Țoca¹
Mihai Marian²
Klara Czimre³

To explore in depth the proposed title for *Eurotimes* Volume 38, *Cross-Border Cooperation – A Tool for Increasing Social Cohesion*, it is imperative to examine two essential concepts that operate within the European Union: CBC (Cross-Border Cooperation) and social cohesion. We cannot focus solely on the social dimension, as we are addressing economic, social, and territorial cohesion, whose main objective is the harmonious development of the entire European territory. According to Articles 174-178 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), these constitute the legal basis for the EU's cohesion policy,⁴ This being the European Union's main investment policy.

The contemporary European context, marked by profound transformations, complex challenges, and global crises (the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, the Russo-Ukrainian war, etc.), positions cross-border cooperation as a strategic and essential pillar, as well as a key instrument for strengthening social cohesion and promoting sustainability. Going beyond the economic dimension, these initiatives contribute to elements such as reinforcing cultural ties, reducing regional disparities, and creating a common space of solidarity among communities. All these aspects fall under the umbrella of the European Union's Cohesion Policy, which is founded on the principles of solidarity and the reduction of regional disparities.

The financial instruments proposed by the European Union to achieve its primary strategic objectives are implemented through the establishment of structural and investment funds, which include:

- European Social Fund (ESF),⁵ Created in 1957 with the Treaty of Rome as a solidarity mechanism, and since 2021 as ESF+⁶ representing the main instrument aimed at supporting measures to prevent and combat unemployment, develop human resources, and promote social integration in the labour market,
- European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF), the second fund created as a solidarity mechanism in 1957, alongside the ESF,
- European Regional Development Fund, established in 1975 when regional aspects were introduced,

¹ Associate Professor PhD, Faculty of History, International Relations, Political Sciences and Communication Sciences, University of Oradea. **E-mail:** ctoca@uoradea.ro.

² Associate Professor PhD, Vice Dean Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, University of Oradea. **E-mail:** mmarian@uoradea.ro.

³ Associate Professor PhD, Department of Social Geography and Regional Development, University of Debrecen, **E-mail:** czimre.klara@science.unideb.hu.

⁴ EUR-Lex, "Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion," accessed October 09, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/RO/legal-content/glossary/economic-social-and-territorial-cohesion.html>.

⁵ European Social Fund, accessed September 28, 2025, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:european_social_fund.

⁶ Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 Establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and Repealing Regulation (EU) no. 1296/2013, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 231/21, accessed August 31, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1057>.

- Cohesion Fund, created in 1994; in 1986, with the Single European Act, economic and social cohesion became an area of competence of the European Community. After 2008, the Treaty of Lisbon introduced a third dimension of cohesion, namely territorial cohesion⁷,
- European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF))⁸ with a budget of €6.14 billion for the EU's 2021–2027 financial framework,
- Just Transition Fund (JTF))⁹.

Reviewing the concept of Cross-Border Cooperation in Europe, we can state that CBC has evolved from local initiatives into a multi-level ecosystem, all supported by the European Union through specific policies, funds, and instruments. From a conceptual point of view, reviewing the main stages in the evolution of the concept of Cross-Border Cooperation, starting from Madrid 1980, where the emphasis was placed on good neighbourliness between local authorities, subsequently operationalized in EU policies through European Territorial Cooperation, ETC, Interreg, and EGTC, in general terms, CBC¹⁰ represents that structured interaction/cooperation between territories/actors/organizations located on either side of a state border/frontier, whose primary purpose is to achieve common objectives that transcend administrative boundaries, pursuing economic development, social cohesion, environment, culture, security, governance, and more.

The entire mechanism set in motion by European institutions through specific instruments for achieving EU objectives allows us to visualise a series of benefits such as economic gains, increased institutional capacity, and support for social cohesion. However, along with these benefits inevitably come challenges, including legal and administrative alignment, resource asymmetries, and resilience to crises. In the contemporary period, the 2021–2027 EU budgetary framework emphasises the green transition, digitalisation, inclusion, and governance, thereby consolidating CBC as a strategic tool for territorial integration and social cohesion in Europe.

At the same time, the European Union promotes cooperation between regions and countries with the aim of supporting socio-economic development and removing obstacles present at borders. Thus, we refer to European Territorial Cooperation, Interreg, which is structured around four main pillars ¹¹:

- cross-border (Interreg A),
- trans-national (Interreg B),
- interregional (Interreg C),
- outermost regions' cooperation (Interreg D),
- Interreg NEXT (neighbourhood) for cooperation with non-EU countries.

The 38th issue of the *EuroTimes* journal, entitled Cross-Border Cooperation – A Tool for Increasing Social Cohesion, is structured into three main sections plus a FOCUS article addressing a highly topical and sensitive theme within the European Union in the context of contemporary conflicts

⁷ European Parliament, *Cohesion, Agriculture and Social Policies* (Fact Sheets), 4, accessed September 19, 2025, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/erpl-app-public/factsheets/pdf-chapter/ro/ro-chapter-3.pdf>.

⁸ Council of the European Union, Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Regulation (EU) No 508/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council (EMFF) - Partial General Approach, Brussels, 14 June 2019, PECH 290, CADREFIN 281, CODEC 1232, accessed September 03, 2025, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10297-2019-INIT/ro/pdf>.

⁹ Regulation (EU) 2021/1056 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 Establishing the Just Transition Fund, *Official Journal of the European Union* L 231/1, accessed September 14, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1056>.

¹⁰ Sergei Golunov and Assel Bitabar, *Bridging Borders. Central Asian Cross-Border Cooperation in a Comparative Global Perspective* (Springer, 2025), 1, 7–10; Klára Czimre, *Cross-Border Co-operation: Theory and Practice* (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetem Kiado, 2006).

¹¹ Klára Czimre, *Development of Cross-Border Regions* (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem, 2013), 48–55; Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on Specific Provisions for the European Territorial Cooperation Goal (Interreg) Supported by the European Regional Development Fund and External Financing Instruments, accessed September 19, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1059>.

and global crises, entitled Weimarisation of the European public space, authored by George Anglițoiu. Fourteen professors, researchers, and specialists in the field contributed to the topic of the *Eurolimes* 38 volume, eight researchers/professors from Romania and six colleagues from European Union countries (two from the Republic of Moldova from the State University of Moldova, two colleagues from Hungary from Ludovika University in Budapest, respectively a colleague from Ukraine from the University of Uzhhorod, respectively a colleague from Spain). Among the eight Romanian researchers, four professors from the University of Oradea contributed to this *Eurolimes* issue, together with one colleague from SNSPA Bucharest, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, University of Bucharest, and AJOFM Bihor.

The first section includes three articles: “The European Social Model: Social Cohesion and Inclusion,” by Claudia-Ana Moarcăș; “Evaluating the Impact of E-Government on Social Cohesion in EU Border Regions,” by Stoica Ionuț Petre, and “Economic Growth, Demographic Decline and EU Cohesion: Employers’ Perspective on Labour Shortages in Bihor County, Romania,” by a team consisting of Zsolt-Botond Bottyan, Delia-Georgeta Bekesi, and Csaba-Lajos Bekesi. As we can observe from the topics proposed by these five authors, the three articles address highly relevant themes where the concept of social cohesion is central as a defining variable, each author linking it to a second research variable to ensure the studies’ relevance. The concepts connected to the main theme include: inclusion, e-government, and the economic and demographic dimensions.

The article “The European Social Model: Social Cohesion and Inclusion” underscores social cohesion and inclusion as core pillars of the European Social Model “is used to describe the European experience in the attempt of simultaneously promoting economic growth and social cohesion, but also for reinforcing the delimitation from the American model¹²” demonstrating through comparative analysis and empirical evidence that wage equity and inclusive practices are vital for democratic resilience and socio-economic stability¹³. It concludes that proactive, participatory social policies aligned with digital and green transitions are a strategic imperative for building a fair, united, and sustainable European Union. The case study is quite extensive and rigorous, analysing three European countries: Romania, Germany, and Sweden. It highlighted that the effectiveness of wage policies depends equally on regulation and the culture of social dialogue, as well as on the capacity for collective bargaining. Specifically for Romania, systemic reforms are needed to overcome institutional fragmentation and enhance organisational inclusion.

The European Social Model represents a balance between economic efficiency and social justice. Europe promotes a vision in which collective well-being is as important as individual freedom. In this regard, there are three arguments:

- Social protection as a pillar of human dignity,¹⁴
- Social dialogue – the foundation of stability, conform art. 151 al TFUE,¹⁵
- Adaptability in the face of contemporary challenges.

The fundamental values of the European Social Model can remain viable only if they are supported by concrete, participatory, and flexible actions. By addressing inequalities in a multidimensional way—income, gender, region, education, and ethnicity—we emphasise that social inclusion cannot be achieved without integrated measures adapted to the national context.

The paper “Impact of E-Government on Social Cohesion in EU Border Regions” aims to explore the role of e-government¹⁶ in strengthening social cohesion in the border regions of the European Union,

¹² Carmen Beatrice Păuna et al., *Modelul social european – implicații pentru România* [European Social Model – Implications for Romania] (București: Institutul European din România, 2006), 10.

¹³ Stefano Filastro, Klaus Grünberger, and Edlira Narazani, “The Impact of Minimum Wages on Income Inequality in the EU” (JRC Technical Report), *JRC Working Papers on Taxation and Structural Reforms*, no. 04 (2023): 4–5.

¹⁴ International Labour Organisation, *Universal Social Protection for Human Dignity, Social Justice and Sustainable Development* (International Labour Conference, 108th Session, 2019) (Geneva: International Labour Office, Switzerland, 2019), 285–304.

¹⁵ “Social Dialogue,” accessed September 12, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/social-dialogue.html>.

where a series of determining factors intersect, such as cultural, linguistic, and administrative ones. The qualitative case studies used in the methodological approach, focusing on projects implemented along the Romanian-Hungarian and German-Polish borders, examine how cross-border digital initiatives—such as joint platforms (medical, educational, local governance)—contribute to reducing perceived inequalities, improving access to services, and fostering regional identities. Any efforts to bring improvements through various measures also entail a series of challenges, among which we mention digital gaps, language barriers, differing legislative frameworks, as well as varying levels of digitalisation and different levels of digital education. However, the research argues that well-designed and well-developed e-government measures—such as interoperable electronic identification systems and multilingual service platforms—aim to reduce institutional gaps and can enhance trust in public authorities, as well as encourage civic engagement at the cross-border level.

From a policy perspective, recommendations include expanding cross-border digital pilot projects, investing in digital skills, and ensuring alignment between national strategies and the EU's digital and cohesion agendas. When discussing the connection between digital governance and broader social objectives, e-government can strengthen not only administrative coordination but also social relations in Europe's border areas, offering new perspectives to decision-makers and experts. Specifically, at the Romanian-Hungarian border, cooperation based on project-driven systemic integration can reduce the current gap and advance toward a more cohesive, resilient, and citizen-centred cross-border health ecosystem.

The article “Economic Growth, Demographic Decline and EU Cohesion: Employers' Perspective on Labor Shortages in Bihor County, Romania” starts from a paradox for Romania as a member state of the European Union, where there is substantial economic growth, one of the main factors being EU funds. Yet, in parallel, a severe demographic crisis is unfolding at the EU level¹⁷: the fertility rate remains below the replacement threshold, the share of people over 65 has increased to 21.6% (compared to 16.4% in 2004), while the proportion of young people under 15 has decreased to 14.6%. At the same time, the main focus of the study is Bihor County, located on the border with Hungary, and aims to examine the labour shortage faced by employers in Bihor—a county that is economically dynamic within the North-West Development Region, yet struggles with acute labour deficits despite high economic growth and low unemployment. The research adopts a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews, with the target group being staff from local companies.

From the research perspective, the study shows that Bihor's labour market is characterised by a structural shortage of workforce, which limits local development and competitiveness. As solutions, specific policies are needed, including curriculum reform and demand-oriented training, retention strategies and return migration, as well as calibrated immigration. Thus, public policies focused on education, vocational training, and economic incentives are essential levers for strengthening the local labour market. Coordination between the educational environment, authorities, and the private sector is a necessary condition for transforming the current dynamics into a coherent, predictable, and equitable system capable of supporting long-term economic and social development.

Within the second section we find 3 articles: “The Role of Youth in the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in a Democratic Society,” proposed by Alexandra Colța and Ludmila Roșca, “Ukraine – EU Integration: Cross-Border Cooperation During Wartime,” authored by Yaroslav Drozdovskyy,

¹⁶ Tamara Almarabeh and Amer AbuAli, “A General Framework for E-Government: Definition Maturity Challenges, Opportunities, and Success,” *European Journal of Scientific Research* 39, no. 1 (2010): 30; Albert Meije, Manuel Pedro Rodríguez Bolíva, and J. Ramon Gil-Garcia, “From E-Government to Digital Era Governance and Beyond: Lessons from 15 Years of Research into Information and Communications Technology in the Public Sector,” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (2018): 1–5.

¹⁷ Eurostat, “EU Population Increases for the 4th Consecutive Year” (News articles), 11 July 2025, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20250711-1>; Eurostat, “Demography of Europe – 2025 edition” (Interactive publications), accessed September 21, 2025, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/demography-2025>.

respectively “When European Identity Speaks English: Multilingualism and Social Cohesion in the European Space,” written by Simona FER.

The article “The Role of Youth in the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in a Democratic Society” aims to highlight the link between the level of civic and political participation of young people and the degree of solidarity and social inclusion in a society, with a focus on young people in the Republic of Moldova. The Republic of Moldova is a state facing numerous social, economic, and political challenges, but which strives through its own efforts—and more recently, due to the regional geopolitical context and the conflict in Ukraine—to accelerate its process of accession to the European Union and NATO. The research, through its theoretical-conceptual and methodological approach, demonstrates that young people in the Republic of Moldova, through their active involvement in decision-making processes, contribute to strengthening social cohesion¹⁸. A series of issues may arise in the inclusion of young people, such as external migration, disparities between urban and rural areas, or unequal access to educational and economic resources. Conversely, if young people engage in various participatory structures (youth councils, non-governmental organisations, volunteer projects), they support multiple dimensions—on the one hand, their personal development, and on the other, the strengthening of intergenerational solidarity and the prevention of social exclusion. The more actively young people participate in society, the more we can speak of a catalyst for an inclusive democratic society, where Cohesion Policy becomes an authentic and effective process of social integration. The integration of the European Union’s Cohesion Policy represents an essential element for the efficiency of state institutions in the Republic of Moldova and for the activity of officials in central and local public administration. Promoting participatory democracy in the Republic of Moldova constitutes a strategic objective of pro-European governance, based on leveraging the opportunities offered by Social Policy, Cohesion Policy, and EU youth policies. Implementing this model requires the active involvement of socio-political actors who are trained, aware of current challenges, and bearers of a political culture oriented toward participation, in line with the principles of good governance and the European mechanisms of transparency and accountability.

In the article “Ukraine – EU Integration: Cross-Border Cooperation During Wartime,” the author states that since Russia’s invasion in February 2022, Ukraine’s integration into the EU has been significantly influenced by cross-border cooperation with neighbouring EU states, particularly Romania. This research employs a mixed-methods analysis, combining quantitative data on trade volumes and costs with a qualitative assessment of legislative alignment and infrastructure, to evaluate the efficiency and strategic value of the EU’s “Solidarity Corridors.” In this regard, studies demonstrate the functioning of transport and logistics infrastructure for freight transport in the EU-Ukraine border zone, with significant data concerning Ukraine’s borders with Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland¹⁹. The study confirms that cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Romania, operationalised through the EU’s

¹⁸ Petru Negură, Victor Mocanu, and Mihai Potoroacă, “Coeziunea socială în Republica Moldova din perspectiva apartenenței, încrederii și solidarității sociale (2016–2018)” [Social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova from the perspective of belonging, trust, and social solidarity (2016–2018)], *Calitatea Vieții XXX*, no. 2 (2019); Rodica Ivașcu, Natalia Covrig, and Veaceslav Bătrînescu, “Coeziunea socială în Republica Moldova” [Social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova] (Chișinău: 2021), accessed October 03, 2025, https://progen.md/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CPD_Coeziunea-Sociala-in-Moldova-2021-1.pdf; Andrei Dumbrăveanu, “The Solidarity and the Social Cohesion in the Republic of Moldova in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic,” in *Formarea și consolidarea coeziunii sociale în Republica Moldova în contextual apropierii de Uniunea Europeană* [Building and strengthening social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova in the context of rapprochement with the European Union], vol. II, *Studiu sociologic* [Sociological study], ed. Victor Mocanu (Chișinău: Institutul de Cercetări Juridice, Politice și Sociologice, 2022), accessed October 08, 2025, https://icjp.asm.md/sites/default/files/publicatii/formarea_si_consolidarea_coeziunii_sociale_in_rm_vol_ii_2022.pdf.

¹⁹ Khrystyna Prytula et al., “Study of the Functioning of Transport and Logistics Infrastructure for Freight Transport in the EU-Ukraine Border Zone,” *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development* 8, no. 7 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd.v8i7.4494>.

“Solidarity Lanes,” has been essential in ensuring Ukraine’s economic resilience during the large-scale invasion. Furthermore, the author proposes three solutions at the end of the article:

- sustained funding for interoperability,²⁰
- long-term commitment to regional cohesion,
- redundancy for the future: investments in the Danube River fleet and in multimodal terminals²¹ from Constanța should be maintained to ensure that the Danube route remains a viable and highly scalable alternative for large-volume exports during any future disruptions in the Black Sea.

The article “When European Identity Speaks English: Multilingualism and Social Cohesion in the European Space” undertakes a threefold exploration, addressing the methodological, conceptual, and empirical dimensions within a unified framework of linguistic diversity at the European level. In the specialised literature, there is a series of studies that address the concept of multilingualism²² and social cohesion, including at the level of the European Union, we find specific references²³. The study examines contemporary multilingualism and its impact on global power structures, highlighting the role of English as a lingua franca and the challenges related to the preservation of regional and minority languages. The research explores the historical context of linguistic dominance, the influences of colonialism and globalisation, and the social, political, and cultural effects on linguistic diversity and cultural identity. The paper emphasises the need for a balance between modernising global communication and protecting linguistic pluralism to maintain social cohesion.

Within the third section, there are three studies: “Volunteering as a Quick Way to Achieve Social Solidarity,” authored by Aurora-Elena Gavriș; “Beyond Harm: Exploring the Paradoxical Benefits of Health Misinformation on Instagram During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Iran,” authored by Reza Tavalla, and “Adolf Eichmann’s Psychological Examination Findings,” signed by Johanna Farkas and Kund Regényi.

The article “Volunteering as a Quick Way to Achieve Social Solidarity” has volunteering as its central concept, studied at the level of Romania, where it has emerged in contemporary times as a social phenomenon, with a series of beneficial effects visible both at the individual and community level. When discussing individual development, several factors supporting this are identified, as follows: recognition of experience as professional experience, greater employability, a good source of self-knowledge, an additional source of stress, personal growth, development of time management and resource valorisation skills, experiencing the sense of utility, and the application of theory through practical experience²⁴. From a legislative perspective,²⁵ that has become much more flexible, allowing host organisations to have

²⁰ Daniel Hodapp and André Hanelt, “Interoperability in the Era of Digital Innovation: An Information Systems Research Agenda,” *Journal of Information Technology* 37, no. 4 (2022); Gabriel S. S. Leal, Wided Guédria, and Hervé Panetto, “Interoperability Assessment: A Systematic Literature Review,” *Computers in Industry*, no. 106 (2019), accessed September 29, 2025, <https://hal.science/hal-01982217/document>.

²¹ Vitalii Naumov, Igor Taran, Yana Litvinova, Marek Bauer, “Optimizing Resources of Multimodal Transport Terminal for Material Flow Service,” *Sustainability* 12, no. 16 (2020): 6545, doi:10.3390/su12166545; Simon Fuchs and Woan Foong Wong, “Multimodal Transport Networks,” *Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta Working Papers* 2022-13a (2022), accessed October 16, 2025, <https://www.atlantafed.org/-/media/documents/research/publications/wp/2022/10/05/13--multimodal-transport-networks.pdf>.

²² Gabriela Domilescu and Cosmina Simona Lungoci, “Strengthening European Identity by Promoting Multilingualism in Education,” in *Revista de științele Educației* 40, no. 2 (2019), DOI: 10.35923/JES.2019.2.05.

²³ CORDIS, “Mobility and Inclusion in Multilingual Europe,” accessed October 29, 2025, <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/613344>; European Commission, “Learning Resources for Teachers and Educators,” accessed October 30, 2025, <https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools>.

²⁴ Corina-Iulia Voicu and Sergiu-Lucian Raiu, “Volunteering Advantages and Difficulties in Romania,” *Postmodern Openings* 9, no. 4 (2018): 131.

²⁵ Resolution of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States Meeting within the Council on a Framework for European Cooperation in the Youth Field: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027 (2018/C 456/01), *Official Journal of the European Union* C456/1, accessed November 04, 2025, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:42018Y1218\(01\);](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:42018Y1218(01);)

multiple ways through which they can fulfil their missions. Contemporary societies, which are in constant transformation and where unforeseen events can suddenly arise due to the ever-changing international scene—with moments of crisis or urgent intervention situations—make volunteering increasingly valuable as a prompt human action that provides solutions. So, volunteering represents a form of social action that contributes to solving problems.

At the European level, we observe a growing interest in volunteering and consider that the importance of this form of organising human action will continue to increase, as it proves its efficiency and success over time. Thus, the European Union allocates a series of financial instruments in this direction, as follows:

- European Solidarity Corps (ESC),²⁶
- EU Aid Volunteers,²⁷
- Erasmus+ (Key Action 1), which includes mobility opportunities in the field of youth volunteering (youth volunteering),²⁸
- Funding instruments for volunteer teams (ESC Team Volunteering)²⁹.

Reza Tavalla, in the article “Exploring the Paradoxical Benefits of Health Misinformation on Instagram During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Iran,” uses qualitative research, based on semi-structured interviews, among the Iranian population, regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, more precisely the misinformation produced during this period. In the article, the author addresses a series of studies, research from the specialised literature, which are directly related to the research subject, as follows: : understanding information dynamics in crisis communication, the architecture of public opinion in digital spaces, psychological dimensions of pandemic communication, Instagram’s unique affordances in crisis communication, the misinformation paradox (beyond binary conceptualisations, trust deficits and alternative information ecologies, etc.). The research also brought a series of limitations, including:

- predominantly qualitative methodology, which provides contextualised understanding, but reduces the generalisability of the results,
- limited representativeness, reported to a small group with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic period, in addition the need for careful interpretation in order to avoid overgeneralisation,
- possible selection bias, recruitment through platforms can generate homogeneity,
- limited diversity of experiences,
- limited temporal focus, the need for quantitative and qualitative research for the purpose of validation and extension,
- extension research sample and its diversification.

Thus, in conclusion, in contexts of institutional distrust, disinformation on social media is not only a threat, but also fulfils essential psychological and social functions – it provides agency, reduces anxiety, creates community and meaning. To combat the negative effects, crisis communication strategies

Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament], Lege nr. 78 din 24 iunie 2014 privind reglementarea activității de voluntariat în România [Law no. 78 of June 24, 2014 regarding the regulation of volunteering activity in Romania], accessed November 21, 2025, <https://legislatie.just.ro/public/DetaliiDocument/159292>; “Volunteering Charter. European Charter in the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers,” accessed November 21, 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/volunteering_charter_en.pdf.

²⁶ European Commission, “2025 European Solidarity Corps Calls Now Published on the Funding & Tender Portal,” accessed November 22, 2025, https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/2025-european-solidarity-corps-calls-now-published-funding-tender-portal-2024-12-04_en; European Commission, “European Solidarity Corps,” accessed November 22, 2025, https://social-economy-gateway.ec.europa.eu/eu-funding-programmes/european-solidarity-corps_en.

²⁷ European Commission, “EU Aid Volunteers Programme,” accessed November 22, 2025, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/eauid>.

²⁸ Erasmus+, accessed November 22, 2025, <https://www.erasmusplus.ro/>.

²⁹ “Funding for Volunteering Teams in High Priority Areas,” accessed November 22, 2025, <https://eufundingportal.eu/funding-for-volunteering-teams-in-high-priority-areas/>.

must go beyond simple information correction and respond to these human needs, integrating emotional support, social cohesion and empowerment processes alongside accurate information.

The last article, that of Johanna Farkas and Kund Regényi, focuses on “Adolf Eichmann’s Psychological Examination Findings,” and uses quantitative and qualitative methods that have in the foreground a striking personality Adolf Eichmann, a key figure in the deportation of Jews from Hungary. As is known, the subject of the Jewish community was, is and will be a topical subject due to the magnitude given by history, as well as its socio-economic and political implications. This article approaches a subject in the psychological direction, of the specific methodology through the application of various tests to highlight the personality under study. A series of limitations are listed by the authors on the basis of the research undertaken: no single method can morally explain collective crimes, projective techniques are useful, but require caution and validation through interviews, multiple tests and institutional context. the profile indicates vulnerabilities and styles, does not predict actions outside a favourable environment, clinical language should not obscure moral responsibility, the analysis is based on public sources and conservative interpretations, without full details from primary protocols.

In conclusion, the research shows us that Eichmann’s mind was neither an unfathomable abyss, nor a banal “emptiness,” but a rigid, anxious and emotionally reduced system, oriented towards rules and order, capable of transforming violence into bureaucratic procedures. Understanding this mechanism does not excuse the facts, but explains how administrative roles, institutional incentives and constrained personalities can converge towards mass murder. Thus, clinical analysis complements, without replacing, historical and legal perspectives.

George Anglițoiu, through the article “Weimarisation of the European Public Space,” analyses the phenomenon of Weimarisation as a process of erosion of European democracy, comparable to the collapse of the Weimar Republic during the interwar period. The author argues that, similar to the 1920s–1930s, the rise of extremism, political polarisation, and the manipulation of history threaten the stability of the EU. The concept of *totalism* is central, describing radical ideologies that reject centrism and pluralism, favouring charismatic leaders and illiberal solutions.

The study highlights:

- Historical and current causes: economic pressure, identity crisis, populism, external influences (Putinisation, Trumpisation);
- Major risks: weakening of democratic institutions, personalisation of power, proliferation of fake news and propaganda;
- Historical parallels: the failure of Weimar due to Nazi and Communist extremes, as well as post-Versailles revisionism;
- Contemporary impact: rise of radicalism in the EU, decline of the political centre, replication of MAGA and Brexit phenomena;
- External and internal factors: charismatic autocrats, businessocracy (e.g., Elon Musk), instrumentalisation of history and technology.

The author also proposes a series of solutions, among which are: rigorous civic education, respect for the rule of law, political dialogue, combating extremism through democratic means, and strengthening pluralism. As a conclusion, the author argues that Weimarisation represents a structural threat to the European public space, and preventing it requires solidarity, moderation, and the reaffirmation of democratic values.

In conclusion, *Eurotimes* volume 38, *Cross-Border Cooperation: A Tool for Increasing Social Cohesion*, represents a heterogeneous but comprehensive volume addressing timely and relevant themes within the proposed topic. All these dimensions and concepts were analysed through the lens of current policies and regulations, with references to funds and specific instruments, all carried out under the auspices of social cohesion and supported by targeted studies at the border, also addressing the concept of CBC.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Almarabeh, Tamara, and Amer AbuAli. "A General Framework for E-Government: Definition Maturity Challenges, Opportunities, and Success." *European Journal of Scientific Research* 39, no. 1 (2010): 29–42.
- CORDIS. "Mobility and Inclusion in Multilingual Europe." Accessed October 29, 2025. <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/613344>.
- Council of the European Union. Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Regulation (EU) No 508/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council (EMFF) - Partial General Approach. Brussels, 14 June 2019, PECH 290, CADREFIN 281, CODEC 1232. Accessed September 03, 2025. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10297-2019-INIT/ro/pdf>
- Czimre, Klára. *Development of Cross-Border Regions*. Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem, 2013.
- Czimre, Klára. *Cross-Border Co-operation: Theory and Practice*. Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiado, 2006.
- Domilescu, Gabriela, and Cosmina Simona Lungoci. "Strengthening European Identity by Promoting Multilingualism in Education." *Revista de Științele Educației* 40, no. 2 (2019): 57–75. DOI: 10.35923/JES.2019.2.05.
- Dumbrăveanu, Andrei. "The Solidarity and the Social Cohesion in the Republic of Moldova in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic." In *Formarea și consolidarea coeziunii sociale în Republica Moldova în contextual apropierei de Uniunea Europeană [Building and strengthening social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova in the context of rapprochement with the European Union]*. Vol. II, *Studiu sociologic [Sociological study]*, edited by Victor Mocanu, 44–63. Chișinău: Institutul de Cercetări Juridice, Politice și Sociologice, 2022. Accessed October 08, 2025. https://icjp.asm.md/sites/default/files/publicatii/formarea_si_consolidarea_coeziunii_sociale_in_r_m_vol_ii_2022.pdf.
- Erasmus+. Accessed November 22, 2025. <https://www.erasmusplus.ro/>.
- EUR-Lex. "Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion." Accessed October 09, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/RO/legal-content/glossary/economic-social-and-territorial-cohesion.html>.
- European Commission. "EU Aid Volunteers Programme." Accessed November 22, 2025. <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/euaid>.
- European Commission. "European Solidarity Corps." Accessed November 22, 2025. https://social-economy-gateway.ec.europa.eu/eu-funding-programmes/european-solidarity-corps_en.
- European Commission. "Learning Resources for Teachers and Educators." Accessed October 30, 2025. <https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools>.
- European Commission. "2025 European Solidarity Corps Calls Now Published on the Funding & Tender Portal." Accessed November 22, 2025. https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/2025-european-solidarity-corps-calls-now-published-funding-tender-portal-2024-12-04_en
- European Parliament. *Cohesion, Agriculture and Social Policies. Fact Sheets*. Accessed September 19, 2025. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/erpl-app-public/factsheets/pdf-chapter/ro/ro-chapter-3.pdf>.
- European Social Fund. Accessed September 28, 2025. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:european_social_fund.
- Eurostat. "Demography of Europe – 2025 edition." Interactive publications. Accessed September 21, 2025. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/demography-2025>.
- Eurostat. "EU Population Increases for the 4th Consecutive Year." News articles, 11 July 2025. Accessed September 21, 2025. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20250711-1>.
- Filauro, Stefano, Klaus Grünberger, and Edlira Narazani. "The Impact of Minimum Wages on Income Inequality in the EU." JRC Technical Report. JRC Working Papers on Taxation and Structural Reforms, no. 04 (2023).

- Fuchs, Simon, and Woan Foong Wong. "Multimodal Transport Networks." Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta Working Papers 2022-13a (2022). Accessed October 16, 2025. <https://www.atlantafed.org/-/media/documents/research/publications/wp/2022/10/05/13--multimodal-transport-networks.pdf>.
- "Funding for Volunteering Teams in High Priority Areas." Accessed November 22, 2025. <https://eufundingportal.eu/funding-for-volunteering-teams-in-high-priority-areas/>.
- Golunov, Sergei, and Assel Bitabar. *Bridging Borders. Central Asian Cross-Border Cooperation in a Comparative Global Perspective*. Springer, 2025.
- Hodapp, Daniel, and André Hanelt. "Interoperability in the Era of Digital Innovation: An Information Systems Research Agenda." *Journal of Information Technology* 37, no. 4 (2022): 404–427.
- International Labour Organisation. *Universal Social Protection for Human Dignity, Social Justice and Sustainable Development*. International Labour Conference, 108th Session, 2019. Geneva: International Labour Office, Switzerland, 2019).
- Ivașcu, Rodica, Natalia Covrig, and Veaceslav Bătrînescu. "Coeziunea socială în Republica Moldova" [Social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova]. Chișinău: 2021. Accessed October 03, 2025. https://progen.md/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CPD_Coeziunea-Sociala-in-Moldova-2021-1.pdf
- Leal, Gabriel S. S., Wided Guédria, and Hervé Panetto. "Interoperability Assessment: A Systematic Literature Review." *Computers in Industry*, no. 106 (2019): 111–132. Accessed September 29, 2025. <https://hal.science/hal-01982217/document>.
- Meije, Albert, Manuel Pedro Rodríguez Bolíva, and J. Ramon Gil-Garcia. "From E-Government to Digital Era Governance and Beyond: Lessons from 15 Years of Research into Information and Communications Technology in the Public Sector." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (2018): 1–5.
- Naumov, Vitalii, Igor Taran, Yana Litvinova, and Marek Bauer. "Optimizing Resources of Multimodal Transport Terminal for Material Flow Service." *Sustainability* 12, no. 16 (2020): 6545. doi:10.3390/su12166545.
- Negură, Petru, Victor Mocanu, and Mihai Potoroacă. "Coeziunea socială în Republica Moldova din perspectiva apartenenței, încrederii și solidarității sociale (2016–2018)" [Social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova from the perspective of belonging, trust, and social solidarity (2016–2018)]. *Calitatea Vieții XXX*, no. 2 (2019): 162–188.
- Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament]. *Lege nr. 78 din 24 iunie 2014 privind reglementarea activității de voluntariat în România* [Law no. 78 of June 24, 2014 regarding the regulation of volunteering activity in Romania]. Accessed November 21, 2025. <https://legislatie.just.ro/public/DetaliiDocument/159292>.
- Păuna, Carmen Beatrice, Lucian-Liviu Albu, Mariana Stanciu, Valentina Vasile, and Florin Marius Pavelescu. *Modelul social european – implicații pentru România* [European Social Model – Implications for Romania]. București: Institutul European din România, 2006.
- Prytula, Khrystyna, Yaroslava Kalat, Joanna Kurowska-Pysz, Mariana Melnyk, Anna Maksymenko, Iryna Leshchukh, and Constantin-Vasile Țoca. "Study of the Functioning of Transport and Logistics Infrastructure for Freight Transport in the EU-Ukraine Border Zone." *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development* 8, no. 7 (2024): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd.v8i7.4494>.
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1056 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 Establishing the Just Transition Fund. *Official Journal of the European Union* L 231/1. Accessed September 14, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1056>.
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 Establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and Repealing Regulation (EU) no. 1296/2013. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 231/21. Accessed August 31, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1057>.
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on Specific Provisions for the European Territorial Cooperation Goal (Interreg) Supported by the European

- Regional Development Fund and External Financing Instruments. Accessed September 19, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1059>.
- Resolution of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States Meeting within the Council on a Framework for European Cooperation in the Youth Field: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027 (2018/C 456/01). Official Journal of the European Union C456/1. Accessed November 04, 2025. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:42018Y1218\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:42018Y1218(01)).
- “Social Dialogue.” Accessed September 12, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/social-dialogue.html>.
- Voicu, Corina-Iulia, and Sergiu-Lucian Raiu. “Volunteering Advantages and Difficulties in Romania.” *Postmodern Openings* 9, no. 4 (2018): 122–139.
- “Volunteering Charter. European Charter in the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers.” Accessed November 21, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/volunteering_charter_en.pdf.

I. Cohesive society and regional development

Claudia-Ana MOARCĂȘ (București) ◀▶ *The European Social Model: Social Cohesion and Inclusion*

Stoica Ionuț PETRE (Iași) ◀▶ *Evaluating the Impact of E-Government on Social Cohesion in EU Border Regions*

Zsolt-Botond BOTTYAN, Delia-Georgeta BEKESI, Csaba-Lajos BEKESI (Oradea) ◀▶ *Economic Growth, Demographic Decline and EU Cohesion: Employers' Perspective on Labour Shortages in Bihor County, Romania*

The European Social Model: Social Cohesion and Inclusion

Claudia-Ana MOARCĂŞ³⁰

Abstract

This study addresses the role of social cohesion and inclusion as fundamental pillars of the European Social Model. Through a multidimensional approach, it examines how minimum wage policies, wage transparency, and active social measures contribute to reducing economic and structural inequalities across EU Member States. The paper integrates theoretical concepts, comparative policy analysis (Romania, Germany, Sweden), and empirical data and concludes that equity in remuneration and inclusive practices are critical for strengthening democratic resilience and socio-economic stability. The paper highlights persistent challenges – including gender pay gaps, regional disparities, and barriers facing vulnerable groups – and emphasises the need for coordinated, transparent, and adaptable policies. The implementation section investigates employee perceptions of wage equity and social inclusion within Romanian organisations, confirming a gap between legal frameworks and workplace realities. In the context of digital and green transitions, the thesis advocates proactive, participatory social policies that align economic modernisation with inclusive growth. The findings reinforce that social cohesion is not merely a normative goal but a strategic imperative for building a fair, united, and sustainable European Union.

Keywords: *Social Cohesion, Social Inclusion, Equity, Solidarity, Social Justice, European Social Model*

I. Argumentum

Against a background of multiple and simultaneous challenges – globalisation, migration, technological transformations, and economic and health crises – the European Union (EU) reaffirms the principles of solidarity and social equity by strengthening the European social model. The fundamental dimensions of social cohesion and inclusion are examined by analysing the European legislative framework, relevant social policies, and their impact on vulnerable groups.

Starting from the growing importance of the social dimension in European integration against a backdrop of profound economic change, overlapping crises and increased risks of social fragmentation, we arrive at the reality that **social cohesion and inclusion** are no longer mere public policy objectives, but fundamental conditions for democratic stability and the consolidation of a fair and sustainable European Union.

In the context of the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the adoption of Directives (EU) 2022/2041 and 2023/970 on adequate minimum wages and wage transparency, the role of Member States in combating inequalities and protecting vulnerable groups is reaffirmed.

We consider **the interdisciplinary approach**, which combines economic, sociological, and legal analysis, conducive to understanding the complex phenomena of exclusion, discrimination, and social stratification. Through the lens of wage policies and protection mechanisms, we aim to highlight the concrete impact of European policies on citizens and on organisational realities in Romania.

We also appreciate that conducting an applied investigation, by researching employees' perceptions of wage equity and inclusion in the professional environment, allows the theoretical framework to be correlated with practical reality and contributes to the formulation of public policy proposals.

³⁰ Faculty of Law, University of Bucharest. **E-mail:** claudia-ana.moarcas@drept.unibuc.ro.

II. The European social model - a guarantee of balance between progress and solidarity

In a world marked by economic polarisation, political instability, and rapid technological change, the European social model stands out as a benchmark for balance between economic efficiency and social justice. This model is not just an institutional construct; it is an expression of Europe's fundamental values: solidarity, fairness, social inclusion, human dignity, and the protection of fundamental rights. In the face of contemporary challenges, the European social model must be defended and adapted as a guarantee of social cohesion and democratic stability. The European social model is a set of principles, policies, and institutions that define how European countries manage the relationship between the economy, society, and the state.

The European social model is often seen as **an example of a balance between economic efficiency and social justice**. In contrast to more liberal models, such as the American model, Europe promotes a vision in which **collective well-being** is as important as **individual freedom**.

Argument 1: Social protection as a pillar of human dignity

One of the central elements of the European social model is its extensive social protection system. Universal access to health care, education, and social insurance is not treated as a privilege but as a fundamental right of citizens. These policies help reduce inequalities and prevent social exclusion, giving everyone the chance to actively participate in the economic and civic life of society³¹.

Argument 2: Social dialogue – the foundation of stability

Another defining feature is the social dialogue among governments, trade unions, and employers. This mechanism allows for fair negotiation of working conditions and helps to avoid major social conflicts. In countries such as Germany and Sweden, this model has led to a culture of consensus and a high-performing economy without sacrificing employees' rights³².

Argument 3: Adaptability in the face of contemporary challenges

Although the European social model faces serious challenges, like an aging population, migration, and digitalisation, it has the capacity to adapt. Labour reforms, investments in digital education, and policies to integrate migrants are examples of proactive responses³³. Unlike more liberal models, which emphasise individual responsibility, Europe continues to invest in collective well-being³⁴. Critics argue that the European social model is costly and rigid, affecting economic competitiveness. However, studies show that countries with strong social systems have more resilient economies and higher levels of life satisfaction. Furthermore, investment in social protection is not an expenditure, but an investment in human capital. Although Romania allocates a lower percentage of GDP to social protection than the EU average, investments in education and health have shown positive effects on regional development and social mobility³⁵.

The common framework of the model respects the specific characteristics of the Member States:

³¹ European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Establishing a European Pillar of Social Rights, COM(2017) 250 final, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/european-pillar-of-social-rights.html>.

³² Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton University Press, 1990).

³³ Daniel Alonso Soto, "Technology and the Future of Work in Emerging Economies: What is Different", *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, no. 236, 2022, accessed October 21, 2025, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2020/01/technology-and-the-future-of-work-in-emerging-economies_f36b00ab/55354f8f-en.pdf.

³⁴ "Quality of Life Indicators – Material Living Conditions," *Eurostat*, 2023, accessed August 29, 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Quality_of_life_indicators_-_material_living_conditions.

³⁵ Marin Pana, "Modele sociale europene. Și observații pentru România" [European social models. And observations for Romania], *Cursdeguvernare.ro*, 15 February 2013, <https://cursdeguvernare.ro/modelele-sociale-europene-si-observatii-pentru-romania.html>.

Country	Type of model	Main features
Sweden	Nordic	Strong welfare state, high taxes, equality
Germany	Corporatist	Contribution-based social insurance, social dialogue
France	Universalist	Extensive public services, broad social protection
Romania	In transition	Ongoing reform, challenges in implementation

In conclusion, the European social model is not perfect, but it is deeply necessary and offers an alternative vision to extreme individualism, promoting a society in which no one is left behind. In an age of uncertainty, this model remains a beacon of balance between progress and solidarity, an expression of European identity built on democratic and humanist values. Although it faces major challenges, it stands as a pillar of stability and cohesion in Europe. The future of this model depends on the ability of states to adapt it to new realities without compromising its essence.

II.1 Concepts

The European social model is a complex normative and practical construct that, unlike other economic and social paradigms, is not limited to market mechanisms, as it actively promotes the intervention of the state, European institutions, and social partners in reducing inequalities and ensuring inclusion.

The social model is a hybrid model, at the intersection of economic liberalism, social justice, and participatory democracy, and aims to ensure not only prosperity but also sustainable social cohesion³⁶. The development of the European social model has gone through several stages, as follows:

- 1950s–1970s: social policy was marginally integrated into the process of community building and was subordinate to the common market.
- The 1980s and 1990s: directives on health and safety at work, equal opportunities, and worker mobility are introduced; the European Social Fund is created.
- After 2000: integrated strategies such as the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Pillar of Social Rights (2017) define a coherent social architecture at EU level.
- Recent period: overlapping crises (economic, health, energy, security) have emphasised the need to strengthen the social component of the EU through policies to reduce exclusion, combat poverty, and protect vulnerable groups.

The key institutions promoting the European social model are the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the social partners. The interaction between these entities generates the legislative, financial, and monitoring framework necessary for the implementation of social principles.

II.2. The central components of the European social model

The basic pillars include: (i) universal social protection – access to essential services (education, health, housing); (ii) social justice and equity – combating inequalities in income, opportunities, and status; (iii) social dialogue – involving trade unions and employers in decision-making; (iv) active inclusion – the social and professional integration of marginalised groups; (v) mobility and labour rights – guaranteeing freedom of movement and protecting mobile workers.

The European Pillar of Social Rights (2017)³⁷ summarises these principles in 20 fundamental rights, grouped into three pillars: equal opportunities and access to the labour market; fair working

³⁶ See, in this regard, Jean Claude Barbier, “Systems of Social Protection in Europe: Two Contrasted Paths to Activation,” *JESP* 14, no. 5 (2024); Frank Vandenbroucke, “The EU and Social Protection: What Should the European Convention Propose?” *MPIfG Working Paper* 6, no. 2 (2002), accessed September 11, 2025, <https://www.frankvandenbroucke.be/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/72.pdf>; Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford University Press, 1999); Joseph Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future* (W. W. Norton & Co. Company, 2012).

conditions; social protection and inclusion. As Europe is marked by geopolitical tensions, economic pressures, and rapid technological change, the European social model offers a strategic vision based on balance and sustainability. Social cohesion and inclusion are becoming not only moral imperatives but also conditions for democratic stability, economic competitiveness, and societal resilience³⁸.

The digital and green transitions require a redefinition of social policies through investment in skills, gender equality, protection of atypical work, and intergenerational solidarity. The European social model, adapted to new challenges, can be the antidote to social fragmentation and exclusionary populism.

The European social model is constantly evolving, while retaining the core values that have made it so successful: dignity, solidarity, and universal rights. Social cohesion and inclusion are essential for a united, functional, and humane Europe.

III. Minimum and adequate wages – an element of social cohesion and inclusion in the European Union

III.1. Definition of minimum wage, adequate wage and wage transparency

The minimum wage is the minimum level of remuneration established by the law, below which no work performed in an employment relationship may be paid. It is a socio-economic policy instrument designed to protect low-income workers and promote a decent standard of living. In Romania, the minimum wage is updated annually by government decision, based on indicators such as inflation, productivity, and economic growth³⁹.

Adequate wages, according to Directive (EU) 2022/2041,⁴⁰ include both the existence of a minimum threshold and its ability to ensure decent living conditions. Adequacy is assessed in relation to: (i) the purchasing power; (ii) the cost of a basket of essential goods and services; (iii) the distribution of wages in the economy; (iv) the overall level of productivity⁴¹.

³⁷ European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Establishing a European Pillar of Social Rights. COM(2017) 250 final.

³⁸ Eurofound, *The Political Dimension of Social Cohesion in Europe* (Research Report, 25 April 2023) (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024), accessed September 09, 2025, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/all/political-dimension-social-cohesion-europe>.

³⁹ Paul Maarek and Elliot Moiteaux, “Polarization, Employment and the Minimum Wage,” *Labour Economics* 73 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2021.102076>.

⁴⁰ Directive (EU) 2022/2041 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on Adequate Minimum Wages in the European Union, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 275/33, 25.10.2022, accessed July 31, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2022/2041/oj/eng>. See also Parlamentul României, Lege nr. 283 din 13 Noiembrie 2024, privind modificarea și completarea unor acte normative, pentru stabilirea salariilor minime adecvate [Romanian Parliament, Law No. 283 of November 13, 2024, amending and supplementing certain legislative acts to establish adequate minimum wages], accessed July 31, 2025, <https://legislatie.just.ro/public/DetaliiDocument/290923>; Stratulat Albulescu Attorneys at Law, “Stabilirea salariilor minime adecvate” [Setting adequate minimum wages], 20 December 2024, accessed July 29, 2025, <https://saa.ro/ro/noutati/stabilirea-salariilor-minime-adequate/>.

⁴¹ “Noutăți aduse de Legea privind salariul minim adecvat: Protecția lucrătorilor și adaptarea la noile realități economice [New developments brought about by the Adequate Minimum Wage Act: Worker protection and adaptation to new economic realities], 10 December 2024, accessed July 31, 2025, <https://www.lugera.ro/blog/noutati-aduse-de-legea-privind-salariul-minim-adequat-protectia-lucratorilor-si-adaptarea-la-noile-realitati-economice/>; Simina Voiculescu, “Mecanismul de stabilire și actualizare a salariului minim brut pe țară a fost oficializat, dar acum trebuie pus în aplicare prin HG” [The mechanism for setting and updating the national gross minimum wage has been formalized, but now it must be implemented by government decision], *avocat.net*, 15 November 2024, accessed August 01, 2025, https://www.avocatnet.ro/articol_66901/Mecanismul-de-stabilire-%C8%99i-actualizare-a-salariului-minim-brut-pe-%C8%9B%C4%83-a-fost-oficializat-dar-acum-trebuie-pus-in-aplicare-prin-HG.html.

Wage transparency as regulated by Directive (EU) 2023/970⁴² is an essential mechanism for combating discrimination and promoting fairness in remuneration. It involves: (i) publishing the criteria for determining wages; (ii) reporting pay gaps between women and men; (iii) prohibiting wage confidentiality clauses.

III.2. Economic and social theories on the impact of wages on inequalities

Economic theories:

- The efficiency wage theory argues that higher wages can increase productivity, reduce absenteeism, and increase employee loyalty⁴³.
- The monopsony model: in markets with few employers, the minimum wage can correct bargaining imbalances and stimulate employment⁴⁴.
- Aggregate demand theory: raising the minimum wage stimulates consumption by low-income households and has positive effects on the economy.

Social theories:

- Social conflict theory (Marx, Therborn) stipulates that low wages perpetuate social stratification and reproduce structural inequalities.
- Capability theory refers to access to a decent wage and is a condition for the exercise of fundamental freedoms and social participation⁴⁵.

Empirical studies in Romania show that successive increases in the minimum wage have not led to significant job losses, but have contributed to reducing in-work poverty, especially among young people and unskilled workers.

III.3. Concepts of multidimensional inequality

Social inequality is not limited to income-related differences as it includes a range of interconnected dimensions that influence individuals' access to resources, opportunities, and fundamental rights. This approach, known as multidimensional inequality, allows for a more in-depth analysis of the mechanisms of social exclusion.

Relevant dimensions:

- a. Income – the unfair distribution of material resources, as reflected in wage differences and the ability to meet basic needs.
- b. Gender – persistent disparities in pay and professional advancement to the detriment of women.
- c. Region – geographical polarisation between developed urban areas and rural or peripheral regions.
- d. Education – the level of education influences social mobility and access to well-paid jobs.
- e. Ethnicity – ethnic minorities, such as the Roma community, face systemic barriers to employment, housing, and civic participation.

⁴² Directive (EU) 2023/970 of the European Parliament and the Council of 10 May 2023 to Strengthen the Application of the Principle of Equal Pay for Equal Work or Work of Equal Value between Men and Women through Pay Transparency and Enforcement Mechanism, *Official Journal of the European Union* L132/21, 17.05.2023, accessed July 28, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023L0970>. See also Ana-Maria Iordache, Sonia Bălănescu, and Ecaterina Boca, "Regulile UE privind transparența salarială: Cum ar trebui să se pregătească angajatorii pentru implementare?" [EU rules on wage transparency: How should employers prepare for implementation?], *juridice.ro*, 13 November 2023, accessed July 27, 2025, <https://www.juridice.ro/714289/regulile-ue-privind-transparenta-salariala-cum-ar-trebuie-sa-se-pregateasca-angajatorii-pentru-implementare.html>.

⁴³ Stiglitz.

⁴⁴ David Card and Alan B. Krueger, *Myth and Measurement: The New Economics of the Minimum Wage* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

⁴⁵ Sen.

These dimensions do not act in isolation but are cumulative and generate complex forms of vulnerability. Public policies must adopt an intersectional approach that considers the interdependencies among factors of inequality and aims at sustainable inclusion.

IV. European cohesion and social inclusion policies

IV.1. Foundations of cohesion policy

The European Union's cohesion policy is the main investment tool for reducing regional disparities and promoting harmonious development in all EU regions. Legally enshrined in Articles 174–178 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), this policy aims to strengthen economic, social, and territorial cohesion by supporting less developed regions; areas affected by industrial transition; and territories with geographical handicaps.

Cohesion policy is implemented through a set of structural and investment funds:

- European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) – for employment, inclusion, and education.
- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) – for infrastructure, innovation, and regional development⁴⁶.
- Cohesion Fund – for countries with GDP per capita below 90% of the EU average.
- Just Transition Fund (JTF) – to support regions affected by climate transition.

The ESF+, the Cohesion Fund, and the ERDF support projects aimed at social and professional integration, education, and combating exclusion. The EU's Inclusion Strategy 2021–2027 aims to ensure equal access to housing, education, employment, and health services. The protection of vulnerable groups is ensured through policies dedicated to young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs), migrants, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities, reflecting therefore the EU's commitment to an inclusive society. The EaSI (*Employment and Social Innovation*) program facilitates social innovation and local partnerships. In the current multiannual financial framework, cohesion policy has five strategic goals for the period 2021–2027:

1. A smarter Europe – through innovation and economic transformation.
2. A greener Europe – through investment in clean energy and reducing emissions.
3. A smarter Europe – through innovation and economic transformation.
4. A more social Europe – through the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.
5. A Europe that works for its citizens – through integrated local development.

These aims are supported by national and regional programs, as well as cross-border initiatives (Interreg), with a total allocation of over €392 billion until 2027.

IV.2. Social inclusion policies and their impact on Romania

Romania will receive over €46 billion through cohesion policy in the period 2021–2027, through eight national and eight regional programs that aim to: (i) modernise transport, health, and education infrastructure; (ii) support the business environment and innovation; (iii) reduce poverty and social exclusion.

According to official data, over the last decade, European funds have contributed to an increase of over 58% in GDP and a 10-percentage point reduction in the at-risk-of-poverty rate.

European cohesion and social inclusion policies⁴⁷ are essential pillars of the European social model and contribute to reducing disparities, promoting fairness, and strengthening a united and resilient

⁴⁶ “European Funds: Opportunities and Impact for Romania’s Development,” *InfoCons* (Blog, n.d.), accessed August 12, 2025, <https://infocons.org/blog/2024/05/21/2279/>.

⁴⁷ European Parliament Resolution of 6 April 2022 on the Start of the Implementation of the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy (2022/2527(RSP)), accessed August 21, 2025, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0113_EN.pdf; European Commission, *Ninth Report on Economic, Social, and Territorial Cohesion* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024), accessed August 29, 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/reports/cohesion9/9CR_Report_FINAL.pdf; European Parliament, “Economic, Social, and Territorial Cohesion” (Fact Sheet), accessed September 02, 2025, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/erpl-app-public/factsheets/pdf/en/FTU_3.1.1.pdf.

Europe. In Romania, these policies have brought about significant structural changes, but persistent challenges still require effective implementation, tailored to local needs and supported by strong partnerships.

IV.3. Social cohesion and inclusion policies in Romania: between European ideals and national realities

Social cohesion is defined as “*the ability of a society to ensure the well-being of all its members, reduce disparities, and avoid polarization*”⁴⁸. It involves solidarity, institutional trust, and civic participation. Social inclusion means actively bringing all citizens into economic, social, and political life, irrespective of their status⁴⁹. It is a multidimensional process aimed at combating exclusion and promoting equal opportunities. In Romania, these policies have been significantly influenced by the EU accession process and the adoption of European values of solidarity, equality, and human rights. However, their implementation has been marked by structural, institutional, and cultural challenges.

After 1989, Romania went through a difficult transition, with increases in poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion. Social policies were initially reactive and assistance-oriented, but gradually evolved towards more proactive approaches, particularly under the influence of European funds.

The national strategies adopted were: (i) *the National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction (2015–2020)*, which proposed integrated measures for vulnerable groups⁵⁰; and (ii) *the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion (2022–2027)*, which aims to combat discrimination and promote access to education, health, and housing⁵¹.

The Regional Operational Program and the Human Capital Operational Program have funded social infrastructure, vocational training, and educational inclusion projects⁵². Here are some examples of good practices applied in Romania using European funds:

- **Education:** programs such as “Hot meals in schools” and “After-school programs” have reduced school dropout rates in vulnerable communities⁵³.

⁴⁸ *A New Strategy for Social Cohesion* (Revised strategy for Social Cohesion approved by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 31 March 2004) (Council of Europe, 2004), accessed August 17, 2025, https://www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/revisedstrategy_en.pdf.

⁴⁹ European Commission, *Europe 2020. A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*, COM(2010) 2020 final, Brussels, 03.03.2010, accessed July 19, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:en:PDF>.

⁵⁰ Strategia națională privind incluziunea socială și reducerea sărăciei pentru perioada 2015–2020 [National strategy on social inclusion and poverty reduction for the period 2015–2020], accessed August 03, 2025, https://bucuresti.mmanpis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Strategia-nationala-privind-incluziunea-sociala-si-reducerea-saraciei-2015_2020.pdf.

⁵¹ Strategia Guvernului României de incluziune a cetățenilor aparținând minorității rome pentru perioada 2022–2027 [The Romanian Government's strategy for the inclusion of citizens belonging to the Roma minority for the period 2022–2027], *Monitorul Oficial al României*, Partea I, no. 450 bis (05.05.2022), accessed August 13, 2025, <http://www.anr.gov.ro/images/2022/Monitorul-Oficial-Partea-I-nr.-450Bis.pdf>.

⁵² Ministerul Investițiilor și Proiectelor Europene [Ministry of European Investments and Projects], “Studii și analize realizate prin asistență tehnică din Programele operaționale aferente perioadei 2014–2020” [Studies and analyses carried out with technical assistance from the Operational Programs for the period 2014–2020], accessed October 19, 2025, <https://mfe.gov.ro/minister/rapoarte-si-studii/2014-2020/>; “Dezvoltare regională. POR (2014–2020)” [Regional development. POR (2014–2020)], accessed October 17, 2025, <https://www.fonduri-ue.ro/por-2014>; “Capital uman. POCU (2014–2020)” [Human capital. POCU (2014–2020)], accessed October 17, 2025, <https://www.fonduri-ue.ro/pocu-2014>.

⁵³ Ministerul Educației, Direcția Generală Învățământ Preuniversitar Direcția Strategii, Evaluare și Monitorizare Curriculum Serviciul Învățământ Special și Incluziune Socială [Ministry of Education, Directorate-General for Pre-university Education Directorate for Strategy, Evaluation, and Curriculum Monitoring Special Education and Social Inclusion Service], Raport final privind stadiul implementării Programului – pilot “Masă caldă” în anul școlar 2021–2022, în cele 150 de unități de învățământ preuniversitar de stat, stabilite prin O.U.G. nr. 91/2021 [Final report

- **Employment:** projects have supported vocational training and labour market integration for NEETs, people with disabilities, and Roma⁵⁴.
- **Civic participation:** NGO initiatives, such as those of the FDSC, have promoted citizen involvement in local decision-making processes and community development⁵⁵.

The limitations and challenges encountered can be summarised as follows: (i) **institutional fragmentation**, highlighted by a lack of coordination between institutions and overlapping competences, lowering the effectiveness of social policies; (ii) **insufficient funding**, with budgets allocated to social policies often below the level needed to have a real impact, and the absorption of European funds remains problematic; (iii) **prejudice and cultural exclusion manifested** in discrimination against Roma, persons with disabilities, or other marginalised groups persist, affecting real inclusion.

Social cohesion and inclusion policies in Romania have made significant progress but remain subject to structural and cultural constraints. For these policies to be effective, an integrated, participatory, and sustainable approach is needed that harnesses local resources, involves communities, and promotes a culture of solidarity. In the European context where diversity and equality are fundamental values, Romania must transform social policies from bureaucratic instruments into real mechanisms for change.

V. *Comparative analysis of wage policies: Romania, Germany, Sweden*

Wage policies play an essential role in promoting social equity and reducing economic inequalities. Within the European Union, national approaches differ significantly depending on institutional traditions, the level of economic development, and the culture of social dialogue. This chapter provides a comparative analysis of wage models in Romania, Germany, and Sweden, highlighting their strengths, challenges, and impact on social cohesion.

1. **Romania – legal minimum wage and structural challenges**

The government sets the minimum wage following the dialogue with, and input from, social partners. Its impact includes: (i) reducing in-work poverty among young people and unskilled workers; (ii) pressure on SMEs and competitiveness.

Summing up challenges in this area reveal the lack of a predictable mechanism for updating and politically influenced arbitrary increases, which leads to deepening regional and sectoral disparities.

2. **Germany – tripartite commission and institutional balance**

The minimum wage is set by a tripartite commission (trade unions, employers, government). It is characterised by a transparent mechanism based on economic indicators and extensive collective bargaining in most sectors.

The impact is a moderate rise in the minimum wage and a reduction in gender gaps, while increasing the protection of vulnerable workers.

3. **Sweden – collective bargaining without a legal minimum wage**

In the absence of a legal minimum wage, it is collective agreements that set wages, which leads to a strong social partnership and extensive collective bargaining coverage (over 90%).

The impact is reflected in high wage equity, flexibility, and sectoral adaptability.

Comparative conclusions

Country	Type of regulation	Social partner involvement	Impact on equity
Romania	Legal, through Government Decision	Low	Average

on the implementation status of the pilot program “Hot Meals” in the 2021–2022 school year, in the 150-state pre-university educational institutions, established by Government Emergency Ordinance No. 91/2021], accessed September 09, 2025, https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/Raport_final_MASA_CALDA_2021_2022.pdf.

⁵⁴ “Capital Uman. POSDRU (2007–2013). Stadiul absorbției Fondurilor Structurale și de Coeziune la nivelul POSDRU” [Human Capital. POSDRU (2007–2013). Status of absorption of Structural and Cohesion Funds at POSDRU level], accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.fonduri-ue.ro/posdru-2007#rezultate>.

⁵⁵ “2020 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index. Romania, September 2021,” accessed September 20, 2025, <https://www.fdsc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2020-index-en.pdf>.

Country	Type of regulation	Social partner involvement	Impact on equity
Germany	Legal, tripartite commission	High	High
Sweden	Collective bargaining	Very high	Very high

V.1. Impact of social policies on the pillars of the European social model

The impact of wage policies on social cohesion is reflected in:

(i) reduction of in-work poverty

In the European Union, over 9% of workers are classified as “working poor”⁵⁶. An adequate minimum wage helps to reduce this phenomenon, particularly in sectors with precarious employment, such as services, agriculture, and cleaning.

(ii) combating regional inequalities

Member States with low minimum wages, such as Romania or Bulgaria, can reduce the gap to the EU average by adopting progressive adjustment mechanisms⁵⁷. This also contributes to economic and social cohesion between regions.

(iii) strengthening institutional trust

Wage transparency increases employees’ trust in employers and the legal system, contributing to institutional cohesion and social stability⁵⁸.

The impact of wage policies on social inclusion is reflected in:

(i) Promoting gender equality

The gender pay gap in the EU is around 13%⁵⁹. The Pay Transparency Directive provides concrete tools to identify and correct these discrepancies, contributing to the social inclusion of women.

(ii) Protecting vulnerable groups

A decent minimum wage supports young workers, migrants, people with disabilities, and people with low levels of education, helping their integration into the labour market⁶⁰.

(iii) Boosting economic participation

By guaranteeing a decent income, these policies encourage active participation in economic life and reduce dependence on social assistance by promoting individual autonomy and dignity.

In Romania, the gross minimum wage has increased significantly since EU accession, recording an annual increase of 13.7% over the last decade, so that by the beginning of 2025 it was expected to reach approximately 47% of the EU average wage⁶¹. However, living standards remain low in many regions and wage disparities persist. The gender pay gap is around 4.5%, below the EU average, but

⁵⁶ “European Union – In Work at Risk Poverty Rate,” accessed September 29, 2025, <https://tradingeconomics.com/european-union/in-work-at-risk-of-poverty-rate-eurostat-data.html>.

⁵⁷ International Labour Organization (ILO), “Minimum Wages,” accessed September, 29, 2025, <https://www.ilo.org/topics/wages/minimum-wages>.

⁵⁸ OECD, *Government at a Glance* (Report) (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2021), accessed October 03, 2025, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/06/government-at-a-glance-2025_70e14c6c/0efd0bcd-en.pdf.

⁵⁹ European Commission, “Gender Pay Gap Statistics,” March 2022, accessed September 02, 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Gender_pay_gap_statistics.

⁶⁰ Eurofound, *Minimum Wages in 2023: Annual Review. Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue* (Report) (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023), accessed October 09, 2025, <https://assets.eurofound.europa.eu/f/279033/19e6e2d42f/ef23019en.pdf>.

⁶¹ Sebastian Rotaru, “Minimum Wage in Romania Set to Increase – Romania Has the Highest Growth Rate of Minimum Wages in the EU over the Last Decade,” *Euractiv*, 15 November 2025, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/minimum-wage-in-romania-set-to-increase/>; Mihai Pelin, “European Minimum Wage in Romania,” *Radio România Internațional*, 15 November 2024, <https://www.rri.ro/en/news-and-current-affairs/today-in-the-news/european-minimum-wage-in-romania-id829890.html>.

significant in sectors such as IT, finance, and public administration⁶². The Romanian government started consultations with social partners on the transposition of Directive 2022/2041, and the National Agency for Equal Opportunities (ANES) launched campaigns on wage transparency. The Ministry of Labour also proposed mechanisms for automatically adjusting the minimum wage in line with productivity and the cost of living.

Challenges and limitations in this field relate to:

- i. **Differences between Member States:** minimum wage levels vary significantly, which may affect the consistency of the Directive's application.
- ii. **Resistance from employers:** some sectors argue that increasing the minimum wage may affect competitiveness and lead to an increase in undeclared work.
- iii. **Need for an effective monitoring framework:** the implementation of the directives requires clear mechanisms for evaluation, sanctioning, enforcement, and involvement of social partners.

In conclusion, the adoption of the directives on adequate minimum wages and wage transparency are decisive steps in strengthening the European social model. These measures contribute to reducing inequalities, promoting fairness, and strengthening social cohesion and inclusion.

For their impact to be real, rigorous implementation tailored to the national context and the active involvement of all social actors are necessary. Romania has the opportunity to turn these directives into effective instruments of social reform, for the benefit of its citizens and democratic stability.

V.2. Employees' perceptions of pay equity and social inclusion in Romanian organisations

In the context of promoting the values of the European social model, pay equity and social inclusion are central principles of a functional and democratic labour market. The transposition of Directive (EU) 2023/970 on pay transparency into the national law and the implementation of Directive (EU) 2022/2041 on adequate minimum wages require employers to take clear measures to correct pay inequalities and ease equal access to professional opportunities.

Some empirical observations concerning Romanian employees' perception and awareness of defining aspects of remuneration such as equity, minimum wage, transparency of salary scales, the degree of social inclusion promoted in the organisational environment, allowed the drafting of several conclusions that can be considered illustrative at the level of this category:

- **Salary transparency** is perceived as low, especially in the private sector.
- **Individual negotiation** prevails, to the detriment of collective agreements.
- **Gender discrimination** occurs subtly, through unjustified differences in bonuses or promotions.
- **Social inclusion** is not strategically integrated; actions are often occasional or symbolic.

The interpretation of the data highlighted the following aspects: (i) the lack of wage transparency indicates a deficit of institutional trust and organisational maturity; (ii) gender differences in remuneration reflect the need for corrective policies and internal audits; (iii) promoting social inclusion is still perceived as a voluntary practice rather than a management obligation; (iv) a significant proportion of respondents support the need for clear regulations on wages and a fair organisational culture.

⁶² Institutul Național de Statistică [National Institute of Statistics], "2.4 Câștiguri salariale" [2.4 Salary earnings], accessed September 30, 2025, <https://insse.ro/cms/files/women-and-men/1/bloc-2d.html?lang=ro>; "România are o diferență salarială între femei și bărbați de 3 ori mai mică decât media UE" [Romania has a gender pay gap that is three times lower than the EU average], *Economistul*, 12 March 2024, <https://www.economistul.ro/comunicat/romania-are-o-diferenta-salariala-intre-femei-si-barbati-de-3-ori-mai-mica-decat-media-ue-65834/#:~:text=Femeile%20din%20Rom%C3%A2nia%20c%C3%A2%8%99tig%C4%83%20%C3%AEn%20me die%20cu,mult%20sub%20media%20Uniunii%20Europene%20de%2012%2C7%25>.

More research reveals a clear need to improve wage transparency policies and integrate social inclusion into the culture of Romanian organisations⁶³. Most employees are open to regulations that clarify the remuneration process and promote equality.

As recommendations and as *lex ferenda*, we propose:

- developing **transparent salary scales** at the organisational level.
- organising **information sessions** on salary rights and gender equality.
- creating an **internal audit system** on salary fairness.
- integrating social inclusion principles into HR and CSR policies.
- active involvement of trade unions in the dialogue on salary scales and performance evaluation.

VI. Challenges and future directions

Despite EU progress in reducing inequalities and promoting social inclusion, structural, institutional, and economic challenges still limit the effectiveness of public policies. This chapter explores the major obstacles to strengthening social cohesion and proposes strategic directions for action in the coming period.

- **Legislative and institutional obstacles** include the fragmentation of competences between the European and national levels, which creates difficulties in transposing social directives.
- **The lack of a unified framework for monitoring** wage equity and social inclusion limits the comparability of data between Member States.
- **Underfunding of social services** and inclusion programs diminish the effectiveness of interventions, especially in disadvantaged regions⁶⁴.
- **Inefficiencies in wage policies** when about **minimum wage increases** that are not always linked to productivity put pressure on economic competitiveness.
- **Gender pay gaps** persist despite regulations on wage transparency; moreover, **wage compression** affects the motivation of skilled employees and can lead to labour migration.

Previously mentioned **emerging psychosocial risks** are to be added to this list:

- **The digital transition** may accentuate the polarisation between workers with digital skills and those who are technologically excluded.
- **The green transition** involves the restructuring of economic sectors, with an impact on employment in carbon-intensive regions.
- **The ageing population** and **external migration** put pressure on social protection systems and the labour market.

We believe that future strategic directions should focus on **integrated and cross-sectoral policies** ensured by **linking wage policies with education, health, and housing policies** with a view to addressing multidimensional inequality and **promoting active inclusion** through employment measures, vocational training, and support for social entrepreneurship.

Another set of measures should target **digitalisation and social innovation** by **creating digital platforms** for monitoring wage equity and inclusion indicators and **using artificial intelligence** to identify social risks and tailored interventions.

Strengthening social dialogue is imperative, as **the involvement of trade unions and employers** in the design and evaluation of wage policies, as well as **the extension of collective bargaining** and the promotion of public-private partnerships in the field of social inclusion, contribute to

⁶³ Ștefan Guga, “Salariul minim și traiul minim decent. De la mituri la oportunități” [Minimum wage and minimum decent living standards. From myths to opportunities] (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Romania, Syndex România, 2021), accessed August 30, 2025, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bukarest/17786.pdf>.

⁶⁴ Elena Zamfir, “Sărăcia și inegalitățile socioeconomice. Provocări pentru politicile sociale în România postdecembristă” [Poverty and socioeconomic inequalities. Challenges for social policies in *post-December* Romania], *Revista Calitatea Vieții* 32, no. 3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.46841/RCV.2021.03.07>.

the involvement of social partners in the cohesion and decision-making process in the field of social policies.

Proactive measures for vulnerable groups must continue programs dedicated to NEETs, people with special needs, migrants, and ethnic minorities, as well as the introduction of minimum inclusion incomes and integrated social services at the community level⁶⁵.

We believe that the current challenges require a rethinking of European social policies in terms of **resilience, adaptability, and equity**. Future directions must capitalise on the opportunities offered by digitalisation and the green transition, without leaving vulnerable groups behind. Strengthening social cohesion is not only a political obligation but also a condition for the sustainability of the European project.

VII. Instead of conclusions

As we have already emphasised, social cohesion and inclusion are essential pillars of the European social model, and policies on minimum wages and wage transparency contribute significantly to reducing inequalities and building a fair society. At the same time, current challenges require an adaptive, multidimensional, and participatory approach to make social rights a reality for all EU citizens.

The integrated approach to wage policies, inclusion tools, and institutional mechanisms demonstrates that social equity is not just a normative aspiration, but a condition for democratic functioning and sustainable development.

Firstly, the theoretical analysis clearly outlined the differences between minimum wage, adequate wage, and wage transparency, and highlighted their contribution to combating structural inequalities. In Romania, the transposition of European directives into national legislation, although valuable, requires institutional consolidation and adaptation to the specific social and economic context.

A comparative analysis of models in Romania, Germany, and Sweden revealed that the effectiveness of wage policies equally depends on regulation and the culture of social dialogue and the capacity for collective bargaining. In this regard, Romania needs systemic reforms to overcome institutional fragmentation and increase organisational inclusion.

Applied research has confirmed the existence of critical perceptions among employees regarding wage transparency, gender differences, and the promotion of social inclusion. The results suggest the need for proactive communication measures, wage audits, and management training in order to build a fair organisational climate.

Finally, frequently mentioned current challenges of digitalisation, green transition, migration, demographic changes require social policies to be increasingly cross-sectoral, resilient, and citizen-centred. The fundamental values of the European social model can only remain viable if they are supported by concrete, participatory, and flexible actions.

By addressing inequalities in a multidimensional way – income, gender, region, education, and ethnicity – we emphasise that social inclusion cannot be achieved without integrated measures that are tailored to the national context.

The practical section confirms the existence of shortcomings in the transparency of remuneration and in the organisational culture regarding inclusion, as revealed by the willingness of employees to support changes in this regard. Finally, future strategic directions are proposed in line with the digital and ecological transitions, emphasising the need for resilient, innovative, and inclusive social policies.

⁶⁵ Strategia națională privind incluziunea socială și reducerea sărăciei pentru perioada 2022–2027 [National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction for the period 2022–2027], accessed August 11, 2025, <https://sgg.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ANEXA-1-26.pdf>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barbier, Jean Claude. “Systems of Social Protection in Europe: Two Contrasted Paths to Activation.” *JESP* 14, no. 5 (2024): 633–642.
- “Capital uman. POCU (2014–2020)” [Human capital. POCU (2014–2020)]. Accessed October 17, 2025. <https://www.fonduri-ue.ro/pocu-2014>.
- Card, David, and Alan B. Krueger. *Myth and Measurement: The New Economics of the Minimum Wage*. Princeton University Press, 2015.
- A New Strategy for Social Cohesion*. Revised Strategy for Social Cohesion Approved by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 31 March 2004. Council of Europe, 2004. Accessed August 17, 2025. https://www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/revisedstrategy_en.pdf.
- “Dezvoltare regională. POR (2014–2020)” [Regional development. POR (2014–2020)]. Accessed October 17, 2025. <https://www.fonduri-ue.ro/por-2014>.
- Directive (EU) 2022/2041 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on Adequate Minimum Wages in the European Union. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 275/33, 25.10.2022. Accessed July 31, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2022/2041/oj/eng>
- Directive (EU) 2023/970 of the European Parliament and the Council of 10 May 2023 to Strengthen the Application of the Principle of Equal Pay for Equal Work or Work of Equal Value between Men and Women through Pay Transparency and Enforcement Mechanism. *Official Journal of the European Union* L132/21, 17.05.2023. Accessed July 28, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023L0970>.
- Esping-Andersen, Gøsta. *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Princeton University Press, 1990.
- European Commission. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Establishing a European Pillar of Social Rights. COM(2017) 250 final. Accessed August 12, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/european-pillar-of-social-rights.html>.
- Eurofound. *The Political Dimension of Social Cohesion in Europe*. Research Report, 25 April 2023. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024. Accessed September 09, 2025. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/all/political-dimension-social-cohesion-europe>.
- European Commission. *Europe 2020. A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*. COM(2010) 2020 final. Brussels, 03.03.2010. Accessed July 19, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:en:PDF>.
- European Commission. “Gender Pay Gap Statistics.” March 2022. Accessed September 02, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Gender_pay_gap_statistics.
- European Commission. *Ninth Report on Economic, Social, and Territorial Cohesion*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024. Accessed August 29, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/reports/cohesion9/9CR_Report_FINAL.pdf.
- “European Funds: Opportunities and Impact for Romania’s Development.” *InfoCons*. Blog, n.d. Accessed August 12, 2025. <https://infocons.org/blog/2024/05/21/2279/>.
- European Parliament. “Economic, Social, and Territorial Cohesion.” Fact Sheet. Accessed September 02, 2025. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/erpl-app-public/factsheets/pdf/en/FTU_3.1.1.pdf.
- European Parliament Resolution of 6 April 2022 on the Start of the Implementation of the 2021–2027 Cohesion Policy (2022/2527(RSP)). Accessed August 21, 2025. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0113_EN.pdf
- Eurofound. *Minimum Wages in 2023: Annual Review. Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue*. Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023. Accessed October 09, 2025. <https://assets.eurofound.europa.eu/f/279033/19e6e2d42f/ef23019en.pdf>.
- “European Union – In Work at Risk Poverty Rate.” Accessed September 29, 2025. <https://tradingeconomics.com/european-union/in-work-at-risk-of-poverty-rate-eurostat-data.html>.

- Guga, Ștefan. “Salariul minim și traiul minim decent. De la mituri la oportunități” [Minimum wage and minimum decent living standards. From myths to opportunities]. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Romania, Syndex România, 2021. Accessed August 30, 2025. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bukarest/17786.pdf>.
- International Labour Organization (ILO). “Minimum Wages.” Accessed September, 29, 2025. <https://www.ilo.org/topics/wages/minimum-wages>.
- Iordache, Ana-Maria, Sonia Bălănescu, and Ecaterina Boca. “Regulile UE privind transparența salarială: Cum ar trebui să se pregătească angajatorii pentru implementare?” [EU rules on wage transparency: How should employers prepare for implementation?]. *juridice.ro*, 13 November 2023. Accessed July 27, 2025. <https://www.juridice.ro/714289/regulile-ue-privind-transparenta-salariala-cum-ar-trebuie-sa-se-pregateasca-angajatorii-pentru-implementare.html>.
- Maarek, Paul, and Elliot Moiteaux. “Polarization, Employment and the Minimum Wage.” *Labour Economics* 73 (2021): 102076. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2021.102076>.
- Institutul Național de Statistică [National Institute of Statistics]. “2.4 Câștiguri salariale” [2.4 Salary earnings]. Accessed September 30, 2025. <https://insse.ro/cms/files/women-and-men/1/bloc-2d.html?lang=ro>.
- OECD. *Government at a Glance*. Report. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2021. Accessed October 03, 2025. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/06/government-at-a-glance-2025_70e14c6c/0efd0bcd-en.pdf.
- Ministerul Investițiilor și Proiectelor Europene [Ministry of European Investments and Projects]. “Studii și analize realizate prin asistență tehnică din Programele operaționale aferente perioadei 2014–2020” [Studies and analyses carried out with technical assistance from the Operational Programs for the period 2014–2020]. Accessed October 19, 2025. <https://mfe.gov.ro/minister/rapoarte-si-studii/2014-2020/>.
- Ministerul Educației, Direcția Generală Învățământ Preuniversitar Direcția Strategii, Evaluare și Monitorizare Curriculum Serviciul Învățământ Special și Incluziune Socială [Ministry of Education, Directorate-General for Pre-university Education Directorate for Strategy, Evaluation, and Curriculum Monitoring Special Education and Social Inclusion Service]. Raport final privind stadiul implementării Programului – pilot “Masă caldă” în anul școlar 2021–2022, în cele 150 de unități de învățământ preuniversitar de stat, stabilite prin O.U.G. nr. 91/2021 [Final report on the implementation status of the pilot program “Hot Meals” in the 2021–2022 school year, in the 150-state pre-university educational institutions, established by Government Emergency Ordinance No. 91/2021]. Accessed September 09, 2025. https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/Raport_final_MASA_CALDA_2021_2022.pdf.
- “Noutăți aduse de Legea privind salariul minim adecvat: Protecția lucrătorilor și adaptarea la noile realități economice [New developments brought about by the Adequate Minimum Wage Act: Worker protection and adaptation to new economic realities], 10 December 2024. Accessed July 31, 2025. <https://www.lugera.ro/blog/noutati-aduse-de-legea-privind-salariul-minim-adekvat-protectia-lucratorilor-si-adaptarea-la-noile-realitati-economice/>.
- Pana, Marin. “Modele sociale europene. Și observații pentru România” [European social models. And observations for Romania]. *Cursdeguvernare.ro*, 15 February 2013. <https://cursdeguvernare.ro/modelele-sociale-europene-si-observatii-pentru-romania.html>.
- Parlamentul României, Lege nr. 283 din 13 Noiembrie 2024, privind modificarea și completarea unor acte normative, pentru stabilirea salariilor minime adecvate [Romanian Parliament, Law No. 283 of November 13, 2024, amending and supplementing certain legislative acts to establish adequate minimum wages]. Accessed July 31, 2025. <https://legislatie.just.ro/public/DetaliiDocument/290923>.
- Pelin, Mihai. “European Minimum Wage in Romania.” *Radio România Internațional*, 15 November 2024. <https://www.rri.ro/en/news-and-current-affairs/today-in-the-news/european-minimum-wage-in-romania-id829890.html>.

- “Capital Uman. POSDRU (2007–2013). Stadiul absorbției Fondurilor Structurale și de Coeziune la nivelul POSDRU” [Human Capital. POSDRU (2007–2013). Status of absorption of Structural and Cohesion Funds at POSDRU level]. Accessed September 21, 2025. <https://www.fonduri-ue.ro/posdru-2007#rezultate>.
- “România are o diferență salarială între femei și bărbați de 3 ori mai mică decât media UE” [Romania has a gender pay gap that is three times lower than the EU average]. *Economistul*, 12 March 2024. <https://www.economistul.ro/comunicat/romania-are-o-diferenta-salariala-intre-femei-si-barbati-de-3-ori-mai-mica-decat-media-ue-65834/#:~:text=Femeile%20din%20Rom%C3%A2nia%20c%C3%A2%C8%99tig%C4%83%20%C3%AEn%20medie%20cu,mult%20sub%20media%20Uniunii%20Europene%20de%2012%20C7%25>.
- Rotaru, Sebastian. “Minimum Wage in Romania Set to Increase – Romania Has the Highest Growth Rate of Minimum Wages in the EU over the Last Decade.” *Euractiv*, 15 November 2025. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/minimum-wage-in-romania-set-to-increase/>.
- “Quality of Life Indicators – Material Living Conditions.” *Eurostat*, 2023. Accessed August 29, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Quality_of_life_indicators_-_material_living_conditions.
- Sen, Amartya. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Soto, Daniel Alonso. “Technology and the Future of Work in Emerging Economies: What is Different.” *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, no. 236, 2022. Accessed October 21, 2025. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2020/01/technology-and-the-future-of-work-in-emerging-economies_f36b00ab/55354f8f-en.pdf.
- Stiglitz, Joseph. *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*. W. W. Norton & Co. Company, 2012.
- Strategia Guvernului României de incluziune a cetățenilor aparținând minorității rome pentru perioada 2022–2027 [The Romanian Government’s strategy for the inclusion of citizens belonging to the Roma minority for the period 2022–2027]. *Monitorul Oficial al României*, Partea I, no. 450 bis (05.05.2022). Accessed August 13, 2025. <http://www.anr.gov.ro/images/2022/Monitorul-Oficial-Partea-I-nr.-450Bis.pdf>.
- Strategia națională privind incluziunea socială și reducerea sărăciei pentru perioada 2015–2020 [National strategy on social inclusion and poverty reduction for the period 2015–2020]. Accessed August 03, 2025. https://bucuresti.mmanpis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Strategia-nationala-privind-incluziunea-sociala-si-reducerea-saraciei-2015_2020.pdf.
- Strategia națională privind incluziunea socială și reducerea sărăciei pentru perioada 2022–2027 [National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction for the period 2022–2027]. Accessed August 11, 2025. <https://sgg.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ANEXA-1-26.pdf>.
- Stratulat Albulescu Attorneys at Law. “Stabilirea salariilor minime adecvate” [Setting adequate minimum wages], 20 December 2024. Accessed July 29, 2025. <https://saa.ro/ro/noutati/stabilirea-salariilor-minime-adequate/>.
- “2020 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index. Romania, September 2021.” Accessed September 20, 2025. <https://www.fdsc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2020-index-en.pdf>.
- Voiculescu, Simina. “Mecanismul de stabilire și actualizare a salariului minim brut pe țară a fost oficializat, dar acum trebuie pus în aplicare prin HG” [The mechanism for setting and updating the national gross minimum wage has been formalized, but now it must be implemented by government decision]. *Avocat.net*, 15 November 2024. Accessed August 01, 2025. https://www.avocatnet.ro/articol_66901/Mecanismul-de-stabilire-%C8%99i-actualizare-a-salariului-minim-brut-pe-%C8%9Bar%C4%83-a-fost-oficializat-dar-acum-trebuie-pus-in-aplicare-prin-HG.html.
- Vandenbroucke, Frank. “The EU and Social Protection: What Should the European Convention Propose?” *MPIfG Working Paper* 06, no. 2 (2002). Accessed September 11, 2025. <https://www.frankvandenbroucke.be/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/72.pdf>.

Zamfir, Elena. "Sărăcia și inegalitățile socioeconomice. Provocări pentru politicile sociale în România postdecembristă" [Poverty and socioeconomic inequalities. Challenges for social policies in *post-December* Romania]. *Revista Calitatea Vieții* 32, no. 3 (2021): 309–340. <https://doi.org/10.46841/RCV.2021.03.07>.

Evaluating the Impact of E-Government on Social Cohesion in EU Border Regions

Ionuț-Petre STOICA⁶⁶

Abstract: *This paper examines the role of e-government in strengthening social cohesion within European Union border regions, where diverse cultural, linguistic, and administrative contexts converge. The transformation restructures how citizens access and experience public services, e-government emerges not only as a tool for administrative efficiency but also as a mechanism for inclusion, participation, and trust, the core elements of social cohesion. The study investigates how digital public services influence citizen–institution relations and cross-community interactions. Using qualitative case studies from selected EU border areas (particularly the Romanian-Hungarian and German-Polish frontiers), it looks at how cross-border digital initiatives such as joint platforms for healthcare, education, and local governance, contribute to reducing perceived inequalities, improving access to services, and nurturing shared regional identities. Findings highlight persistent challenges, including digital divides, languages barriers, different legal frameworks, and uneven digital literacy. However, the research shows that well-designed e-government measures such as interoperable electronic identification systems and multilingual service platforms can bridge institutional gaps, enhance trust in public authorities, and encourage civic engagement across borders. The paper argues that the capacity of e-government to foster cohesion depends on inclusive design and meaningful stakeholders' involvement. Policy recommendations include expanding cross-border digital pilot projects, investing in digital skills, and ensuring alignment between national strategies and EU digital and cohesion agendas. By linking digital governance with broader social objectives, the study demonstrates how e-government can consolidate not only administrative coordination but also the social relationships of Europe's borderlands, offering new insights for policy makers and experts.*

Keywords: *e-government, cohesion, EU, cross-border, multi-level governance*

Introduction

During recent decades, the European Union (EU) has increasingly relied on digital transformation as a strategic driver for improving public administration, enhancing democratic participation, and fostering economic and social cohesion. In this context, the e-government (the use of digital technologies in public service delivery) has emerged not only as a mechanism for increasing efficiency and transparency but also as a potential tool for deepening integration among countries and citizens, especially in regions with historical, cultural, and administrative fragmentation.

EU border regions, where national jurisdictions meet and frequently overlap, serve as critical testing grounds for evaluating the broader impact of digital governance. These areas are often marked by linguistic diversity, economic disparities, and fragmented infrastructures. At the same time, they offer unique opportunities for cross-border cooperation and innovation. The EU seeks to promote territorial cohesion and reduce disparities between regions, and the role of e-government in sustaining social

⁶⁶ PhD Candidate, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iași, România. **E-mail:** info@istoica.ro.

cohesion (defined as the degree of connections and solidarity among groups in society) has gained growing significance.

This paper aims to investigate how e-government initiatives can enhance social cohesion in EU border regions, where trust, participation, and equality of access to public services are both challenged and catalysed by digital transformation. In particular, the study focuses on the extent to which cross-border digital public services—such as shared eID⁶⁷ platforms, online education and health portals, and collaborative governance tools—foster inclusion, reduce perceived inequalities, and cultivate a shared regional identity among residents.

The research employs a qualitative, case study approach, exploring initiatives in two representative border areas: the Romanian–Hungarian and German–Polish regions. By exploring these cases, the paper identifies the enabling conditions and structural barriers that influence the impact of e-government on social cohesion.

Conceptual and theoretical frameworks

The concept of social cohesion has been widely explored in the social sciences, with researchers converging on the idea that cohesion encompasses inclusion, participation, trust, and the reduction of social and territorial inequalities. Foundational work by Chan et al.⁶⁸ argues that cohesion has both horizontal and vertical dimensions, referring to the relationships among individuals and between citizens and public institutions. Subsequent contributions, such as those by Dickes et al.⁶⁹ and Fonseca et al.⁷⁰, emphasise the multidimensionality of cohesion, noting that it is sensitive to structural inequalities, historical divides, and variations in institutional performance. These conceptualisations are highly relevant for understanding the dynamics of border regions, where disparities in access to public services, socio-economic inequalities, and administrative fragmentation are more pronounced. In such contexts, digital public services may play a pivotal role in promoting cohesion by enhancing inclusiveness, transparency, and trust.

A second relevant body of literature concerns multi-level governance (MLG), which offers a conceptual framework for understanding complex coordination processes between local, national, and supranational actors. Hooghe and Marks⁷¹ distinguish between *type I* and *type II* MLG⁷² structures, capturing the layered distribution of authority that characterises European governance. Piattoni⁷³ further argues that the EU's hybrid institutional architecture necessitates collaboration across jurisdictional

⁶⁷ Electronic Identification (eID) refers to the digital equivalent of a physical identity document (such as a passport or national ID card) that enables an individual or legal entity to prove their identity online in a secure, standardised, and legally recognised way. An eID allows users to authenticate themselves when accessing digital public or private services, ensuring that the person online is indeed who they claim to be.

⁶⁸ Joseph Chan, Ho-Pong To, and Elaine Chan, “Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research,” *Social Indicators Research* 75, no. 2 (January 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-005-2118-1>.

⁶⁹ Paul Dickes, Marie Valentova, and Monique Borsenberger, “Construct Validation and Application of a Common Measure of Social Cohesion in 33 European Countries,” *Social Indicators Research* 98, no. 3 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-009-9551-5>.

⁷⁰ Xavier Fonseca, Stephan Lukosch, and Frances Brazier, “Social Cohesion Revisited: A New Definition and How to Characterize It,” *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* 32, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2018.1497480>.

⁷¹ Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, “Types of Multi-Level Governance,” *European Integration Online Papers* 5, no. 11 (October 12 2001), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.302786>.

⁷² The concept of Multi-Level Governance (MLG) distinguishes between two ideal types of governance arrangements (type I and type II) which capture how authority is distributed across territorial and functional jurisdictions. Type I governance resembles traditional federal or quasi-federal systems in which authority is divided among a limited number of territorial levels. Type II governance describes a more dynamic system composed of numerous task-specific jurisdictions created for particular functions.

⁷³ Simona Piattoni, *The Theory of Multi-Level Governance: Conceptual, Empirical, and Normative Challenges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199562923.001.0001>.

boundaries, a dynamic particularly evident in border regions. Studies by Stephenson⁷⁴ and Bache and Flinders⁷⁵ demonstrate that MLG arrangements can either enable or constrain the implementation of cross-border e-government depending on the degree of institutional alignment and political will. Thus, MLG provides an essential analytical framework for examining the governance conditions that shape cross-border digital service delivery.

Complementing the governance literature, border studies provide insights into the socio-cultural and political dynamics that outline frontier zones. Paasi's⁷⁶ seminal work conceptualises borders as socially constructed institutions shaping territorial identities. Building on this perspective, Brunet-Jailly⁷⁷ proposes a multidimensional framework where borders are shaped by political, economic, cultural, and policy factors. Newman⁷⁸ and Scott⁷⁹ highlight how borders, despite processes of European integration, remain active spaces of negotiation, often characterised by asymmetries in administrative systems, languages, and economic development. In the context of digitalisation, Scott⁸⁰ notes that new forms of "digital bordering" emerge as digital infrastructures, interoperability frameworks, and language-access policies mediate cross-border interactions. This literature underscores the challenges of implementing cohesive, accessible digital services across borders.

A further body of scholarship examines the impact of digital transformation on public service delivery. Dunleavy et al.⁸¹ argue that *digital-era governance* replaces traditional bureaucratic models with technologically integrated systems emphasising joined-up service delivery. More recent empirical studies, such as those by Mergel et al.⁸² and Cordella and Tempini,⁸³ highlight the reconfiguration of administrative routines, the potential for efficiency gains, and the emergence of new institutional roles driven by data-intensive service delivery. Open data research⁸⁴ further demonstrates that digital transformation enhances transparency and participation when implemented effectively. These insights are vital for a glimpse into the cross-border e-government, where coordinated digital infrastructures can reduce duplication, increase accessibility, and enhance service coherence across national boundaries.

⁷⁴ Paul J. Stephenson, "Twenty Years of Multi-Level Governance: 'Where Does It Come From? What Is It? Where Is It Going?'" *Journal of European Public Policy* 20, no. 6 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2013.781818>.

⁷⁵ Ian Bache and Matthew Flinders, eds., *Multi-Level Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199259259.001.0001>.

⁷⁶ Anssi Paasi, *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Boundary* (Chichester, England; New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997).

⁷⁷ Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, "Theorizing Borders: An Interdisciplinary Perspective," *Geopolitics* 10, no. 4 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040500318449>.

⁷⁸ David Newman, "The Lines that Continue to Separate Us: Borders in our 'Borderless' World," *Progress in Human Geography* 30, no. 2 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1191/0309132506ph599xx>.

⁷⁹ James W. Scott, "European Politics of Borders, Border Symbolism and Cross-Border Cooperation," in *A Companion to Border Studies*, ed. Thomas M. Wilson and Henk van Houtum (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118255223.ch5>.

⁸⁰ James W. Scott, "Bordering, Border Politics and Cross-Border Cooperation in Europe," in *Neighbourhood Policy and the Construction of the European External Borders*, ed. Filippo Celata and Raffaella Coletti (Cham: Springer, 2015), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-18452-4_2.

⁸¹ Patrick Dunleavy et al., "New Public Management Is Dead—Long Live Digital-Era Governance," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 16, no. 3 (2006) <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mui057>.

⁸² Ines Mergel, Noella Edelmann, and Nathalie Haug, "Defining Digital Transformation: Results from Expert Interviews," *Government Information Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2019): 101385, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2019.06.002>.

⁸³ Antonio Cordella and Niccolò Tempini, "E-Government and Organisational Change: Reappraising the Role of ICT and Bureaucracy in Public Service Delivery," *Government Information Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2015.03.005>.

⁸⁴ Marijn Janssen, Yannis Charalabidis, and Anneke M. G. van Eijk, "Benefits, Adoption Barriers and Myths of Open Data and Open Government," *Information Systems Management* 29, no. 4 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10580530.2012.716740>.

The relationship between e-government and institutional trust is another core dimension of the literature. Tolbert and Mossberger⁸⁵ show that e-government initiatives can enhance trust when services are reliable, user-friendly, and transparent. Similarly, Welch et al. (2005)⁸⁶ find that effective online services improve satisfaction with public administration and citizen confidence. Transparency research by Grimmelikhuijsen⁸⁷ adds nuance, indicating that outcomes depend on user perceptions and the clarity of information provided. In border regions, often characterised by historical tensions, administrative complexity, or perceptions of inequality, trust-building through digital governance may have disproportionately positive impacts on social cohesion.

Parallel to the trust literature, research on e-government and social inclusion highlights the role of digital tools in mitigating inequalities and supporting participation. Helbig et al.⁸⁸ identify the complexity of digital-government ecosystems, noting that inclusiveness depends on institutional design, stakeholder engagement, and accessibility. Sánchez-Corral's⁸⁹ systematic review shows that digital inclusion is strongly correlated with broader social inclusion outcomes, particularly for marginalised groups. Open government research⁹⁰ suggests that ICTs can create participatory cultures when transparency and citizen engagement mechanisms are embedded into platforms. These insights are highly relevant for cross-border regions, where disparities in infrastructure, literacy, and service accessibility may otherwise obstruct the uptake of digital services.

In addition, research on identity formation and cross-border cooperation examines how shared institutional arrangements and collaborative governance can foster regional identities. Perkmann⁹¹ argues that cross-border institutions promote the emergence of new functional regions, while O'Dowd⁹² highlights the symbolic and political dimensions of border transformation. Empirical studies by Bufon and Markelj⁹³ show that frequent cross-border interactions contribute to shared understandings and collective belonging. In the digital domain, interoperable platforms and multilingual portals have been identified as facilitative tools supporting the development of a shared regional identity,⁹⁴ reinforcing cohesion by reducing barriers and fostering consistent interactions across borders.

⁸⁵ Caroline J. Tolbert and Karen Mossberger, "The Effects of E-Government on Trust and Confidence in Government," *Public Administration Review* 66, no. 3 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00594.x>.

⁸⁶ Eric W. Welch, Charles C. Hinnant, and M. Jae Moon, "Linking Citizen Satisfaction with E-Government and Trust in Government," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 15, no. 3 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mui021>.

⁸⁷ Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen, "Linking Transparency, Knowledge and Citizen Trust in Government: An Experiment," *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 78, no. 1 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852311429667>.

⁸⁸ Natalie C. Helbig, J. Ramón Gil-García, and Enrico Ferro, "Understanding the Complexity of Electronic Government: Implications from the Digital Divide Literature," *Government Information Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2008.05.004>.

⁸⁹ Elsa Sánchez-Corral Fernández, "Educar para la justicia social: Una apuesta desde el análisis interseccional para estudiantes de grupos privilegiados," *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios Educativos* 51, no. 3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.48102/rlee.2021.51.3.399>.

⁹⁰ John C. Bertot, Paul T. Jaeger, and Justin M. Grimes, "Using ICTs to Create a Culture of Transparency: E-Government and Social Media as Openness and Anti-Corruption Tools for Societies," *Government Information Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2010.03.001>.

⁹¹ Markus Perkmann, "Cross-Border Regions in Europe: Significance and Drivers of Regional Cross-Border Cooperation," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 10, no. 2 (2003), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776403010002004>.

⁹² Liam O'Dowd, "The Changing Significance of European Borders," *Regional and Federal Studies* 12, no. 4 (2002), <https://doi.org/10.1080/714004774>.

⁹³ Milan Bufon and Vesna Markelj, "Regional Policies and Cross-Border Cooperation: New Challenges and New Development Models in Central Europe," *Revista Română de Geografie Politică* 12, no. 1 (2010).

⁹⁴ Scott, "Bordering, Border Politics."

Finally, the literature on the digital divide and user-centred design highlights persistent inequalities in access to digital services, especially in peripheral or rural border areas. Van Dijk⁹⁵ and Friemel⁹⁶ document how structural inequalities in infrastructure, skills, and socio-economic status shape disparities in digital participation. Helsper⁹⁷ emphasises that digital inequalities both reflect and reinforce broader social inequalities, underscoring the need for targeted interventions. Complementing this perspective, user-focused design research,⁹⁸ highlights the importance of participatory design processes that incorporate user needs, linguistic diversity, and cultural contexts. In cross-border settings, such design principles are crucial for ensuring that digital services are usable and inclusive for linguistically and culturally diverse populations.

Global health crises, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic, have functioned as a profound exogenous shock, serving as an unprecedented catalyst for the evolution of e-government. This event compelled a rapid shift from gradual, often fragmented digitalisation to an exigent *digital-by-default* paradigm, essential for ensuring the continuity of state functions and societal operations⁹⁹. This transformation can be analysed across three distinct phases: the antecedent conditions prior to the pandemic, the accelerated adoption during the crisis, and the subsequent efforts toward institutionalisation.

The pandemic crisis led to the rapid re-imposition of *hard* borders, disrupting the *functional regions* and daily cross-border interactions that define many European frontier zones¹⁰⁰. This created an urgent, unprecedented need for coordinated cross-border information and services (e.g., for cross-border workers, freight, or access to family). It underscored that true digital-era governance¹⁰¹ in border regions is not merely about national portals; it is about establishing robust, interoperable, and user-centred¹⁰² digital infrastructures that are resilient across jurisdictions. Without this, the evolution of e-government risks reinforcing, rather than mitigating, the territorial and administrative divides that often illustrate border regions.

EU policies and frameworks

The European Union has sketched a policy design that collectively supports cross-border digital governance and social cohesion. It has a set of binding digitalisation targets, promoting harmonised standards and universal access to key public services, a required step for reducing disparities that particularly affect border regions. The EU Cohesion Policy channels investments in digital infrastructure, public administration reform, and interoperability, ensuring that lagging regions can participate in Europe's digital transformation.

⁹⁵ Jan A. G. M. van Dijk, "Digital Divide Research, Achievements and Shortcomings," *Poetics* 34, no. 4-5 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2006.05.004>

⁹⁶ Thomas N. Friemel, "The Digital Divide Has Grown Old: Determinants of a Digital Divide among Seniors," *New Media & Society* 18, no. 2 (2016): 313–331, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814538648>.

⁹⁷ Ellen J. Helsper, *The Digital Disconnect: The Social Causes and Consequences of Digital Inequalities* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526492982>

⁹⁸ Elizabeth B.-N. Sanders and Pieter Jan Stappers, "Co-Creation and the New Landscapes of Design," *CoDesign* 4, no. 1 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1080/15710880701875068>; Maria A. Wimmer, "Integrated Service Modeling for Online One-stop Government," *Electronic Markets* 12, no. 3 (2002): 149–156, <https://doi.org/10.1080/101967802320245910>

⁹⁹ Deborah Agostino, Michela Arnaboldi, and Melisa Diaz Lema, "New Development: COVID-19 as an Accelerator of Digital Transformation in Public Service Delivery," *Public Money & Management* 41, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2020.1764206>.

¹⁰⁰ Perkmann.

¹⁰¹ Dunleavy et al.

¹⁰² Maria A. Wimmer, Integrated Service Modelling for Online One-stop Government. *Electronic Markets* 12, no. 3 (2002), <https://doi.org/10.1080/101967802320245910>.

The Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030¹⁰³ outlines the European Union’s strategic vision for digital transformation by 2030, establishing binding targets across four pillars: digital skills, digital infrastructures, the digitalisation of businesses, and public services. A central element of the programme is ensuring that all Europeans have access to key digital public services and secure electronic identification solutions. By promoting harmonised digital standards and reducing barriers to digital participation, the initiative seeks to foster convergence across Member States. This is particularly relevant for border regions, where disparities in digitalisation can be a barrier for cross-border mobility, service access, and social cohesion.

EU Cohesion Policy 2021–2027¹⁰⁴ integrates digital transformation into broader efforts to reduce territorial inequalities and promote balanced development across Europe. Through funding instruments such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund, member states can invest in digital infrastructure, public administration reform, and interoperable e-government systems. The policy prioritises cooperation and inclusiveness, making it especially important for border regions that require coordinated digital responses to overcome administrative fragmentation and ensure equitable access to public services.

Interreg Programmes is a core component of Cohesion Policy, Interreg programmes specifically support cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation. It facilitates joint initiatives between neighbouring regions, enabling shared digital platforms for healthcare, mobility, emergency services, education, and local governance. These programmes address long-standing administrative and language barriers in border areas, supporting the development of interoperable solutions that enhance service continuity and strengthen functional cross-border regions.

The European Interoperability Framework (EIF)¹⁰⁵ provides a structured approach for ensuring that public administrations across the EU can communicate and operate seamlessly. By establishing legal, organisational, semantic, and technical interoperability principles, the framework guides the development of harmonised digital public services. For border regions, the EIF is critical in facilitating the integration of administrative systems that differ across national contexts, enabling smoother information exchange and supporting efficient cross-border service delivery.

The European Digital Identity (eID) Framework, grounded in the eIDAS Regulation and expanded through eIDAS 2.0, enables secure, cross-border recognition of national electronic identification schemes. It allows citizens and businesses to use trusted digital identities to access public and private services throughout the EU. The introduction of the European Digital Identity Wallet further enhances mobility and interoperability, offering a unified tool for managing verifiable credentials. In border regions (where residents frequently interact with institutions in multiple states) such secure and interoperable identity infrastructures are essential for enabling integrated cross-border e-government services.

Challenges to inside EU cross-border interoperability and e-government cooperation

Despite the European Union’s sustained efforts to promote digital cohesion, implementing interoperable e-government services in border regions remains fraught with complex challenges. These difficulties arise not only from technical incompatibilities but also from legal, institutional, and socio-cultural asymmetries that continue to shape citizen experiences and state capacity. This chapter identifies

¹⁰³ European Parliament and Council, “Decision (EU) 2022/2481 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 Establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030” (Text with EEA relevance), accessed October 21, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2022/2481/oj>.

¹⁰⁴ European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, “Cohesion Policy Legislation 2021–2027,” accessed October 21, 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/legislation-and-guidance/regulations_en.

¹⁰⁵ European Commission, The European Interoperability Framework – Implementation Strategy, COM(2017) 134 final (Brussels: European Commission, 2017), accessed October 19, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0134>.

and analyses the main barriers that erode the effectiveness of cross-border digital services and limit their potential impact on social cohesion.

One of the most significant obstacles to cross-border e-government is the lack of technical interoperability. National systems are often developed independently, with different architectures, data standards, and protocols. This fragmentation complicates the seamless exchange of data between public administrations, particularly in fields such as healthcare, taxation, education, or civil registries. Moreover, disparities in digital infrastructure (broadband coverage or cloud computing capabilities) persist across EU regions. Less developed areas along the eastern and southern borders often lack the foundational infrastructure necessary to implement advanced digital services. As a result, e-government initiatives in these regions tend to remain behind their Western European counterparts.

Diverging national legal frameworks and administrative procedures constitute another critical barrier to cross-border digital integration. Variations in data protection laws, public procurement regulations, recognition of digital signatures, and sectoral standards frequently impede the development of shared platforms. For example, while the eIDAS Regulation provides a legal basis for cross-border electronic identification and trust services, the uneven implementation and lack of mutual recognition mechanisms are difficulties for a practical cooperation between member states. Additionally, administrative resistance to change and limited institutional capacity in some border regions exacerbate this divergence.

Language remains a major challenge in cross-border communication, both in terms of user interface design and institutional collaboration. Many digital platforms are developed monolingually, excluding significant portions of the population and reinforcing the digital divide. Cultural perceptions of public institutions and attitudes toward digitalisation also differ across borders. In some regions, historical distrust of government, low digital literacy, or limited civic engagement undermine the uptake of digital services. These sociocultural factors directly affect the inclusiveness and perceived legitimacy of cross-border e-government initiatives.

Digital inequality, or the digital divide, is a pervasive issue in border areas. Older adults, low-income groups, and ethnic minorities often have limited access to digital devices or the skills necessary to navigate digital public services. Without targeted efforts to build digital competence and provide user support, eGovernment risks reinforcing existing social inequalities rather than alleviating them.

Furthermore, the absence of coordinated digital inclusion policies across borders leads to unequal benefits from shared services. A platform designed for a digitally advanced population on one side of the border may be unusable for residents across the frontier, undermining both its functionality and cohesion-building potential.

Effective cross-border digital governance requires multilevel and multi-actor coordination, yet institutional fragmentation remains a persistent challenge. Different political priorities, administrative cultures, and levels of decentralisation create governance mismatches between neighbouring regions. In some cases, lack of trust or competition for funding between local authorities on either side of the border impedes cooperation. Moreover, short-term project-based funding mechanisms (e.g., through Interreg) do not always support the long-term sustainability or scaling-up of successful pilot initiatives.

These challenges highlight the complexity of achieving meaningful cross-border interoperability. While technical solutions exist, their success depends on broader efforts to harmonise legal frameworks, support intercultural understanding, and ensure inclusive access. Addressing these barriers is essential for e-government to become a genuine vector of social cohesion in EU border regions.

Case studies of cross-border e-government cooperation

Analysis of the Interreg eHealth projects in the Romania–Hungary cross-border region

The Romania–Hungary (ROHU) border region presents an example of the systemic challenges facing European Territorial Cooperation (ETC)¹⁰⁶ in healthcare. Marked by shared demographic shifts,

¹⁰⁶ European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, “European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg),” accessed October 24, 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/.

persistent health workforce shortages, and historically under-resourced or obsolete medical infrastructure, the region continues to face significant disparities in access to specialised care (OECD & European Commission 2020¹⁰⁷, 2022¹⁰⁸; OECD, 2020¹⁰⁹, 2021¹¹⁰). In response, the Interreg V-A¹¹¹ and VI-A Romania–Hungary Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC)¹¹² Programmes have strategically deployed substantial funding to support eHealth pilot projects designed to address these inequalities (Interreg V-A Romania–Hungary Programme, 2014–2020)¹¹³. These initiatives represent a shift from purely infrastructure-based aid toward integrated, digitally enhanced solutions that support social cohesion and systemic resilience¹¹⁴.

The deployment of telemedicine, joint training protocols, and shared cross-border infrastructure aims to turn the national border from a point of administrative and clinical separation into a seamless functional health service area¹¹⁵. The four key initiatives selected for analysis reflect three strategic regional priorities: reducing high infant/maternal mortality, mitigating specialised care shortages characteristic of medical deserts, and building long-term systemic resilience¹¹⁶. The four projects examined are:

- Telemedicine is the future¹¹⁷
- Babies across borders¹¹⁸
- prOmoting evidence-bASed rEformS¹¹⁹

¹⁰⁷ OECD and European Commission, *Health at a Glance: Europe 2020 – State of Health in the EU Cycle* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1787/82129230-en>.

¹⁰⁸ OECD/European Commission, *Health at a Glance: Europe 2022 – State of Health in the EU Cycle* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1787/507433b0-en>.

¹⁰⁹ OECD, *Empowering the Health Workforce: Strategies to Make the Most of the Digital Revolution* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1787/bc6de2e9-en>.

¹¹⁰ Karolina Socha-Dietrich, “Empowering the Health Workforce to Make the Most of the Digital Revolution,” *OECD Health Working Papers*, no. 129 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1787/37ff0eaa-en>.

¹¹¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, “Interreg V-A – Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes 2014–2020,” accessed October 16, 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/cross-border_en.

¹¹² European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, “Interreg VI-A – Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes 2021–2027,” accessed October 16, 2025, <https://interreg.eu/programmes>.

¹¹³ European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, “Interreg V-A Romania–Hungary Programme, 2014–2020,” accessed October 16, 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/in-your-country/programmes/2014-2020/ro/2014tc16rfcb049_en.

¹¹⁴ OECD, *Empowering the Health Workforce*.

¹¹⁵ Mathias Wissmaret al., “Health Professional Mobility and Health Systems – Evidence from 17 European countries,” *Observatory Studies Series* 23, 2011, accessed October 25, 2025, <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/569b8aca-a5c9-4ddd-a29d-7375cbc613db/content>.

¹¹⁶ OASES Consortium, *Making Medical Deserts Bloom: Evidence-Based Reform and Health Workforce Strategies in Europe* (EU Health Programme (2021–2027) project no. 101018341, 2023), accessed October 18, 2025, <https://oasesproject.eu/>.

¹¹⁷ Project ROHU-386, *CBC-HOSPEQUIP: Improving Cross-Border Health-Care Services with Modernised Medical Equipment within Dr. Gavril Curteanu Hospital in Oradea and Békés County Central Hospital*, Lead beneficiary: Municipal Hospital Dr. Gavril Curteanu Oradea (Romania); Partner: Békés County Central Hospital (Hungary). Interreg V-A/Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme, Nov. 1, 2019 – Oct. 31, 2021, ERDF contribution €2,511,187.30, accessed October 19, 2025, <https://interreg-rohu.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ROHU-386-EN-final.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ Project ROHU-48, *Babies across Borders – Connecting Health Services in the Field of Obstetrics-Gynecology and Neonatal Care between Emergency Clinical County Hospital “Pius Brînzeu” Timișoara and the Pediatric Clinic of Szeged* (Lead Partner: JUDEȚUL Timiș/Spitalul Clinic Județean de Urgență “Pius Brînzeu” Timișoara, Partner: Szegedi Tudományegyetem), Interreg V-A Romania–Hungary Programme 2014–2020, start date December 1, 2019, end date November 30, 2023, accessed October 18, 2025, <https://keep.eu/projects/22936/Babies-across-borders-conne-EN/>.

¹¹⁹ OASES Consortium.

- Resilience4Health¹²⁰

They represent a blend of pure digital implementation (ROHU-386), large-scale infrastructure development coupled with digital tools (ROHU-48, ROHU00627), and crucial policy research (OASES). The methodology relied on empirical mapping of project documentation, including Interreg final reports, fact sheets, EU policy documents, and academic literature on cross-border healthcare and medical deserts¹²¹. Because detailed operational data are not publicly available, this approach focuses on assessing strategic intent and design rather than quantitative performance indicators.

A shared regional challenge across all projects is the chronic underfunding of healthcare relative to the EU average and a legacy of outdated specialised medical infrastructure¹²².

Project I: “Babies Across Borders” (BABYROHU, ROHU-48) – Infrastructure for Specialised Care

Babies Across Borders (ROHU-48) is the largest financially and scope-wise (Interreg V-A Romania–Hungary Programme, 2020). Implemented between 2019 and 2023 with a total budget exceeding €13.8 million, it addressed maternal and infant health, a critical disparity area in Romania and Hungary¹²³. The project was implemented by Timiș County Council, the University of Szeged, and the Emergency Clinical County Hospital “Pius Brînzeu” in Timișoara—an institutional configuration combining administrative oversight, academic expertise, and clinical delivery. The project adopted a strategic, holistic approach to prevention and health-care service improvement:

1. Infrastructure overhaul, involving construction and rehabilitation of obstetrics-gynecology and neonatology facilities in Timișoara and Szeged. This investment aligns with EU health system modernisation objectives¹²⁴.
2. Know-how exchange and protocol harmonisation, essential for ensuring consistent quality of care in a cross-border setting¹²⁵
3. Digital components, such as screening and early diagnosis using shared data systems—consistent with emerging EU initiatives like the European Health Data Space.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ Project ROHU-00627, *Resilient, Integrated and Accessible Cross-Border Health Services (Resilience4Health)*, Lead Partner: Timiș County (Romania); Project Partners: “Pius Brînzeu” County Emergency Clinical Hospital Timișoara (Romania), University of Szeged (Hungary), Móra-Vitál Outpatient Specialist Care and Spa Therapy Center (Hungary), Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme 2021–2027, accessed October 18, 2025, https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/project_library/resilience4health-resilient-integrated-and-accessible-cross-border-health-services-rohu-627/.

¹²¹ Candan Kendir et al., “Collaboration of Primary Care and Public Health at the Local Level: Observational Descriptive Study of French Local Health Contracts,” *Primary Health Care Research & Development*, no. 21 (2020): e61, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1463423620000559>.

¹²² OECD and European Commission, *Health at a Glance: Europe 2020*; Ministerul Sănătății [Ministry of Health], *Strategia Națională de Sănătate 2022–2030* [National Health Strategy for 2022–2030], accessed October 15, 2025, https://oldsite.ms.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SNS_2022-2030.pdf; Romanian Ministry of Health, “Health Sector Reform — Terms of Reference: Health Data Policy Specialist,” accessed October 15, 2025, https://oldsite.ms.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ToR_Health-Data-Policy-Specialist.pdf.

¹²³ Romanian Ministry of Health.

¹²⁴ OECD and European Commission, *Health at a Glance: Europe 2020*.

¹²⁵ European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, *The Organisation of Resilient Health and Social Care Following the COVID-19 Pandemic: Lessons from Europe* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020), accessed October 17, 2025, https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-12/026_health_socialcare_covid19_en_0.pdf; Steve Thomas et al., *Strengthening Health Systems Resilience: Key Concepts and Strategies* (Copenhagen: European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2020), accessed October 12, 2025, <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/332441/Policy-brief%2036-1997-8073-eng.pdf>.

¹²⁶ European Commission, “The European Health Data Space (EHDS) Regulation and Digital Health for Europe,” *European Commission – eHealth, Digital Health and Care* (2022), accessed October 22, 2025, https://health.ec.europa.eu/ehealth-digital-health-and-care/european-health-data-space-regulation-ehds_en

The project targeted nearly two million inhabitants, directly improving access to specialised maternal and infant healthcare which are key indicators of socioeconomic well-being¹²⁷. By ensuring proximity-based access regardless of nationality, BABYROHU directly reinforces cross-border social cohesion. The project's strategic importance lies in its direct attack on high rates of infant and maternal mortality, which are key indicators of socio-economic disparity. By ensuring access to modern, specialised equipment and expertise in the nearest location, regardless of the border, the project directly strengthens social cohesion and builds citizen trust in the cross-border healthcare safety net. The emphasis on prevention and specialised care for the most vulnerable groups addresses profound health inequalities in the region.

Project II: "Telemedicine is the Future" (ROHU-386) – Digital Know-How and Remote Diagnostics

The project *Telemedicine is the future*¹²⁸ (Interreg V-A Romania–Hungary Programme, 2020) specifically focused on leveraging digital technology to improve access to specialised diagnosis and consultation. The project involved the *Dr. Gavril Curteanu* Municipal Clinical Hospital in Oradea, Romania, and the Békés County Central Hospital in Hungary. This geographical pairing targeted key areas near the central portion of the ROHU border. With a budget of €2.51 million, the investment was balanced between equipping specialised units and procuring specific eHealth technology. Key activities included the establishment of protocols and cross-border teams for exchange of experience in fields such as cardiology and perinatology.

The core digital element was the procurement of two telemedicine systems designed to facilitate remote diagnostics. The strategic goal was to allow doctors to provide consultations and swift, effective remote diagnostics to patients and their counterparts across the border. This directly addressed the physician shortage in specialised areas by enabling a specialist in one country to serve patients in the other without the need for patient travel which could be a key strategy for combating medical deserts.

The initiative is a critical case study in the shift from physical to digital cross-border cooperation. It is designed to serve a target population of 180,000 inhabitants, providing them with the assurance of rapid access to specialised opinions. The project's impact is measured not just in equipment modernisation, but in the establishment of formal digital communication channels and the creation of formalised cross-border medical teams, setting a precedent for scalable digital diagnosis models in the region. The success of such a system reduces costs for the patient and optimises the utilisation of scarce specialised medical expertise across the two counties.

Project III: OASES – Policy Foundation for Mitigating Medical Deserts

Unlike the Interreg-funded projects focusing on infrastructure and implementation, the OASES (prOmoting evidence-bASed rEformS on medical deserts) project provides the crucial policy and methodological backbone for tackling regional health challenges. Co-funded by the EU's Health Programme (not Interreg), OASES is an EU-wide research initiative led by a consortium that includes partners from Romania (Babeş-Bolyai University) and Hungary (Semmelweis University).

OASES adopts a broad definition of a *medical desert*, encompassing not just a simple shortage of health professionals but also issues related to poor quality, low accessibility (spatial, temporal, financial, and cultural), and long waiting times.

The project's activities centred on high-level academic and policy work:

1. indicator development by creating a robust, customisable set of indicators and a measurement methodology (minimal, intermediate, and advanced datasets) to accurately assess medical desertification across diverse EU contexts.

2. pilot studies and consensus building – the project conducted detailed pilot studies in seven countries, including Romania and Hungary, utilising a consensus-building exercise (often involving a

¹²⁷ OECD and European Commission, *Health at a Glance: Europe 2022*.

¹²⁸ ROHU-386, titled CBC-HOSPEQUIP in some documents.

modified Delphi methodology) with local and national stakeholders. This process identified the specific antecedents and mitigation strategies relevant to the ROHU region, confirming challenges such as long distances and difficulties in registering with a doctor.

3. policy translation: the research produced detailed reports, including a report on the state of the art of desertification and policy recommendations for sustainability. These recommendations focus on actionable reforms, such as increasing the number of practicing doctors, expanding the roles of professionals, utilising eHealth (digital solutions), and reorganising primary care delivery.

The OASES project provides the evidence-based justification for the digital investments made by the Interreg projects. It confirms that the use of eHealth (as seen in ROHU-386) and targeted infrastructure investment (as seen in ROHU-48 and ROHU00627) are validated, evidence-based policy solutions for the regional challenges. Its work on defining and measuring inaccessibility ensures that future Interreg programming remains focused on achieving tangible improvements in accessibility, quality, and availability of health services.

Project IV: Resilience4Health (ROHU00627) – Strategic Resilience and Integrated Networks

Resilient, integrated and accessible cross-border health services (Resilience4Health, ROHU00627) is an Operation of Strategic Importance (OSI) under the new INTERREG VI-A Romania-Hungary 2021–2027 programme¹²⁹. Its status as an OSI highlights its crucial role in achieving the overarching program objectives of improving access to healthcare and fostering resilience across the entire health system. The project focuses on the Timiș and Csongrád-Csanád counties, aiming for the development of an innovative procedure for health and rehabilitation services, including the exploration of patient mobility opportunities.

This project exemplifies the integration of physical infrastructure investment with the development of a coherent cross-border network. The project's most visible activity is the construction of a new, three-story medical recovery unit in Lovrin, Romania, an external unit of the *Pius Brînzeu* Hospital, utilising the local geothermal resources for balneophysiokinetotherapy. While focused on infrastructure, the project's strategic outcome is the creation of an integrated cross-border healthcare network. Activities include organising professional meetings, exchanging best practices, and developing a *cross-border Action Plan* that formalises cooperation beyond the project's funding period. The goal is to ensure that patients receive care at the nearest appropriate facility, irrespective of national borders, thereby improving accessibility and reducing waiting times for specialised rehabilitation.

The project targets 6,550 users of the newly built or modernised facilities, contributing to higher standards of healthcare quality and efficiency and ensuring superior health outcomes for the region. Its long-term focus on resilience prepares the region's health systems to better absorb future shocks (e.g., pandemics, workforce migration) through integrated planning and resource sharing.

These four projects collectively demonstrate a mature, multi-layered strategy for cross-border eHealth cooperation in the ROHU region:

- ROHU-48 (BABYROHU) and ROHU00627 (Resilience4Health) represent the infrastructure layer, providing the physical capacity and modern equipment necessary for specialised care (maternal health and rehabilitation). Their digital component is primarily enabling, ensuring data sharing and optimised patient flow in the modernised facilities.
- ROHU-386 (Telemedicine) represents the digital layer, directly leveraging ICT to bypass geographical barriers and specialist shortages, focusing on remote consultation and diagnostics in high-need fields like cardiology and perinatology.

¹²⁹ European Commission & Managing Authority of the Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme, *Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme 2021–2027* (Oradea: Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, 2022), accessed October 24, 2025, <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/home-en/>

- OASES provides the policy and research layer, defining the challenge of *medical deserts* and generating the evidence-based reforms (including e-Health utilisation) that justify and guide the multi-million-euro investments of the Interreg programs.

The combined strategy is highly effective: policy research defines the problem, infrastructure projects create centres of excellence, and digitalisation ensures these centres are accessible to the entire cross-border population. While successful in implementation, these projects face common challenges in translating technical success into full social cohesion:

- sustainability: Projects like ROHU-386 and ROHU-48 must transition from EU funding to permanent national or regional budget lines. This requires political commitment to maintain the eHealth systems, medical teams, and harmonised protocols established
- workforce adoption: digital tools are only effective if routinely used. Continuous professional training and addressing medical staff concerns regarding liability and integration with existing national eHealth systems remain essential for the success of the telemedicine components.
- legal and data integration – full cross-border integration requires addressing the legal complexities of exchanging sensitive patient data (patient summaries) across national IT systems, a goal these projects indirectly prepare for by establishing trust and joint protocols.

The projects have yielded two significant positive outcomes that contribute to social cohesion the strengthening of relationships and mutual trust within and between communities which are represented by improved access to public services and enhanced trust in public institutions. The digital nature of the platforms has successfully extended the reach of healthcare and education services, making them more available to groups that traditionally face barriers, such as rural and marginalised communities. By delivering services that are more responsive and inclusive (e.g., easier access to medical records or consultations), the e-platforms help build greater trust and confidence in the respective governments and public administrative bodies.

Ultimately, these initiatives move the ROHU region toward true social cohesion by de-facto removing the health border. They ensure that specialised medical care is guaranteed to citizens based on proximity and need, not nationality, cementing the concept of a shared health catchment area. The Interreg Romania–Hungary eHealth projects profile a comprehensive and strategic approach to regional health integration. By simultaneously tackling infrastructure deficits (BABYROHU, Resilience4Health), leveraging digital technologies to mitigate specialist shortages (Telemedicine), and grounding reforms in rigorous EU-wide policy research (OASES), the region is building a resilient, integrated, and accessible health system. The continued success of this strategy is dependent on the political commitment to sustain these platforms, embed the joint protocols into national law, and scale the demonstrated e-Health capabilities to benefit the entire cross-border population, thereby realising the full potential for digital social cohesion.

German–Polish cross-border initiatives under European territorial cooperation

The German–Polish border has long been regarded as one of the most complex and multilayered frontiers in Europe, reflecting centuries of geopolitical shifts, demographic transformations, cultural interactions, and administrative reconfigurations. Since the accession of Poland to the European Union in 2004 and its entry into the Schengen Area in 2007, this frontier has undergone a silent yet profound transformation. What had once symbolised separation and asymmetry has increasingly become a laboratory for integration and cohesion-driven development. The European Union’s cross-border cooperation frameworks, particularly INTERREG and the broader European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) architecture, have played a decisive role in reconciling divergent development pathways,

enhancing institutional capacities, fostering socio-economic convergence, and strengthening the territorial cohesion of the region.

The overarching purpose of these programmes is not simply to finance isolated projects, but to cultivate a functional cross-border region that transcends national divisions by embedding cooperation into everyday governance, mobility, service provision, cultural exchange and spatial planning. This logic is firmly rooted in the EU's cohesion policy, which seeks to reduce disparities, promote balanced territorial development, and ensure that border regions no longer remain peripheries but become dynamic, interconnected, and resilient spaces within an integrated European framework. As the European Commission emphasises, the INTERREG V-A programmes between Germany and Poland (particularly the Poland–Germany/Saxony and Brandenburg–Lubuskie programmes) aim to overcome precisely those structural barriers that historically impeded development, such as poor accessibility, linguistic fragmentation, inadequate institutional cooperation, and limited connectivity of services.

Within this evolving policy landscape, the German–Polish borderland has witnessed a proliferation of projects that have reshaped both physical and intangible infrastructures. These include the creation of cross-border health networks, coordinated emergency response systems, integrated transport corridors, digital governance platforms, shared cultural heritage initiatives, environmental and climate adaptation systems, and bilingual educational opportunities. Although these interventions may appear highly diverse, they collectively articulate the deeper normative and strategic aspiration of EU cohesion policy: the construction of a shared territorial space characterised by interoperability, accessibility, equity, and joint prosperity.

A central pillar of this transformation has been the INTERREG V-A Poland–Germany/Saxony 2014–2020 programme,¹³⁰ financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). With a budget exceeding €82 million, including more than €70 million in ERDF co-financing, the programme's mission has been to convert the border into a zone of cooperation by enhancing mobility, strengthening social and cultural interactions, fostering innovation and education, and protecting natural heritage¹³¹. The programme's focus on cross-border road connections, educational harmonisation, socio-cultural integration, and institutional cooperation underscores its commitment to the broader objectives of territorial cohesion. By aligning investment with shared development challenges and opportunities, the programme helps construct territorial continuities that are essential for long-term convergence.

Among the most emblematic areas of cooperation in this region is the health sector. Border populations often face geographic, linguistic or administrative obstacles when seeking care, and disparities in service quality can exacerbate socio-economic inequalities. Cross-border healthcare initiatives therefore play a crucial role in strengthening social cohesion and improving quality of life. Projects such as the cross-border medical cooperation between Guben (Germany) and Gubin (Poland), supported through INTERREG Brandenburg–Poland, exemplify how joint investments in medical infrastructure, telemedicine, coordinated emergency response protocols, and patient mobility have reduced waiting times, improved access to specialists, and created more resilient healthcare networks. The “Two Town Halls – One Euro-Town” project, often referred to as a *virtual town hall* initiative, extended this logic by constructing shared administrative and informational services, bilingual contact points, and a digital platform enabling residents from both sides of the border to interact with public authorities more

¹³⁰ “INTERREG V-A Poland–Germany/Saxony. Programme Description,” accessed October 23, 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/in-your-country/programmes/2014-2020/de/2014tc16rfcb018_en, “2014–2020 INTERREG V-A Poland – Germany / Saxony,” accessed October 23, 2025, <https://keep.eu/programmes/30/2014-2020-Poland-Germany-Saxony/>.

¹³¹ European Commission, “Commission Implementing Decision of 16 June 2014 Setting up the List of Cooperation Programmes and Indicating the Global Amount of Total Support from the European Regional Development Fund for each Programme under the European Territorial Cooperation Goal for the Period 2014 to 2020 (notified under document number C(2014) 3776) (2014/366/EU),” *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 178/18, 18 June 2014, accessed October 24, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32014D0366>.

effectively¹³². Although primarily administrative and socio-cultural in nature, the project's emphasis on reducing bureaucratic fragmentation and promoting digital cohesion reflects the changing nature of cross-border governance in the era of digital transformation.

Transport and mobility constitute another fundamental dimension of cross-border cohesion. Poor accessibility and fragmented infrastructure have historically undermined economic development in the German–Polish border region. The INTERREG Poland–Germany/Saxony programme therefore prioritised substantial investments in road modernisation, bridge rehabilitation, and multimodal transport integration. Road modernisation projects—such as the upgrades to regional routes connecting Turoszów to Sieniawka and Zatonie to Bogatynia,¹³³ coordinated with improvements to connecting roads in Zittau and Krauschwitz¹³⁴—have significantly enhanced cross-border connectivity. These interventions support labour mobility, facilitate trade, and integrate peripheral rural areas into broader economic circuits, thereby contributing directly to the EU's cohesion objectives. The region's cross-border commuting patterns, particularly in areas like Lusatia, demonstrate that such infrastructure is not merely symbolic but affects everyday life, enabling individuals to seek employment, education, or services across the border without encountering delays or administrative obstacles.

Digitalisation has also emerged as a key theme in the new generation of cross-border cohesion instruments. *The cross-border monitoring model innovative data collection* project¹³⁵ exemplifies how data-driven forms of cooperation can support evidence-based territorial development. By harmonising datasets, improving data governance, and supporting open-data initiatives, the project provided local and regional authorities in the Szczecin metropolitan region with the tools to jointly monitor socio-economic trends and plan coordinated interventions. This type of collaboration, which is often invisible to the public, but essential for long-term planning, strengthens institutional cohesion and helps bridge differences in administrative cultures between Germany and Poland.

Environmental cooperation forms an equally important component of cohesion in border regions. The shared river systems of the Oder and Neisse demand coordinated action on flood prevention, climate adaptation and biodiversity protection. Several INTERREG projects have addressed these concerns by implementing integrated flood early-warning systems, harmonised environmental monitoring, and cross-border conservation of protected areas. Initiatives such as *Kom(m)ando – gemeinsamer Schutz vor Klimafolgen*¹³⁶ and *EnergyTransPolSax*¹³⁷ have incorporated climate adaptation, renewable energy, and ecological conservation into cross-border planning frameworks. In doing so, they reflect the EU's growing emphasis on climate-resilient cohesion, recognising that environmental threats do not stop at

¹³² Euro-Town Guben-Gubin, “Two Town Halls – one Euro-Town. Stage II” (INTERREG VA Brandenburg-Poland 2014–2020, implementation period 01 April 2020 – 30 June 2022), accessed October 25, 2025, <https://guben-gubin.eu/en/eurotown-projects/two-town-halls-one-euro-town-stage-ii>.

¹³³ “Modernization a Voivodeship Road no. 354, Section between Turoszow-Sieniawka and no. 352, section Zatonie-Bogatynia, Including Schramm Street in Zittau,” INTERREG V-A Poland–Germany / Saxony 2014–2020, KEEP Interreg Database, accessed October 25, 2025, <https://keep.eu/projects/19330/Modernization-a-voivodeship-EN/>.

¹³⁴ “Modernization a voivodeship road no. 353, section between Strzelno and Pieńsk, Including Rothenburger Street in Krauschwitz,” INTERREG V-A Poland–Germany / Saxony 2014–2020, KEEP Interreg Database, last updated March 10, 2023, accessed November 22, 2025, <https://keep.eu/projects/17814/Modernization-a-voivodeship-EN/>.

¹³⁵ “Cross-Border Monitoring Model — Innovative Data Collection Measures in the Szczecin Metropolitan Region (INT179),” 2014–2020 INTERREG V-A Germany / Mecklenburg–Western Pomerania / Brandenburg – Poland, KEEP Interreg Database, project period May 1, 2020 – April 30, 2022, accessed October 22, 2025, <https://keep.eu/projects/25155/Cross-border-monitoring-mod-EN/>.

¹³⁶ “Kom(m)ando – Gemeinsamer Schutz vor Klimafolgen,” Interreg V-A Poland–Saxony 2014–2020, lead partner: Stadtverwaltung Löbau (Germany); partner: Powiat Lubański (Poland), accessed November 02, 2025, <https://mapadotacji.gov.pl/projekty/1337099/?lang=en>.

¹³⁷ “EnergyTransPolSax –Joint Discovery of New Trends in the Energy Economy,” Interreg V-A Poland–Saxony 2014–2020, lead partner: Karkonoska Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A., accessed November 02, 2025, <https://karr.pl/energytranspolsax/>.

borders and that coordinated responses are essential for public safety, economic stability and ecological sustainability.

Cultural and educational cooperation has become another pillar of territorial cohesion in the German–Polish context. Programmes such as *Denk Mal: Unser Erbe – Ihre Zukunft*,¹³⁸ *Learn about Your Neighbouring Country*,¹³⁹ *Neue Berufsorientierungskompetenzen PL-SAX*,¹⁴⁰ *Schlesien – gemeinsames Natur – und Kulturerbe*, and numerous youth mobility initiatives have sought to nurture bilingual competencies, promote shared historical understanding, and cultivate a cross-border identity rooted in mutual respect and cooperation. These initiatives reinforce the social foundation of cohesion by supporting intercultural dialogue, reducing social distance, and fostering long-term interpersonal connections. In border regions historically marked by conflict or territorial change, such projects contribute significantly to reconciliation and socio-cultural integration.

The twin cities of Görlitz (Germany) and Zgorzelec (Poland), and Guben (Germany) and Gubin (Poland), exemplify the transformative potential of cultural-administrative cooperation. Their numerous joint initiatives, ranging from heritage restoration to municipal service integration, illustrate how cross-border urban cooperation can alleviate fragmentation and increase functional coherence. The *Virtual Town Hall*¹⁴¹ project is particularly relevant, not only because it established a shared digital platform and bilingual administrative units, but because it explicitly aimed to overcome linguistic, cultural and institutional barriers, acting as a symbolic and practical catalyst for territorial cohesion. By transforming municipal cooperation into a daily reality, such projects help normalise cross-border interactions and embed cooperation into local governance structures.

The broader impacts of these initiatives on territorial cohesion are multifaceted. Economically, the expansion of transport links, digital innovation systems, tourism development frameworks, and SME support mechanisms has enhanced local competitiveness and contributed to more balanced regional development. Socially, cross-border cooperation has strengthened interpersonal networks, built trust, and enhanced access to services. Environmentally, shared strategies have improved resilience to climate risks while protecting biodiversity. Politically, the process has helped institutionalise cooperation, creating sustainable governance frameworks that anchor cohesion beyond the lifespan of individual projects.

Yet the process is not without challenges. Studies on INTERREG programmes underscore the persistence of several barriers: differing administrative procedures and regulatory frameworks, linguistic limitations among staff and citizens, varying levels of institutional capacity, and the risk that project-based cooperation remains temporary rather than structurally embedded¹⁴². Despite these obstacles, the German–Polish borderland exhibits significant progress in addressing these issues. The emergence of stable cross-border networks, Euroregions (such as Neisse–Nisa–Nysa and Pro Europa Viadrina), and integrated planning platforms demonstrates that cooperation is increasingly institutional rather than merely project-driven.

Looking ahead, cohesion in the German–Polish border region will depend on how INTERREG VI-A 2021–2027 integrates digital transformation, climate adaptation, green mobility, and social innovation into the cross-border cooperation agenda. The EU’s new Cohesion Policy framework places strong emphasis on digital public services, smart specialisation, green transition, and community-driven development, all of which align with the needs and strategic directions of the German–Polish region.

¹³⁸ “Denk Mal: Unser Erbe – Deine Zukunft”, INTERREG V-A Poland–Saxony 2014–2020, accessed November 01, 2025, <https://projekty.plsn.eu/de/projekty/projekt/54>.

¹³⁹ “Entdecke Dein Nachbarland! – Learn About Your Neighbouring Country!” Interreg V-A Poland–Germany/Saxony 2014–2020, accessed November 04, 2025, <https://kohesio.eu/en/projects/Q4300236>.

¹⁴⁰ “Neue Berufsorientierungskompetenzen PL-SAX,” Interreg V-A Poland–Saxony 2014–2020, accessed November 02, 2025, <https://projekty.plsn.eu/de/projekty/projekt/43>.

¹⁴¹ Euro-Town Guben–Gubin.

¹⁴² Tobias Chilla and Markus Lambracht, “Institutional Mapping of Cross-Border Cooperation. INTERREG Programme Analyses with KEEP Data.” *European Planning Studies* 31, no. 4 (2022). doi:10.1080/09654313.2022.2058321.

Digital governance will likely deepen cross-border cohesion by facilitating interoperable administrative procedures, shared platforms for public participation, and coordinated crisis management systems.

In conclusion, German–Polish cross-border cooperation under EU frameworks reflects a profound shift in the understanding of borders in contemporary Europe. No longer viewed as peripheries or obstacles, borders are increasingly conceived as dynamic interfaces that can drive integration, innovation and cohesion. Through health, transport, environmental, cultural, and digital cooperation, the German–Polish border region demonstrates how EU cohesion policy can reshape territorial realities and foster convergence. The process is gradual, uneven and continually evolving, but its cumulative effects testify to the transformative potential of cross-border cooperation as a cornerstone of European integration. In this frontier space, cohesion is no longer merely a policy objective but a lived experience, shaped by thousands of residents, administrators, institutions and communities who engage daily in building a shared cross-border future.

Discussions and conclusions

The comparative examination of the Romania–Hungary (ROHU) eHealth initiatives and the mature German–Polish cross-border cooperation model reveals a pronounced time-lag in institutional development, digital integration, and systemic resilience. While the German–Polish borderland has benefitted from more than three decades of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) since the early 1990s, the ROHU region only began building substantial cross-border structures following Romania’s EU accession in 2007. This temporal asymmetry continues to shape governance capacity, trust-building processes, the degree of administrative and digital interoperability, and ultimately the quality of social cohesion.¹⁴³ Bridging this gap requires a transition from short-term, project-based cooperation to long-term institution-building, supported by integrated digital, administrative, and social systems.

A priority is the permanent institutionalisation of cross-border health governance. The German–Polish experience demonstrates that Euroregions, joint coordination bodies and cross-border health commissions are indispensable for ensuring continuity beyond individual project cycles. By contrast, ROHU health cooperation remains highly dependent on EU project funds, which risks fragmentation and loss of momentum once funding cycles end. Establishing a permanent ROHU Cross-Border Health Coordination Body—co-funded by national authorities and county councils—would provide the institutional backbone needed to harmonise clinical protocols, sustain telemedicine systems, and coordinate data-sharing mechanisms. Long-term institutional structures also help to mitigate disruptions generated by political turnover and administrative fragmentation, strengthening trust and policy continuity across the border¹⁴⁴.

A second strategic intervention involves long-term cross-border health workforce planning and harmonised training systems. The German–Polish border has accumulated a strong tradition of routine bilingual training, joint medical teams, and shared emergency procedures¹⁴⁵. These elements are largely absent in the ROHU region, where digital solutions (particularly telemedicine) remain underused due to workforce shortages, high staff turnover, and uneven digital competences¹⁴⁶. A ROHU Health Workforce Mobility and Training Pact would address these shortcomings by creating shared medical curricula, cross-border residency modules in high-need fields (maternal health, rehabilitation, telemedicine), and targeted incentives for practitioners to serve populations in medical deserts. Embedding joint professional pathways directly into the labour market contributes to systemic resilience and reinforces cross-border cohesion through daily professional interaction.

Strengthening digital and legal interoperability is a third key requirement. The German–Polish *Virtual Town Hall* initiative illustrates how administrative interoperability, shared platforms and harmonised procedures can reduce barriers and enhance service accessibility. In the ROHU region, IT

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ OECD and European Commission, *Health at a Glance: Europe 2020*.

¹⁴⁵ Euro-town Guben–Gubin.

¹⁴⁶ OASES Consortium.

fragmentation and legal uncertainties continue to obstruct seamless exchange. Accelerated alignment with the European Health Data Space would enable the adoption of compatible digital standards for diagnostics, referrals and imaging, alongside common cyber-security protocols and secure cross-border patient summaries. Such interoperable systems reduce transaction costs, foster transparency, and build citizen trust in digital public services.

A fourth recommendation concerns the transition from infrastructure-heavy to service-integrated models of cooperation. Major ROHU initiatives such as BABYROHU (ROHU-48) and Resilience4Health (ROHU00627) have been essential for addressing infrastructural deficits, yet they remain dominated by construction and equipment procurement. German–Polish cooperation, having addressed such deficits earlier, has evolved toward service integration, digital participation, and network-based models of care. To follow this trajectory, ROHU programming should incorporate cross-border appointment systems, common waiting lists, mobile specialist teams, and telemonitoring services—particularly for remote and vulnerable populations. Emphasising everyday service integration rather than one-time infrastructure upgrades reinforces functional social cohesion by ensuring citizens experience the benefits of cross-border access directly.

Equally important is the enhancement of citizen participation and digital cross-border public services. German–Polish initiatives have shown that bilingual digital portals, shared municipal platforms, and participatory governance tools significantly strengthen trust and reduce perceived administrative distance. ROHU projects have not yet integrated a substantial civic participation component. Developing a ROHU Cross-Border Citizen Portal would improve communication on entitlements, access routes, health service availability, and patient rights, while allowing citizens to provide structured feedback on challenges encountered in cross-border mobility. Such participatory tools deepen democratic legitimacy and foster a shared sense of belonging¹⁴⁷.

A sixth strategic priority is the acceleration of ROHU’s shift from isolated pilots to systemic, cross-sectoral transformation by drawing on German–Polish best practices. The most successful German–Polish initiatives integrate health cooperation with digital governance, mobility, cultural cohesion, climate adaptation and labour market strategies. ROHU remains comparatively siloed, focusing primarily on health and digital tools without linking these to broader territorial development policies. Embedding eHealth initiatives within cross-sectoral strategies—such as linking rehabilitation services with mobility planning, telehealth with social inclusion policies, or health literacy with bilingual education—reduces fragmentation and speeds up the region’s convergence with more mature cooperation models.

Finally, long-term success depends on reliable national co-financing mechanisms. German and Polish municipalities possess higher administrative capacity and stronger fiscal bases, enabling them to maintain and expand cross-border systems after EU funding ends¹⁴⁸. ROHU counties and hospitals often lack similar financial resilience. Without dedicated national budget lines for telemedicine operations, maintenance of shared infrastructure, and continuous cross-border training, the innovations established under ROHU-48, ROHU-386 and ROHU00627 risk degradation after EU project closure. Multiannual domestic commitments are therefore essential to convert pilot accomplishments into enduring institutions—an indispensable condition for long-term social cohesion.

Taken together, these recommendations suggest that the ROHU region can accelerate its developmental trajectory by strategically adopting the institutional, digital and participatory mechanisms already consolidated along the German–Polish frontier. By transitioning from project-based cooperation to systemic integration, ROHU can reduce the current time-lag and move toward a more cohesive, resilient, and citizen-centred cross-border health ecosystem.

¹⁴⁷ OECD, *Empowering the Health Workforce*.

¹⁴⁸ Chilla and Lambracht.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agostino, Deborah, Michela Arnaboldi, and Melisa Diaz Lema. "New Development: COVID-19 as an Accelerator of Digital Transformation in Public Service Delivery." *Public Money & Management* 41, no. 1 (2021): 69–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2020.1764206>.
- Bache, Ian, and Matthew Flinders, eds. *Multi-Level Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199259259.001.0001>.
- Bertot, John C., Paul T. Jaeger, and Justin M. Grimes. "Using ICTs to Create a Culture of Transparency: E-Government and Social Media as Openness and Anti-Corruption Tools for Societies." *Government Information Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2010): 264–271. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2010.03.001>.
- Brunet-Jailly, Emmanuel. "Theorizing Borders: An Interdisciplinary Perspective." *Geopolitics* 10, no. 4 (2005): 633–649. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040500318449>.
- Bufon, Milan, and Vesna Markelj. "Regional Policies and Cross-Border Cooperation: New Challenges and New Development Models in Central Europe." *Revista Română de Geografie Politică* 12, no. 1 (2010).
- Chan, Joseph, Ho-Pong To, and Elaine Chan. "Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research." *Social Indicators Research* 75, no. 2 (Januarie 2006): 273–302. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-005-2118-1>.
- Chilla, Tobias, and Markus Lambracht. "Institutional Mapping of Cross-Border Cooperation. INTERREG Programme Analyses with KEEP Data." *European Planning Studies* 31, no. 4 (2022): 700–718. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2022.2058321>.
- Cordella, Antonio, and Niccolò Tempini. "E-Government and Organisational Change: Reappraising the Role of ICT and Bureaucracy in Public Service Delivery." *Government Information Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2015): 279–286. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2015.03.005>.
- "Cross-Border Monitoring Model — Innovative Data Collection Measures in the Szczecin Metropolitan Region (INT179)." 2014–2020 INTERREG V-A Germany / Mecklenburg–Western Pomerania / Brandenburg – Poland. KEEP Interreg Database. Accessed October 22, 2025. <https://keep.eu/projects/25155/Cross-border-monitoring-mod-EN/>.
- "Denk Mal: Unser Erbe – Deine Zukunft" [Think about it: Our legacy – your future]. INTERREG V-A Poland–Saxony 2014–2020. Accessed November 01, 2025. <https://projekty.plsn.eu/de/projekty/projekt/54>.
- Dickes, Paul, Marie Valentova, and Monique Borsenberger. "Construct Validation and Application of a Common Measure of Social Cohesion in 33 European Countries." *Social Indicators Research* 98, no. 3 (2010): 451–473. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-009-9551-5>.
- Dunleavy, Patrick, Helen Margetts, Simon Bastow, and Jane Tinkler. "New Public Management Is Dead—Long Live Digital-Era Governance." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 16, no. 3 (2006): 467–494. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mui057>.
- "EnergyTransPolSax – Joint Discovery of New Trends in the Energy Economy." Interreg V-A Poland–Saxony 2014–2020. Accessed November 02, 2025. <https://karr.pl/energytranspolsax/>.
- "Entdecke Dein Nachbarland! – Learn About Your Neighbouring Country!" Interreg V-A Poland–Germany/Saxony 2014–2020. Accessed November 04, 2025. <https://kohesio.eu/en/projects/Q4300236>.
- European Commission. "Commission Implementing Decision of 16 June 2014 Setting up the List of Cooperation Programmes and Indicating the Global Amount of Total Support from the European Regional Development Fund for each Programme under the European Territorial Cooperation Goal for the Period 2014 to 2020 (notified under document number C(2014) 3776) (2014/366/EU)." *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 178/18, 18 June 2014. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32014D0366>.
- European Commission. "The European Health Data Space (EHDS) Regulation and Digital Health for Europe." European Commission – eHealth, Digital Health and Care, 2022. Accessed October 22,

2025. https://health.ec.europa.eu/ehealth-digital-health-and-care/european-health-data-space-regulation-ehds_en.
- European Commission. The European Interoperability Framework – Implementation Strategy. COM(2017) 134 final. Bruxelles: European Commission, 2017. Accessed October 19, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0134>.
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy. “Cohesion Policy Legislation 2021–2027.” Accessed October 21, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/legislation-and-guidance/regulations_en.
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy. “European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg).” Accessed October 24, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/.
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy. “Interreg V-A – Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes 2014–2020.” Accessed October 16, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/cross-border_en.
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy. “Interreg V-A Romania–Hungary Programme, 2014–2020.” Accessed October 16, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/in-your-country/programmes/2014-2020/ro/2014tc16rfcb049_en.
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy. “Interreg VI-A – Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes 2021–2027.” Accessed October 16, 2025. <https://interreg.eu/programmes>.
- European Commission & Managing Authority of the Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme. *Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme 2021–2027*. Oradea: Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, 2022. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/home-en/>.
- European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies. *The Organisation of Resilient Health and Social Care Following the COVID-19 Pandemic: Lessons from Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020. Accessed October 17, 2025. https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-12/026_health_socialcare_covid19_en_0.pdf.
- European Parliament and Council. “Decision (EU) 2022/2481 of 14 December 2022 Establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030.” Text with EEA relevance. Accessed October 21, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2022/2481/oj>.
- Euro-Town Guben-Gubin. “Two Town Halls – one Euro-Town. Stage II.” INTERREG VA Brandenburg-Poland 2014–2020. Accessed October 25, 2025. <https://guben-gubin.eu/en/eurotown-projects/two-town-halls-one-euro-town-stage-ii>.
- Fonseca, Xavier, Stephan Lukosch, and Frances Brazier. “Social Cohesion Revisited: A New Definition and How to Characterize It.” *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* 32, no. 2 (2019): 231–253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2018.1497480>.
- Friemel, Thomas N. “The Digital Divide Has Grown Old: Determinants of a Digital Divide among Seniors.” *New Media & Society* 18, no. 2 (2016): 313–331. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814538648>.
- Grimmelikhuisen, Stephan. “Linking Transparency, Knowledge and Citizen Trust in Government: An Experiment.” *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 78, no. 1 (2012). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852311429667>.
- Helbig, Natalie C., J. Ramón Gil-García, and Enrico Ferro. “Understanding the Complexity of Electronic Government: Implications from the Digital Divide Literature.” *Government Information Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2009): 89–97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2008.05.004>.
- Helsper, Ellen J. *The Digital Disconnect: The Social Causes and Consequences of Digital Inequalities*. Londra: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526492982>.
- Hooghe, Liesbet, and Gary Marks. “Types of Multi-Level Governance.” *European Integration Online Papers* 5, no. 11 (2001): 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.302786>.

- “INTERREG V-A Poland–Germany/Saxony. Programme Description.” Accessed October 23, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/in-your-country/programmes/2014-2020/de/2014tc16rfcb018_en.
- Janssen, Marijn, Yannis Charalabidis, and Anneke M. G. van Eijk. “Benefits, Adoption Barriers and Myths of Open Data and Open Government.” *Information Systems Management* 29, no. 4 (2012): 258–268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10580530.2012.716740>.
- Kendir, Candan, Eric Breton, Yann Le Bodo and Yann Bourgueil. “Collaboration of Primary Care and Public Health at the Local Level: Observational Descriptive Study of French Local Health Contracts.” *Primary Health Care Research & Development*, no. 21 (2020): e61. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1463423620000559>.
- “Kom(m)ando – Gemeinsamer Schutz vor Klimafolgen.” Interreg V-A Poland–Saxony 2014–2020. Accessed November 02, 2025. <https://mapadotacji.gov.pl/projekty/1337099/?lang=en>.
- Mergel, Ines, Noella Edelmann, and Nathalie Haug. “Defining Digital Transformation: Results from Expert Interviews.” *Government Information Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2019): 101385. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2019.06.002>.
- Ministerul Sănătății [Ministry of Health]. Strategia Națională de Sănătate 2022–2030 [National Health Strategy for 2022–2030]. Accessed October 15, 2025. https://oldsite.ms.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SNS_2022-2030.pdf.
- “Modernization a voivodeship road no. 353, section between Strzelno and Pieńsk, Including Rothenburger Street in Krauschwitz.” INTERREG V-A Poland–Germany / Saxony 2014–2020. KEEP Interreg Database. Accessed November 22, 2025. <https://keep.eu/projects/17814/Modernization-a-voivodeship-EN/>.
- “Modernization a Voivodeship Road no. 354, Section between Turoszow-Sieniawka and no. 352, section Zatonie-Bogatynia, Including Schramm Street in Zittau.” INTERREG V-A Poland–Germany / Saxony 2014–2020. KEEP Interreg Database. Accessed October 25, 2025. <https://keep.eu/projects/19330/Modernization-a-voivodeship-EN/>.
- “Neue Berufsorientierungskompetenzen PL-SAX.” Interreg V-A Poland–Saxony 2014–2020. Accessed November 02, 2025. <https://projekty.plsn.eu/de/projekty/projekt/43>.
- Newman, David. “The Lines that Continue to Separate Us: Borders in our ‘Borderless’ World.” *Progress in Human Geography* 30, no. 2 (2006): 143–161. <https://doi.org/10.1191/0309132506ph599xx>.
- O’Dowd, Liam. “The Changing Significance of European Borders.” *Regional and Federal Studies* 12, no. 4 (2002): 13–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/714004774>.
- OASES Consortium. *Making Medical Deserts Bloom: Evidence-Based Reform and Health Workforce Strategies in Europe*. EU Health Programme (2021–2027) project no. 101018341, 2023. Accessed October 18, 2025. <https://oasesproject.eu/>.
- OECD. *Empowering the Health Workforce: Strategies to Make the Most of the Digital Revolution*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1787/bc6de2e9-en>.
- OECD and European Commission. *Health at a Glance: Europe 2020 – State of Health in the EU Cycle*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1787/82129230-en>.
- OECD and European Commission. *Health at a Glance: Europe 2022 – State of Health in the EU Cycle*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1787/507433b0-en>.
- Paasi, Anssi. *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Boundary*. Chichester, England; New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997.
- Perkmann, Markus. “Cross-Border Regions in Europe: Significance and Drivers of Regional Cross-Border Cooperation.” *European Urban and Regional Studies* 10, no. 2 (2003): 153–171. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776403010002004>.
- Piattoni, Simona. *The Theory of Multi-Level Governance: Conceptual, Empirical, and Normative Challenges*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199562923.001.0001>.

- Project ROHU-00627. “Resilient, Integrated and Accessible Cross-Border Health Services (Resilience4Health).” Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme 2021–2027. Accessed October 18, 2025. https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/project_library/resilience4health-resilient-integrated-and-accessible-cross-border-health-services-rohu-627/.
- Project ROHU-386. “CBC-HOSPEQUIP: Improving Cross-Border Health-Care Services with Modernised Medical equipment within Dr. Gavril Curteanu Hospital in Oradea and Békés County Central Hospital.” Interreg V-A/Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme. Accessed October 19, 2025. <https://interreg-rohu.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ROHU-386-EN-final.pdf>.
- Project ROHU-48. “Babies across Borders – Connecting Health Services in the Field of Obstetrics-Gynecology and Neonatal Care.” Interreg V-A Romania–Hungary Programme 2014–2020. Accessed October 18, 2025. <https://keep.eu/projects/22936/Babies-across-borders-conne-EN/>.
- Romanian Ministry of Health. “Health Sector Reform — Terms of Reference: Health Data Policy Specialist.” Accessed October 15, 2025. https://oldsite.ms.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ToR_Health-Data-Policy-Specialist.pdf.
- Sánchez-Corral Fernández, Elsa. “Educar para la justicia social: Una apuesta desde el análisis interseccional para estudiantes de grupos privilegiados.” *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios Educativos* 51, no. 3 (2021): 97–124. <https://doi.org/10.48102/rlee.2021.51.3.399>.
- Sanders, Elizabeth B.-N., and Pieter Jan Stappers. “Co-Creation and the New Landscapes of Design.” *CoDesign* 4, no. 1 (2008): 5–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15710880701875068>.
- Scott, James W. “Bordering, Border Politics and Cross-Border Cooperation in Europe.” *Neighbourhood Policy and the Construction of the European External Borders*, edited by Filippo Celata and Raffaella Coletti, 27–44. Cham: Springer, 2015. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-18452-4_2.
- Scott, James W. “European Politics of Borders, Border Symbolism and Cross-Border Cooperation.” *A Companion to Border Studies*, edited by Thomas M. Wilson and Henk van Houtum, 155–169. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118255223.ch5>.
- Socha-Dietrich, Karolina. “Empowering the Health Workforce to Make the most of the Digital Revolution.” *OECD Health Working Papers*, no. 129 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1787/37ff0eaa-en>.
- Stephenson, Paul J. “Twenty Years of Multi-Level Governance: ‘Where Does It Come From? What Is It? Where Is It Going?’” *Journal of European Public Policy* 20, no. 6 (2013): 817–837. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2013.781818>.
- Thomas, Steve, Anna Sagan, James Larkin, Jonathan Cylus, Josep Figueras, and Marina Karanikolos. *Strengthening Health Systems Resilience: Key Concepts and Strategies*. Copenhagen: European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2020. Accessed October 12, 2025. <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/332441/Policy-brief%2036-1997-8073-eng.pdf>.
- Tolbert, Caroline J., and Karen Mossberger. “The Effects of E-Government on Trust and Confidence in Government.” *Public Administration Review* 66, no. 3 (2006): 354–369. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00594.x>.
- “2014–2020 INTERREG V-A Poland – Germany / Saxony.” Accessed October 23, 2025. <https://keep.eu/programmes/30/2014-2020-Poland-Germany-Saxony/>.
- van Dijk, Jan A. G. M. “Digital Divide Research, Achievements and Shortcomings.” *Poetics* 34, no. 4-5 (2006): 221–235. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2006.05.004>.
- Welch, Eric W., Charles C. Hinnant, and M. Jae Moon. “Linking Citizen Satisfaction with E-Government and Trust in Government.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 15, no. 3 (2005): 371–391. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mui021>.
- Wimmer, Maria A. “Integrated Service Modeling for Online One-stop Government.” *Electronic Markets* 12, no. 3 (2002): 149–156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/101967802320245910>.
- Wissmar, Mathias, Claudia B. Maier, Irene A. Glinos, Gilles Dussault, and Josep Figueras. “Health Professional Mobility and Health Systems – Evidence from 17 European countries.” *Observatory Studies Series* 23 (2011). Accessed October 25, 2025. <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/569b8aca-a5c9-4ddd-a29d-7375cbc613db/content>.

Economic Growth, Demographic Decline and EU Cohesion: Employers' Perspective on Labour Shortages in Bihor County, Romania

Botond - Zsolt BOTTYAN¹⁴⁹

Delia-Georgeta BEKESI¹⁵⁰

Csaba-Lajos BEKESI¹⁵¹

Abstract: *Romania presents a significant paradox within the European Union: a “convergence conundrum” where substantial economic growth, largely fuelled by EU Cohesion Policy funds, is occurring alongside one of the most severe demographic crises in the Union. This demographic decline, driven by mass emigration, an aging population, and low birth rates, has culminated in a structural labour shortage that threatens the nation’s long-term economic sustainability. While this crisis is understood at a macroeconomic level, its direct impact on regional economic actors remains less explored. This paper addresses this gap by examining the labour shortage from the perspective of employers in Bihor County, an economically dynamic region in northwestern Romania that paradoxically experiences acute labour deficits despite high growth and low unemployment. Adopting a qualitative research methodology, this study utilises semi-structured interviews with human resources or management personnel from various local companies. The research aims to capture an in-depth, ground-level understanding of how employers perceive the local labour market, what specific skill gaps they face, the adjustment and retention strategies they employ, and what policy interventions they deem necessary. This paper provides the theoretical and contextual framework for this qualitative inquiry, linking the micro-level experiences of employers in Bihor to the macro-level demographic and policy trends shaping Romania and the wider European Union. Overall, the study concludes that the Bihor labour market faces a structural labour shortage, which constrains local economic development and competitiveness. Addressing this challenge requires coherent, long-term coordination between education, business, and public institutions, as well as stable funding and monitoring mechanisms to align workforce skills with the evolving needs of the regional economy.*

Keywords: *economic growth, labour scarcity, skills mismatch, labour market policies, Romania, Bihor County, EU cohesion*

Introduction

Since its accession to the European Union, in 2007, Romania has been a primary beneficiary of the EU’s Cohesion Policy, leveraging billions of euros to modernise its infrastructure and stimulate economic growth¹⁵². This period has been marked by a notable convergence with EU economic standards, reflected in rising GDP and increased foreign investment. On the other hand, this narrative about growth

¹⁴⁹ Lecturer, PhD, Faculty of Social-Humanistic Sciences, University of Oradea, 410087 Oradea, Romania. **E-mail:** bottyan.zsolt@gmail.com.

¹⁵⁰ Lecturer, PhD, Faculty of Social-Humanistic Sciences, University of Oradea, 410087 Oradea, Romania. **E-mail:** g.bekesi@uoradea.ro.

¹⁵¹ Executive Director of Bihor County Agency for Employment Oradea, Romania. **E-mail:** csaba_bekesi@yahoo.com.

¹⁵² Peter Berkowitz, Philippe Monfort, and Jerzy Pieńkowski, “Unpacking the Growth Impacts of European Union Cohesion Policy: Transmission Channels from Cohesion Policy into Economic Growth,” *Regional Studies* 54, no. 1 (2020).

is overshadowed by the fact that Romania's population is shrinking, because of the combined effects of mass emigration and a persistently low birth rate¹⁵³.

This conflict between EU-funded development and human capital depletion has created a “convergence problem,” where the foundations of economic growth are progressively undermined by the erosion of the most critical resource: people. The most acute symptom of this problem is a structural labour shortage that is present in several economic sectors of the Romanian economy, from high-tech industries to construction and agriculture¹⁵⁴. This shortage, beyond the quantitative aspects, presents a qualitative dimension, characterised by the persistent mismatch between the skills supplied by the education system and the competencies demanded by a modernising economy.

While the national and European dimensions of this crisis have been extensively documented through macroeconomic data,¹⁵⁵ a critical gap remains in understanding how these large-scale forces are experienced and navigated at the local level by the economic actors. Employers are directly confronted with the daily realities of unfilled vacancies, skills gaps, and the challenge of retaining talent in a highly mobile, transnational labour market. Their perspectives, strategies, and proposed solutions are important to elaborate effective policies that can solve this “convergence problem”.

Our paper seeks to address this issue by focusing on Bihor County, situated in northwestern Romania, being one of the country's most rapidly growing counties with one of the lowest unemployment rates in Romania¹⁵⁶. By exploring this issue through a qualitative analysis, our research aims to answer the following central question: how do employers in a dynamic regional economy like Bihor County perceive, experience, and respond to the structural labour shortage?

The primary method of data collection consists of semi-structured interviews with individuals in human resource management roles at various companies within Bihor County. This target group was selected for their direct involvement in recruitment, retention, and workforce planning, making them key informants on the challenges posed by the labour shortage. The interviews are guided by a structured protocol designed to explore four main thematic areas, ensuring both consistency across interviews and the flexibility to probe emergent topics:

1. General assessment of the labour market: this theme explores employers' overall evaluation of the labour supply in Bihor County and their perceptions of the primary influencing factors, such as demographic trends (migration, birth rates) and the role of the educational system.
2. Specific labour needs and deficits: this section focuses on the concrete challenges faced by each company, identifying the specific positions that are difficult to fill, the perceived reasons for these shortages (e.g., lack of candidates, skills gaps, local competition), and the characteristics of the employees they ultimately hire for these roles.
3. Employer adjustment and recruitment strategies: this theme investigates the practical measures employers take to adapt to the tight labour market. It covers how they gather labour market information, the recruitment methods they utilise (e.g., online platforms, direct contacts, agencies), and their strategies for attracting and retaining personnel for difficult to fill positions, including compensation, work environment, and training.

¹⁵³ World Bank Group, “World Development Indicators,” accessed August 16, 2025, <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>.

¹⁵⁴ Ionuț Földes, Zoltan Mihály, and Cristian Pop, “Labour Force Composition and Labour Shortage in North-Western Romania: A Cross-County Comparison,” *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, Sociologia* 68, no. 2 (2023).

¹⁵⁵ Vasily Astrov et al., How Do Economies in EU-CEE Cope with Labour Shortages? wiiw Research Report, no. 452 (Vienna: The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (wiiw), 2021); Valentina Vasile et al., “Labor Force Shortage Analysis in Romania-size, Impact and Measures” (Paper presented at the Proceedings of the International Conference on Applied Statistics, 2020).

¹⁵⁶ Agenția Națională pentru Ocuparea Forței de Muncă Bihor [National Agency for Employment], “Situția șomerilor înregistrați pe județe și localități, la 31.08.2028” [Registered unemployed by counties and localities, as of 31.08.2025], accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.anofm.ro/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/someri-localitati-august-2025.pdf>.

4. Policy recommendations: the final theme gathers employers' perspectives on what measures local and national authorities should implement to improve the labour market situation. This includes their opinions on the effectiveness of potential interventions related to vocational training, educational reform, incentives for returning migrants, and the importation of foreign labour.

The data gathered from these interviews are intended for thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, key challenges, and common strategies among employers in Bihor County. This will allow for a comprehensive understanding of the labour shortage from the ground up, providing an important complementary alternative to macro-level analyses.

Literature Review

The European Context: The Policy Tension between Cohesion, Growth, and Demography

One of the European Union's foundational goals is its "harmonious development" which is enacted through its Cohesion Policy,¹⁵⁷ an instrument designed to reduce economic, social, and territorial disparities among member states¹⁵⁸. However, this long-standing policy now confronts a demographic reality that challenges some of the assumptions of its growth models. The continent is aging and shrinking demographically, a process which is driven by low fertility rates and increasing life expectancy¹⁵⁹. This demographic process is constraining potential GDP growth,¹⁶⁰ intensifying fiscal pressures on public services like pensions and healthcare,¹⁶¹ and creating structural labour shortages across nearly all sectors¹⁶².

Romania's Development Paradox: EU-Funded Growth and Human Capital Loss

As a net recipient of EU funds, Romania is confronted by the dilemma of investing these funds in the traditional manner for capital-intensive infrastructure projects or for solving the human-capital-centric nature of the demographic crisis. Since 2007, it has been a major recipient of Cohesion Policy funding, with allocations of approximately 31 billion € for 2014–2020 and another 31 billion € for 2021–2027, supplemented by the Recovery and Resilience Facility¹⁶³. These funds have been the primary resource of public investment and had an important contribution to a 3.8% projected increase in GDP by 2030¹⁶⁴.

This economic progress has been overshadowed by a demographic crisis. The country's population has decreased steadily since 1990, driven by a combination of low fertility and sustained emigration¹⁶⁵. Unofficial estimates suggest over 4 million Romanians now live abroad, and an important

¹⁵⁷ Marco Brunazzo, "The History and Evolution of Cohesion Policy," *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, ed. Simona Piattoni and Laura Polverari (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016).

¹⁵⁸ European Commission, "Cohesion Policy. The EU's Main Investment Policy," accessed August 21, 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/what/investment-policy_en.

¹⁵⁹ Zbigniew Dlugosz, "Population Ageing in Europe," *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 19 (2011); Emily M. Grundy and Michael Murphy, "Population ageing in Europe," *Oxford Textbook of Geriatric Medicine*, ed. Jean-Pierre Michet et al., 3rd edition (Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹⁶⁰ David E. Bloom, David J. Canning, and Günther Fink, "Population Aging and Economic Growth," *Commission on Growth and Development Working Paper* 32 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2010).

¹⁶¹ Dorothee Rouzet et al., "Fiscal Challenges and Inclusive Growth in Ageing Societies," *OECD Economic Policy Papers*, no. 27 (2019).

¹⁶² Sandra Buchholz et al., "Aging Populations, Globalization and the Labor Market: Comparing Late Working Life and Retirement in Modern Societies," in *Aging Populations, Globalization and the Labor Market. Comparing Late Working Life and Retirement in Modern Societies*, ed. Hans-Peter Blossfeld, Sandra Buchholz, and Karin Kurz (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011).

¹⁶³ Fiscal Council of Romania, "Note on the Absorption of European Funds," accessed September 17, 2025, <https://www.fiscalcouncil.ro/2025-02-21%20feb%20-%20EN%20FC%20-%20Absorption%20of%20European%20Funds.pdf>.

¹⁶⁴ Francesca Crucitti et al., "A Cohesion Policy Analysis for Romania towards the 2021–2027 Programming Period," *JRC Working Papers on Territorial Modelling and Analysis*, no 06 (2022) (Seville: European Commission, 2022), accessed September 09, 2025, <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC129049>.

¹⁶⁵ World Bank Group.

part of the diaspora represents young, educated, and of working age, which is constituting a critical loss of “human capital”¹⁶⁶.

Emigration is accompanied by significant internal migration from poorer regions to economically dynamic regions,¹⁶⁷ as is the case in Bihor County. The implementation of EU funds has, in some ways, reinforced these trends. Chronic deficiencies in administrative capacity have led to low absorption rates of European funds and their hasty spending on poorly designed projects¹⁶⁸. In addition, the analysis of the use of European funds reveals a compromise between equity and efficiency, by concentrating investments in the developed region of the capital, Bucharest, and in a few more developed regions, which produce most of the national GDP, deepening regional disparities¹⁶⁹.

Romania's Structural Labour Shortage

The convergence of demographic decline and policy failures manifests most acutely in a structural labour shortage. Projections suggest that Romania's active workforce will continue to shrink for the foreseeable future¹⁷⁰. This situation is driven by the following interconnected factors: the shrinking and aging of the active population, continuous emigration, low immigration, and a skills mismatch between the education system and labour market demands¹⁷¹.

Romania's labour force participation rate is among the lowest in the EU, particularly among youth, women, and the rural population,¹⁷² which coexists with a pervasive skills gap. Employers consistently report a lack of foundational cognitive skills (literacy and numeracy)¹⁷³ and higher-order (socio-emotional) skills among graduates¹⁷⁴. The education system is criticised as being overly theoretical and disconnected from practical, industry-specific needs, leading to high rates of overqualification or situations where graduates work in jobs unrelated to their field of study¹⁷⁵. The primary state response has been to increase quotas for non-EU workers, a short-term fix that fails to address the deep-seated domestic challenges¹⁷⁶.

¹⁶⁶ Monica Roman and Zizi Goschin, “Romanian Immigrants Worldwide: What Makes them Return Home?” *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies* 6, no. 2 (2012).

¹⁶⁷ Cristian Incălțărău et al., “Migration, Regional Growth and Convergence: A Spatial Econometric Study on Romania,” *The Annals of Regional Science* 66, no. 3 (2021).

¹⁶⁸ Dragoș Jaliu and Crina Rădulescu, “Six Years in Managing Structural Funds in Romania. Lessons Learned,” *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences* 9, no. 38 (2013); Gheorghe Zaman and Anca Cristea, “EU Structural Funds Absorption in Romania: Obstacles and Issues,” *Romanian Journal of Economics* 32, no. 1 (2011).

¹⁶⁹ Dumitru Sandu, “Challenge and Response of Regional Disparities: Romania in a Comparative Perspective,” in *Das politische System Rumäniens: Entwicklung und Herausforderungen in Europa*, ed. Astrid Lorenz and Daniela-Maria Mariș (Springer, 2022); Vasile Surd, Ianos Kassai, and Laura Giurgiu, “Romania Disparities in Regional Development,” *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 19 (2011).

¹⁷⁰ Andreea Crețulescu, “Long-Term Labor Force Projections in Romania: An Analysis Based on Data on the Economic Impact of Population Aging” (paper presented at the Proceedings of the International Conference on Business Excellence, 2024).

¹⁷¹ Gina Cristina Dimian, “Labour Market and Educational Mismatches in Romania,” *Procedia Economics and Finance* 10 (2014).

¹⁷² World Bank Group.

¹⁷³ Hannah Kitchen et al., *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Romania*, accessed September 23, 2025, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2017/05/romania-2017_g1g787d2/9789264274051-en.pdf.

¹⁷⁴ Camelia Stăiculescu, Maria Liana Lăcătuș, and Raluca Livinti, “Employers Expectations and Requirements. Case Study: Employers of Schools of Economics and Business Graduates in Romania” (Paper presented at the Proceedings of the 15th International Conference on Business Excellence, 2021).

¹⁷⁵ Dimian.

¹⁷⁶ Cristina Lazăr, Ionel Bostan, and Nicoleta Asalos, “The Workforce Shortage on the Romanian Labor Market: Attempts to Compensate through the Admission of Foreign Quotas,” *MPRA*, no. 126172 (2025), accessed September 21, 2025, https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/126172/4/MPRA_paper_126172.pdf.

The Local Context: Labour Market Dynamics in Bihor County

The national labour crisis manifests with unique characteristics at the regional level. Bihor County, situated in northwestern Romania, is one of the nation's most dynamic counties, with a GDP per capita above the national average and an unemployment rate is around 2.0% in 2025¹⁷⁷. Its dynamic economy is driven by diverse industries, including manufacturing, automotive components, textiles, construction, and commerce.

From a demographic point of view, Bihor County faces the same challenges as Romania, although there is a trend towards stabilising the labour market due to a positive internal migration flow. While local authorities have proactively used EU funds to develop industrial parks¹⁷⁸ in the county's capital Oradea, to fuel economic growth, and started investing in local schools and universities, the persistent reports of labour shortages suggest that these measures have not been sufficient to overcome the deep-seated structural problems on the labour market. This context underscores the need for a deeper, qualitative exploration of the specific difficulties and adaptive strategies of employers on the ground.

Qualitative study on the perspective of human resources and management personnel on the labour shortage in Bihor County, Romania

Research aims and objectives

The purpose of the research is to identify the perception of human resources or management personnel regarding the labour shortage in Bihor County. More specifically, the general objective of our research was to capture respondents' perceptions of the labour market, identify positions with recruitment difficulties, and highlight the solutions applied in the organisations they represent.

The objectives pursued through this research are:

1. To provide a general characterisation of the labour market in Bihor/Oradea from the respondents' perspective
2. Highlighting the specific needs of employers, including shortage occupations and the factors determining recruitment difficulties.
3. Inventory and evaluation of organisational adjustment measures to labour market dynamics
4. Systematising and analysing social and economic policy proposals regarding the labour market, as formulated by respondents, with an emphasis on their relevance and feasibility.

Methodology, research tool, and study participants

In terms of methodology and specific data collection tools, the research used in the study is qualitative, more specifically an interview-based survey. The research tool used for data collection is the interview guide, which was applied to the subjects of the proposed study in March-April 2025. The subjects are individuals responsible for human resources or management, and the sample is opportunistic. Data was collected from 17 subjects, and their involvement in the study was voluntary, depending on their availability and willingness to participate in the interview. They were informed about the purpose of the interview, how it would be conducted, its estimated duration, and the confidentiality of their responses. Although the small sample size does not allow for representative statistical inferences, the present investigation provides a useful exploratory framework for subsequent, larger-scale, studies, and the data obtained can serve as analytical benchmarks in substantiating theoretical conclusions.

The interview guide contains 15 questions, plus information about the company and the respondent, and is structured around four dimensions or subthemes. Subtheme 1 General assessment of

¹⁷⁷ Agenția Națională pentru Ocuparea Forței de Muncă Bihor [National Agency for Employment], "2,03% – rata șomajului înregistrat în evidențele AJOFM Bihor în luna august 2025" [2.03% – unemployment rate recorded in the records of the Bihor County Agency for Employment in August 2025] (Comunicat de presă [Press release], no. 5386/08.09.2025, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.anofm.ro/bihor/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2025/09/Comunicat-de-presa-tara-somajului-august-2025.doc>).

¹⁷⁸ Agenția de Dezvoltare Locală Oradea [Oradea Local Development Agency], accessed September 21, 2025, <https://adlo.ro/>.

the labour market explores perceptions of job opportunities in Bihor/Oradea (diversity, skill level, stability), factors influencing labour availability (wages, conditions, migration, qualifications, policies), and the degree of match between demand and candidates' training/expectations. Subtheme 2 Specific employer needs identify hard-to-fill positions (professions and educational level required), causes of shortages (demographics, insufficient training, educational provision, local competition) and the profile of candidates actually recruited when positions are filled (accredited, with practical experience, or without experience – trained on the job). It also maps positions for which recruitment is easy. Subtheme 3 Labour market adjustment measures List sources of market information (local/national/international), current recruitment methods and reasons for their use, channels avoided and why, as well as attraction/retention measures applied or planned (salary package/benefits, working conditions, training, reorganisation). Includes measures not yet explored and reasons for postponement. It assesses the existence/form of a recruitment strategy (local, national, international). Subtheme 4 Public policies collect opinions on measures recommended to the authorities (vocational training, dual education, tax incentives/subsidies, programs for the diaspora, reduction of contributions, compulsory internships, etc.) and on other proposals under discussion (birth rate, labour import, EU restrictions), with arguments regarding their effectiveness in the Romanian context.

Research results – analysis of thematic dimensions

Socio-demographic data

The sample analysed (17 companies) outlines a predominantly SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) profile: 12 organisations have fewer than 50 employees (5 micro, 7 small), 2 are medium-sized (50–249), and 3 are large (≥ 250); in terms of turnover, 8 companies are in the range of 5–50 million RON, 5 are below 1 million RON, 2 are between 1–5 million RON, one is between 50–200 million RON, and one is above 200 million RON, 5 below 1 million RON, 2 between 1–5 million RON, one between 50–200 million RON, and one above 200 million RON, which shows a concentration up to 50 million RON (15 out of 17). The sectoral structure is led by manufacturing (6 out of 17), followed by construction and trade (together 6 out of 17), while agriculture, transport, and services are represented by 1 company each. The sectoral structure is led by manufacturing (6 out of 17), followed by construction and trade (together 6 out of 17), while agriculture, transport, HoReCa, financial services, and accounting/auditing appear in isolation (1 out of 17 each), suggesting a focus on production and related activities. The responses come mainly from decision-making and strategic support levels: 6 from top management, 4 from HR, 1 from middle management, and 6 administrators, a profile that favours the perspective of organisational policy and medium- to long-term vision. In terms of education, bachelor's degrees dominate (8), followed by high school (6), master's degrees (2), and doctorates (1). In terms of seniority, the average experience of 4–10 years prevails (11), followed by over 11 years (5) and 1–3 years (1). In terms of gender, there is a slight predominance of women (9 women, 7 men) and one undeclared case.

Subtheme 1. Respondents' overall assessment of the labour market

The qualitative data analysed indicates that the job offers in Bihor County and, in particular, in Oradea is perceived by respondents as “moderate to good,” characterised by sectoral diversity (manufacturing, construction, logistics and transportation, trade/retail, services, HoReCa, administration) and territorial distribution that extends beyond the central urban area. Oradea functions as a hub of opportunities, but the existence of jobs in peri-urban and rural areas suggests broader coverage of labour demand at the county level. In terms of qualifications, the market is polarised: the segment with the highest visibility is jobs for unskilled or semi-skilled workers (production operators, warehouse workers, cashiers, construction workers), while opportunities for specialists and graduates with higher education exist, but are fewer, more selective, and often more competitive (engineers of various specialisations, finance and accounting, procurement, health, analysts). Some employers compensate for the lack of experience with on-the-job training, a sign that investing in basic skills is becoming a relatively widespread practice; however, there remains a visible gap between the skills available and those required for technical or niche positions. Job stability is generally higher in industry and manufacturing, especially

in large companies, where permanent contracts and clear rules prevail, making jobs more predictable. In contrast, services and retail remain more vulnerable to seasonality and economic cycles, which reduces predictability. In recent months, some perceptions indicate a slowdown in the variety of offers due to the economic context; however, the market as a whole remains attractive: there is a high volume of entry-level positions for various skill levels, and opportunities for specialists persist, although they are fewer and more competitive.

The apparent contradictions in the subjects' responses ("good/generous" vs. "low offer/low qualification") actually describe different segments of the market: there is sufficient volume in entry-level jobs, but in mid- to high-level positions, quality and matching skills are decisive, and retention becomes difficult. In practice, rapid interventions are useful: technical and digital micro-qualifications, expansion of apprenticeships and dual learning, more precise matching based on skills (not just diplomas), retention measures at company level (onboarding, mentoring, career paths) and support for mobility within the county.

With regard to the factors influencing labour force availability, the analysis of the responses indicates a set of interdependent determinants of labour force availability in Bihor/Oradea, with different roles depending on the occupational segment (entry vs. medium-high). Thus, salary is perceived as the main determinant of entry and retention in the local labour market. When remuneration is below the national/European level or does not reflect the volume and complexity of tasks, difficulties in attracting and retaining workers increase, and migration to regions or countries with higher remuneration intensifies. In the entry-level segments, wage elasticity is higher; in the medium-high segments, the total package (salary, benefits, and future prospects) matters. At the same time, working hours, workload, occupational health and safety (OHS), technological equipment, compliance with legislation, non-salary benefits, and organisational culture directly influence availability and job stability. Predictable jobs with clear procedures and a decent working environment retain employees better than volatile ones. Another factor mentioned by respondents is external and seasonal migration, which influences the local pool of candidates, especially among young people and skilled trades. Wage differentials, promotion opportunities, and quality of life affect seasonal or permanent outflows. The mismatch between candidates' skills and companies' requirements limits employment in technical and mid- to high-level positions. On-the-job training and short micro-qualifications are valued solutions, but existing capacity does not fully cover the need. Rapid validation of skills (beyond diplomas) and the expansion of dual/apprenticeship routes significantly reduce the time to productivity. Public training, counselling, apprenticeship/dual programs, and integration support can correct these imbalances, provided they are implemented well and aligned with the real needs of employers. Long-term consistency, through budget predictability and clear standards, together with education-business partnerships and mobility services (transport/commuting) are essential levers.

The match between available jobs and candidates' profiles/expectations is overall, considered by the respondents to be suboptimal: the local offer focuses on operational positions and medium/low qualifications, while many candidates, including graduates, are looking for better-paid, more flexible, and "modern" jobs, and technical trades (welder, electrician, mechanic, CNC – Computer Numerical Control, operator) remain difficult to fill. The gap is fuelled by a shortage of applied technical skills, salary expectations and conditions above the local average, limited mobility/retraining, and the still insufficient capacity for targeted training. As a result, matching is successful in some cases (especially at entry level and where on-the-job training is available), but generally results in longer time to fill, turnover, and migration, which calls for rapid micro-qualifications, skills validation, retention packages, and education-business partnerships.

"The job supply in Bihor and Oradea is diverse, with positions for both unskilled workers and technical trades or university graduates. However, most openings are in low- or mid-skill roles, while specialist positions are fewer. Required qualification levels vary, yet there is a gap between available competencies and those demanded. Stability is high in industry and manufacturing but more fragile in

services and retail. Overall, the labour market is dynamic, but there are challenges regarding retention and workforce qualification.” (HR Representative, manufacturing)

“There are more vacancies for the unskilled. We also need qualified people.” (Manager, insurance)

“The job offer is acceptable.” (Manager, commerce/retail)

“Salary is one of the most important factors determining whether a person is willing to work in a particular field or area. Other factors include the work schedule, workload, respect from the employer, workplace safety, and work–life balance.” (Administrator, construction)

“In general, there is a mismatch between the jobs on offer and candidates’ preparation. Most available positions require medium or low qualifications, but many university graduates seek better-paid, more specialised roles. At the same time, technical and hands-on trades (welders, electricians, mechanics) are hard to fill due to a shortage of qualified staff. Expectations regarding pay and working conditions are often higher than what local employers offer. Thus, there is matching, but it is not optimal, which explains turnover and staff shortages.” (HR Representative, manufacturing)

“Employers frequently look for skilled workers in technical trades (welders, electricians, mechanics, plumbers, CNC operators, professional drivers); mid-qualified staff for retail, logistics, warehousing, construction; and specialists in IT, engineering, and accounting.” (Administrator, manufacturing)

Subtheme 2. Assessing the specific needs of employers in the labour market

With regard to the positions for which respondents encounter the greatest recruitment difficulties, the aggregate picture indicates recruitment difficulties on two main fronts. On the one hand, skilled technical occupations (vocational/post-secondary level): welders, electricians, locksmiths, mechanics, plumbers, CNC operators, maintenance technicians/electro-mechanical adjusters, where there is a chronic shortage of candidates with solid practical training; here, there is a simultaneous lack of applied training, migration (including to Hungary), salaries perceived as uncompetitive, and the low attractiveness of hard work/variable schedules. On the other hand, there are positions requiring higher education that are difficult to fill, especially engineers (mechanical, automation, construction), IT specialists, and economists/accountants—where the barriers relate to specific technical requirements, experience, and high salary expectations relative to the local offer.

In operational areas requiring unskilled labour, the dominant problem is not a lack of candidates, but low retention: turnover is fuelled by low wages, seasonality, unpredictable schedules, and more attractive alternatives nearby. In construction, both basic qualifications (bricklayer, blacksmith, carpenter) and unskilled personnel are difficult to stabilise for the same reasons: high physical effort, seasonality, and volatility of construction sites. In logistics and transport, the difficulty stems from long-distance availability requirements and salary/per diem packages that are not sufficiently attractive.

The subjects’ responses regarding the main reasons why they cannot find enough suitable candidates for the available positions converge towards a coherent diagnosis of the shortage of suitable candidates: (1) demographic factors — external and internal migration that reduces the pool of candidates, especially among skilled young people; (2) skills mismatch — insufficient practical training, limited local educational provision in technical fields, and too few graduates from vocational schools; (3) high competition on the local market (including with multinationals) and (4) gap between salary/benefit expectations and what employers offer, plus (5) job attractiveness factors (perception of working conditions, schedule, stability). From a policy perspective, these findings point to the need for integrated intervention across the training-to-employment chain: strengthening dual education and apprenticeships (work-based learning), aligning curricula with required skills (e.g., ESCO skills), accelerated up-/re-skilling programs, company-school consortia for internships and job placement, sector-specific wage adjustments and retention/benefit packages, as well as worker mobility and repatriation tools (EURES – European Employment Services, reintegration schemes), all coupled with measures to improve working conditions and organisational flexibility.

Perceptions converge towards a clear pattern: where recruitment is “easy,” it is mainly found in entry-level/unskilled positions and, occasionally, in basic administrative or call centre positions (high school/post-secondary level), such as retail sales assistants/cashiers, warehouse workers and auxiliary workers in manufacturing or HoReCa. Even here, “easy” means access to available candidates rather than necessarily a lasting match: problems with reliability, turnover, salary expectations, and dissatisfaction with working conditions are frequently reported. A large group of respondents say that there are no positions that are easy to recruit for, and some point out that even unskilled workers are hard to find in certain contexts (local competition, schedule, physical effort). The exceptions that indicate easier recruitment for higher education graduates are isolated and seem to reflect niches or advantages specific to certain employers. Overall, the “ease” of recruitment is inversely correlated with the level of qualification, but does not guarantee retention; to stabilise these positions, companies mention the usefulness of on-the-job training programs, flexible schedules, adjusted benefit packages, and a value proposition for employees that is better calibrated to their expectations.

“The most difficult recruitments are for technical trades and vocational qualifications: CNC operators (vocational/post-secondary level). In construction, there is demand for rebar workers/ironworkers, bricklayers, and plumbers, where the shortage of qualified staff is chronic. At the higher-education level, employers struggle to attract engineers (mechanical, automation, civil) and specialists in accounting or IT. For unskilled work there are candidates, but the issue is turnover and lack of stability. Overall, the largest deficit is felt in technical trades requiring strong practical training.” (HR Representative, manufacturing)

“There are many vacancies, but they are hard to fill because of the requirements (experience, long-distance driving, pay/per diems, etc.). There’s a lack of applicants due to working conditions, low wages, and limited attractiveness. Recruitment is intense, seasonally and non-seasonally, but many candidates refuse because of schedules, fluctuations, and remuneration.” (Administrator, HoReCa)

“A significant number of qualified and able-bodied people have left the country, especially young people or those with experience in technical and medical fields. Romania continues to lose active labour to countries that offer better wages and working conditions.” (Administrator, construction)

“The main reason we do not find enough suitable candidates is salary expectations.” (Manager, commerce/retail)

“As a rule, we manage to recruit people with relevant practical experience, even if they do not always have an accredited diploma. In certain technical trades we attract graduates of vocational or post-secondary schools, but their number is small. We often hire candidates without direct experience, whom we train on the job through internal training programs. For more complex positions, the priority remains recruiting specialists with recognised qualifications and at least a few years of experience. Overall, the mix is between traditionally skilled workers and employees trained internally to cover urgent needs.” (HR Representative, manufacturing)

“There are also positions for which candidates are easy to find, especially in areas where the requirements are minimal (no diploma or only general requirements), competition among employers is lower, and the job offers a stable schedule and relatively good conditions.” (Administrator, HoReCa)

Subtheme 3. Employer labour market adjustment measures

The sources from which employers obtain information on labour market developments are: AJOFM (Bihor County Agency for Employment) reports, job platforms (eJobs, BestJobs, OLX, Hipo, plus LinkedIn/Indeed for international trends), local/national media, recruitment firms, and specialist publications (INS (National Institute of Statistics)/Eurostat, EU reports). Access to such data is generally good, but the information is scattered and does not go into sufficient detail on technical occupations at the local level.

Regarding recruitment methods, the responses show that companies use multiple recruitment channels, chosen according to the type of position: for volume and quick response time, online platforms/social networks and public advertisements dominate; for low cost and access to local candidates

(especially unskilled/technical), AJOFM is used; for rare or complex roles, companies turn to recruitment agencies/headhunting and professional networks; for cultural fit and retention, internal recommendations and, occasionally, internal promotions are important; for employer image and medium-term pipeline, job fairs and career events are mentioned. Thus, the effectiveness of recruitment methods varies by channel: online and referrals bring volume, agencies fill hard-to-fill positions, AJOFM offers good access at low cost, and fairs improve the organisation's image. In practice, companies use them in combination, depending on urgency, budget, and job level.

The least frequently used recruitment methods are advertisements in the print media and, in many cases, collaboration with recruitment agencies or AJOFM (perceived as costly/cumbersome or with poor candidate matching); occasionally, companies also avoid using their own databases or internal promotions in small companies. The reasons given are low return on resources, cost and complexity, and poor candidate matching, while digital channels offer speed and better coverage. As a result, budgets are shifting towards online and referrals; agencies/AJOFM remain selective options for difficult positions, provided that requirements are clarified and matching mechanisms are improved. Public announcements in newspapers/print media are rarely used.

The subjects' responses regarding the measures used to attract or retain staff in shortage positions outline a mix of measures with an emphasis on material incentives and direct interventions to address skills mismatches. Thus, employers rely primarily on the salary package: targeted increases for hard-to-fill positions, attendance/productivity/loyalty bonuses, and attractive overtime pay. These are perceived as having the fastest effect in attracting and retaining staff in the context of local competition. The financial package is complemented by concrete benefits (meal vouchers, transport provided, bonuses) and organisational measures that contribute to stability, such as fixed working hours and improved working conditions. To address the skills shortage, companies are investing in on-the-job training and advanced training/retraining courses so that they can also recruit candidates without direct experience. At the same time, some companies are resorting to attracting workers from outside Romania, developing employer branding actions, and building partnerships with schools to secure a "pipeline" of future employees. In specific situations, some positions are being reorganised or even eliminated. Overall, financial motivation remains the main lever in the short term, and the combination of benefits, better conditions, and training creates the conditions for more sustainable retention in the medium term.

Analysis of responses regarding other management measures not used by organisations indicates, overall, a reluctance to adopt costly or bureaucratic measures and a preference for "local resource" solutions. The most frequently mentioned unused option is importing labour from outside the EU, which is perceived as a cumbersome and expensive procedure, with risks of cultural and linguistic integration, sometimes even more costly than local hiring. National/international recruitment is rarely explored for reasons of budget, logistics, and insufficient attractiveness (salaries/benefits/brand). Reducing activity or cutting jobs is undesirable (many companies are aiming for growth), and additional material benefits, free time, or extensive development programs are limited by financial constraints. In addition, measures involving major organisational changes (real flexible working hours, modernisation of culture) are postponed due to their complexity and because salary is considered to remain the main determinant of attraction/retention.

Overall, the responses show that the recruitment strategy at the local or global company level is either non-existent (especially in small companies) or predominantly local-regional, focused on Bihor and neighbouring localities. The current channels are those with fast response times and low costs: online platforms, collaboration with AJOFM, internal recommendations, partnerships with high schools/vocational schools, and participation in job fairs. For scarce or highly specialised roles, some companies supplement with recruitment agencies and, occasionally, with national/international openings, but without a formalised global strategy—the main reasons being costs, more difficult integration, and the need for rapid local coverage. This creates a "two-tier" model: local for volume/entry-level positions; extended (specialised recruiters/international) for rare positions.

“We obtain labour market information primarily through recruitment websites and local and national media. We also periodically consult reports and statistics published by AJOFM and the National Institute of Statistics (INS). Recruitment firms and professional networks provide additional insights, especially for specialised segments. At the international level, we track trends through trade publications and professional associations. We consider access to information to be reasonable, but up-to-date and detailed data are sometimes lacking for certain local technical occupations.” (HR Representative, manufacturing)

“We most frequently use internal recruitment, and when the need exceeds what we can handle ourselves, we turn to recruitment agencies, AJOFM, and job sites where we post job advertisements.” (Talent Acquisition Manager, manufacturing)

“Recruitment methods that we use less often—or even avoid—are public advertisements in traditional print media.” (Administrator, bakery)

“Our recruitment strategy is predominantly local and regional, aimed at attracting candidates from Bihor County and nearby areas. We rely on online platforms, collaboration with AJOFM, and partnerships with vocational schools to meet immediate needs.” (HR Representative, manufacturing)

“We have several internal strategies to retain key people in critical roles, and through our employer branding efforts we are also attractive on the market to new candidates who may join our company.” (Talent Acquisition Manager, manufacturing)

“So far, we have not seriously considered bringing in labour from outside the EU, because this measure entails complex bureaucratic procedures as well as challenges related to the cultural and linguistic integration of foreign employees. In addition, there is a risk that this solution would be only short term and would not resolve the shortage of qualified personnel at the national level.” (Administrator, transport)

“Traditional recruitment methods—conventional approaches—offer proven advantages and can be particularly effective in certain contexts.” (Administrator, commerce/retail)

Subtheme 4. Social and economic policy measures concerning the labour market

Opinions converge on a policy package with three main axes. First, vocational training: expansion of vocational/dual education, school-company partnerships, publicly funded internships and apprenticeships, rapid retraining for adults, and alignment of the curriculum with local demand (engineering, IT, green energy, technical trades). The logic is straightforward: aligning skills with employers’ needs shortens the time to employment and reduces the structural deficit.

The second axis focuses on economic incentives and labour costs: increasing the attractiveness of jobs by reducing payroll contributions (for higher net income), subsidy/tax credit schemes for employers who invest in training and retention, plus support for SMEs (lower taxes, access to financing) and attracting investment. These measures aim to make the local offer competitive with alternatives in the West and to stabilise jobs.

The third axis targets mobility and retention: policies to bring back Romanians from the diaspora, support for internal relocation, local youth integration programs, and mandatory/standardised internships. Overall, participants see positive effects because the combination of relevant skills, more favourable hiring costs, and clear pathways to market entry simultaneously increases the availability, quality, and retention of the workforce. As a priority, dual and retraining programs (with public/EU funding) should be launched quickly, together with a fiscal-social package targeted at sectors with shortages, monitored by simple indicators: time to employment, placement rate after the course, net entry salary, and retention at 6–12 months.

With regard to other measures that should be adopted by local and national authorities to improve the current labour market situation, the consensus is the same: the most promising measures are investments in education and vocational training (modernisation of VET (Vocational Education and Training)/dual education, apprenticeships, targeted retraining, school-business partnerships), because they directly address the skills shortage and shorten the time to employment. Complementary economic incentives (contribution reductions, employment and training subsidies, support for SMEs) are needed to

increase the attractiveness of jobs and local competitiveness. On the mobility component, the repatriation of the diaspora and, in specific cases, the import of labour from outside the EU are seen as useful short- to medium-term solutions, but only as part of a coherent mix that does not replace the development of the local workforce and takes into account costs and integration. Demographic policies (birth rates) are appreciated but understood as long-term measures with no rapid impact on the current deficit. The key message from respondents: the direction is good, but effectiveness depends on implementation—coordination between the state and the private sector, stable funding, and clear standards for practice, evaluation, and results.

“To improve the situation of Romania’s labour market, the authorities should adopt a coherent set of measures focused on vocational training, stimulating employment, and aligning education with the real demands of the labour market. The main proposals are: modernising and expanding vocational and technical education; subsidising the employment of certain categories of people; providing free or subsidised training and retraining programs (through AJOFM or EU funds); and encouraging the return of Romanians from the diaspora.” (Administrator, construction)

“Providing qualifications tailored to actual market needs, so that the workforce is prepared in line with the requirements of companies operating on the market, would help improve the current labour market situation.” (Talent Acquisition Manager, manufacturing)

“Supporting dual education, professional retraining programs, and continuous training courses for employees with financial support from public or European funds are measures that can improve the current labour market situation” (HR Representative, General Mechanical Operations).

“The project ‘START – Invest in Skills for the Future!’ implemented by AJOFM, aims to increase employment opportunities for unemployed people under 30 through workplace apprenticeships. These programs can help reduce the shortage of skilled labour by offering young people training and integration opportunities in the labour market, and financial incentives can contribute to alleviating the labour shortage and encouraging the return of valuable human capital to the country.” (Administrator, HoReCa)

“Training programs through AJOFM and the modernisation of vocational education would be the most effective, because they directly address the shortage of technical trades. Financial incentives for Romanians in the diaspora can help, but they must be coupled with competitive wages and working conditions at home. Pro-natality policies have only long-term effects and do not solve the current shortage. Bringing in labour from outside the EU is a quick fix, but it entails integration challenges and additional costs. Restrictions on the right to work within the EU are unrealistic and would negatively affect freedom of movement.” (HR Representative, manufacturing)

“Training programs and vocational education should be implemented in Romania so that those who do not wish to pursue academic studies can acquire a trade and find employment in Romania.” (Manager, accounting and financial auditing)

Research conclusions

The dominant perception among respondents is that the job market is good to acceptable and relatively diverse, with many operational and medium/low-skilled positions, as well as persistent demand for skilled personnel, where positions are fewer and more competitive. Stability is considered higher in industry/manufacturing (permanent contracts, large companies) and more fragile in services/retail. There are signs of a slight recent decline in supply/variety due to the economic context, but at the same time there are still a large number of vacancies (AJOFM, platforms), including on-the-job training.

In terms of labour supply, the labour market shows a dual labour shortage: there is a lack of both skilled technical professions (vocational/post-secondary level) and positions requiring higher education (engineering, IT, finance–accounting), and the entry-level segment suffers particularly from low retention. The causes are mainly systemic — migration, skills mismatch (insufficient practical training, low VET completion rates), local competition, and the gap between salary/benefit expectations and what employers offer. In practice, companies combine accredited specialists for critical roles with on-the-job training for new entrants, and in the medium term, the solution requires the expansion of VET/apprenticeships,

company-school partnerships, accelerated up/re-skilling, along with salary packages and working conditions that support attraction and retention. The factors influencing labour supply are interdependent: sub-competitive wages stimulate migration; poor working conditions increase turnover; skills shortages push companies toward internal training, but without adequate incentives, retention remains difficult. For entry-level jobs, the minimum wage, working hours, and access (transportation) are the most important factors, while for mid- to high-level positions, total compensation, job content, technological level, career paths, and performance management systems become decisive. Overall, the labour market in Bihor is perceived as active but fragmented: abundant in entry-level job offers but lacking in specialised skills. This imbalance translates into a suboptimal match between candidate profiles and job requirements, which prolongs the time to fill vacancies, increases turnover, and amplifies migration trends. To correct these dysfunctions, participants recommend integrated policies for rapid micro-qualification, skills validation, strengthening education-business partnerships, and implementing coherent retention and mobility measures at the local level. Long-term consistency, securing budgetary resources, and standardising training programs are considered essential conditions for stabilising and improving the quality of the labour market in Bihor County.

Workforce recruitment is mainly affected by a lack of suitable candidates and a mismatch between available skills and job requirements, particularly in technical fields. At the same time, migration and high turnover contribute to human resource instability, amplifying pressure on employers. Staff retention is a major challenge, more complex than the recruitment process itself. Retaining employees depends not only on the financial component, but also on the quality of the organisational environment, job predictability, and professional development opportunities, all of which directly influence loyalty to the employer.

Employers are also increasingly turning to in-house training and on-the-job learning to address skills shortages, but the capacity of these programs is limited. There is therefore a need to expand collaboration with the education system, public authorities, and training institutions to create qualification pathways tailored to actual demand. The recruitment strategies implemented by employers are based on a combination of channels, used according to the specifics of the position and the available resources: online platforms, collaboration with AJOFM, recruitment agencies, internal recommendations, and job fairs. This hybrid approach allows for effective coverage, but remains fragmented.

The main measures to attract and retain staff are financial in nature: salary increases, performance bonuses, additional benefits (meal vouchers, transportation, bonuses), and improved working conditions. At the same time, on-the-job training and professional development initiatives contribute to increased human resource stability. With regard to social and economic policy measures concerning the labour market, the priority is a coherent package of measures: expansion of VET/dual education, apprenticeships, and rapid retraining through school-business partnerships; economic incentives (contribution reductions, subsidies/tax credits, SMEs support, attracting investment); measures for mobility and retention (repatriation, internal relocation, standardised internships), with non-EU imports only on a case-by-case basis and subject to conditions.

Conclusions

EU cohesion funds have accelerated Romania's convergence with the European Union, yet this progress is strained by a "convergence paradox": depopulation driven by emigration and low fertility erodes human capital. The labour shortage is structural, both quantitative and qualitative, rooted in persistent skills – demand mismatch, while stopgap measures (e.g., higher quotas for non-EU workers) remain merely palliative. Bihor provides a telling case: a dynamic economy with low unemployment, yet persistent shortages. Targeted policies are required, including curriculum reform and demand-oriented training, retention and return-migration strategies, and calibrated immigration. A qualitative analysis of the labour market in Bihor County reveals a dynamic but uneven structure, in which a consistent supply of jobs for medium and low-skilled segments coexists with high competition for specialised positions. Salaries, working conditions, and professional development opportunities are emerging as the main determinants of labour force availability and stability, directly influencing the mobility, retention, and

professional orientation of candidates. Despite relative sectoral diversification, the match between available skills and employer requirements remains poor, which prolongs recruitment times and increases turnover. Employers show moderate adaptability, based on on-the-job training and ad hoc salary adjustments, but the lack of an integrated skills development strategy limits the sustainability of these solutions. In this context, public policies focused on education, vocational training, and economic incentives are essential levers for strengthening the local labour market. Coordination between the educational environment, authorities, and the private sector is a necessary condition for transforming the current dynamics into a coherent, predictable, and equitable system capable of supporting long-term economic and social development.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agenția de Dezvoltare Locală Oradea [Oradea Local Development Agency]. Accessed September 21, 2025. <https://adlo.ro/>.
- Agenția Națională pentru Ocuparea Forței de Muncă Bihor [National Agency for Employment]. “2,03% – rata șomajului înregistrat în evidențele AJOFM Bihor în luna august 2025” [2.03% – unemployment rate recorded in the records of the Bihor County Agency for Employment in August 2025]. Comunicat de presă [Press release], no. 5386/08.09.2025). Accessed September 21, 2025. <https://www.anofm.ro/bihor/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2025/09/Comunicat-de-presa-tara-somajului-august-2025.doc>.
- Agenția Națională pentru Ocuparea Forței de Muncă Bihor [National Agency for Employment]. “Situația șomerilor înregistrați pe județe și localități, la 31.08.2028” [Registered unemployed by counties and localities, as of 31.08.2025]. Accessed September 21, 2025. <https://www.anofm.ro/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/someri-localitati-august-2025.pdf>.
- Astrov, Vasily, Sebastian Leitner, Richard Grieveson, Doris Hanzl-Weiss, Isilda Mara, and Hermine Weinberger-Vidovic. How Do Economies in EU-CEE Cope with Labour Shortages? wiiw Research Report, no. 452. Vienna: The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (wiiw), 2021.
- Berkowitz, Peter, Philippe Monfort, and Jerzy Pieńkowski. “Unpacking the Growth Impacts of European Union Cohesion Policy: Transmission Channels from Cohesion Policy into Economic Growth.” *Regional Studies* 54, no. 1 (2020): 60–71.
- Bloom, David E, David Canning, and Günther Fink. “Population Aging and Economic Growth.” Commission on Growth and Development Working Paper 32, 297–328. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2010.
- Brunazzo, Marco. “The History and Evolution of Cohesion Policy.” In *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, edited by Simona Piattoni and Laura Polverari, 17–35. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016.
- Buchholz, Sandra, Annika Rinklake, Julia Schilling, Karin Kurz, Paul Schmelzer, and Hans-Peter Blossfeld. “Aging Populations, Globalization and the Labor Market: Comparing Late Working Life and Retirement in Modern Societies.” In *Aging Populations, Globalization and the Labor Market. Comparing Late Working Life and Retirement in Modern Societies*, edited by Hans-Peter Blossfeld, Sandra Buchholz, and Karin Kurz, 3–32. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011.
- Crețulescu, Andreea. “Long-Term Labor Force Projections in Romania: An Analysis Based on Data on the Economic Impact of Population Aging.” Paper presented at the Proceedings of the International Conference on Business Excellence, 2024.
- Crucitti, Francesca, Nicholas-Joseph Lazarou, Philippe Monfort, and Simone Salotti. “A Cohesion Policy Analysis for Romania towards the 2021–2027 Programming Period.” *RC Working Papers on Territorial Modelling and Analysis*, no. 06 (2022): 1–25. Seville: European Commission, 2022. Accessed September 09, 2025. <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC129049>.

- Dimian, Gina Cristina. "Labour Market and Educational Mismatches in Romania." *Procedia Economics and Finance* 10 (2014): 294–303.
- Długosz, Zbigniew. "Population Ageing in Europe." *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 19 (2011): 47–55.
- European Commission. "Cohesion Policy. The EU's Main Investment Policy." Accessed August 21, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/what/investment-policy_en.
- Fiscal Council of Romania. "Note on the Absorption of European Funds." Accessed September 17, 2025. <https://www.Fiscalcouncil.Ro/2025-02-21%20feb%20-%20en%20fc%20-%20absorption%20of%20european%20funds.Pdf>.
- Földes, Ionuț, Zoltan Mihály, and Cristian Pop. "Labour Force Composition and Labour Shortage in North-Western Romania: A Cross-County Comparison." *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, Sociologia* 68, no. 2 (2023): 35–55.
- Grundy, Emily M., and Michael Murphy. "Population Ageing in Europe." *Oxford Textbook of Geriatric Medicine* Zbigniew Długosz, "Population Ageing in Europe," *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 19 (2011); Emily M. Grundy and Michael Murphy, "Population ageing in Europe," *Oxford Textbook of Geriatric Medicine*, ed. Jean-Pierre Michet, B. Lynn Beattie, Finbarr C. martin, Jeremy D. Walston, 3rd edition, 11–18. Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Incălțărău, Cristian, Gabriela Carmen Pascariu, Adelaide Duarte, and Peter Nijkamp. "Migration, Regional Growth and Convergence: A Spatial Econometric Study on Romania." *The Annals of Regional Science* 66, no. 3 (2021): 497–532.
- Jaliu, Dragoș, and Crina Rădulescu. "Six Years in Managing Structural Funds in Romania. Lessons Learned." *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences* 9, no. 38 (2013): 79–95.
- Kitchen, Hannah, Elizabeth Fordham, Kirsteen Henderson, Anne Looney, and Soumaya Maghnoij. *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Romania*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2017. Accessed September 23, 2025. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2017/05/romania-2017_g1g787d2/9789264274051-en.pdf.
- Lazăr, Cristina, Ionel Bostan, and Nicoleta Asaloș. "The Workforce Shortage on the Romanian Labor Market: Attempts to Compensate through the Admission of Foreign Quotas." *MPRA*, no. 126172 (2025). Accessed September 21, 2025. https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/126172/4/MPRA_paper_126172.pdf.
- Roman, Monica, and Zizi Goschin. "Romanian Immigrants Worldwide: What Makes Them Return Home?" *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies* 6, no. 2 (2012): 2–17.
- Rouzet, Dorothée, Aida Caldera Sánchez, Theodore Renault, and Oliver Roehn. "Fiscal Challenges and Inclusive Growth in Ageing Societies." *OECD Economic Policy Papers*, no. 27 (2019): 1–69.
- Sandu, Dumitru. "Challenge and Response of Regional Disparities: Romania in a Comparative Perspective." In *Das Politische System Rumäniens: Entwicklung Und Herausforderungen in Europa*, edited by Astrid Lorenz and Daniela-Maria Mariș, 263–284. Springer, 2022.
- Stăiculescu, Camelia, Maria Liana Lăcătuș, and Raluca Livinti. "Employers Expectations and Requirements. Case Study: Employers of Schools of Economics and Business Graduates in Romania." Paper presented at the Proceedings of the 15th International Conference on Business Excellence, 2021.
- Surd, Vasile, Ianos Kassai, and Laura Giurgiu. "Romania Disparities in Regional Development." *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 19 (2011): 21–30.
- Vasile, Valentina, Cristina Rodica Boboc, Simona Ioana Ghiță, Irina Băncescu, and Andreea Simona Săseanu. "Labor Force Shortage Analysis in Romania-Size, Impact and Measures." Paper presented at the Proceedings of the International Conference on Applied Statistics, 2020.
- World Bank Group. "World Development Indicators." Accessed August 16, 2025. <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>.
- Zaman, Gheorghe, and Anca Cristea. "Eu Structural Funds Absorption in Romania: Obstacles and Issues." *Romanian Journal of Economics* 32, no. 1 (2011): 60–77.

II. Cross-Border Cooperation – tool for increasing social cohesion

Alexandra COLȚA, Ludmila ROȘCA (Chișinău) ◀▶ *The Role of Youth in the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in a Democratic Society*

Yaroslav DROZDOVSKYY (Uzhhorod) ◀▶ *Ukraine – EU Integration: Cross-Border Cooperation During Wartime*

Simona FER (Oradea) ◀▶ *When European Identity Speaks English: Multilingualism and Social Cohesion in the European Space*

The Role of Youth in the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in a Democratic Society

Alexandra COLȚA¹⁷⁹
Ludmila ROȘCA¹⁸⁰

Abstract. *In contemporary society, characterised by numerous transformations, the active involvement of young people in the political process is a determining factor of sustainable development. The study highlights the link between the level of civic and political participation of young people and the degree of solidarity and social inclusion in a society. Starting from the conceptual analysis of sustainable development and youth policies, the authors explore the ways in which youth participation in decision-making processes contributes to strengthening social cohesion, especially in the Republic of Moldova. By analysing national and European strategies on youth and civic involvement, structural barriers that limit youth participation are identified, as well as good practices that can be taken over in regions in transition. The authors assess the importance of inter-institutional cooperation and regional policies in creating a favourable framework for youth involvement in the political process. In conclusion, the authors mention that the involvement of young people in the life of communities is a catalyst for social inclusion and their sustainable development.*

Keywords: *young people, participation, social cohesion, sustainable development, cohesion policy*

Introduction

Contemporary society is characterised by a sharp dynamism, generated by complex processes such as: globalisation, accelerated digitalisation, climate change, migration, and war in the region. These transformations directly influence the way in which citizens relate to state institutions and democratic governance mechanisms. In this context, young people represent a vulnerable social category, but at the same time, they are extremely relevant for shaping the future, as they feel the effects of economic, political, and social instability most acutely. The Republic of Moldova, located at the intersection of the Eastern and European spaces, is subject to major pressures to adapt to democratic standards and the cohesion policy promoted by the European Union. Structural transformations of the state, as well as reforms in the fields of: education, economy and social protection, outline a context in which the participation of young people in public life can no longer be seen as an option, but as a necessity for consolidating the stability and resilience of society.

Applied methodology. Complex social phenomena, such as: youth policy, sustainable development, inclusion, participation, and social cohesion were analysed based on the systemic approach. We capitalised on the cognitive/constructive potential of the principles: interdisciplinarity and complementarity. We widely applied the content analysis of the decisions of the Council of the European Union, the European Youth Strategy 2019–2027, the National Youth Strategy, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, etc. Thus, we obtained theoretical and methodological support for achieving

¹⁷⁹ Ph.D. student, State University of Moldova. **E-mail:** aalecsandra@mail.ru.

¹⁸⁰ Doctor of Philosophy, Senior Researcher, State University of Moldova, **E-mail:** ludmilarosca.com@gmail.com.

the objectives of this investigation: defining the role of young people in the sustainable development of democratic society.

Theoretical support of the investigation

The concept of sustainable development, established by the Brundtland Report and subsequently consolidated by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, represents the foundation of modern policies oriented towards equity and responsibility. Sustainable development integrates three interdependent dimensions: economic, ecological and social. While the first two have been intensively addressed in international literature, the social dimension has gained increasing importance in recent decades, emphasising inclusion, equity and active participation of citizens in the political process. In the Republic of Moldova, the National Development Agenda and the National Youth Strategy place the social dimension of sustainable development at the centre of public policies, recognising that without reducing inequalities, creating opportunities for young people and strengthening social cohesion, the sustainability goals cannot be achieved. Thus, the social dimension is not limited to material well-being, but includes the participation of young people as actors of change and as promoters of community cohesion.

The EU Youth Strategy provides a framework for the objectives, principles, priorities, as well as the main areas and measures for cooperation in the field of youth policy, taking into account their competences and the principle of subsidiarity. Cooperation at EU level stimulates the participation of young people in democratic life, in accordance with Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. It also supports social involvement and civic engagement. Youth policy capitalises on the principles: equality, non-discrimination, inclusion, participation. Youth policy as an object of study has several dimensions, the most important being: global, European, national, regional and local. The systemic approach to youth policies suggests the need to appreciate action plans, policy projects in their economic, political, social interconnections.

Youth participation in the political process is a characteristic of the quality of democracy. Their involvement in civic and political life contributes not only to the equitable representation of the interests of young generations, but also to the creation of more transparent, inclusive and efficient democratic mechanisms. In European documents, young people are valued as an “active social capital,” capable of stimulating processes of innovation, solidarity and community cohesion. Thus, their participation becomes a catalyst for sustainable development, as it promotes intergenerational equity, environmental responsibility and social inclusion. In the Republic of Moldova, strengthening a framework conducive to youth involvement in the decision-making process is closely linked to the strategic objective of approaching European values and standards. Therefore, ensuring active participation of young people in decision-making processes is not only a democratic imperative, but also a necessary condition for achieving sustainable development objectives and for strengthening social cohesion at local, national and regional levels.

In the Republic of Moldova, recent research shows a paradox: although young people show interest in social issues and are active in community initiatives and online, their formal participation – especially in elections or in traditional structures of political representation – remains low.¹⁸¹ This discrepancy highlights the need to develop innovative mechanisms of involvement that respond to the needs and expectations of young people. At the same time, modern theoretical approaches emphasise “deliberative participation,” in which young people are real partners in the decision-making process, not just passive beneficiaries of public policies.

The European Union’s cohesion policy is the main financial and strategic instrument aimed at reducing regional disparities, strengthening solidarity and ensuring balanced development in the Member

¹⁸¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Moldova, 2022 UN Country Annual Results Report: Republic of Moldova (Chişinău: PNUD Moldova, 2022), accessed August 02, 2025, <https://moldova.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/2022%20UN%20Country%20Annual%20Results%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>.

States. Currently, it aligns with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027, focusing on five major directions: green and digital transition, social and territorial cohesion, strengthening economic resilience, innovation and supporting human capital.

With regard to young people, cohesion policy intersects with the European Youth Strategy 2019–2027, which promotes the active participation, inclusion and autonomy of young people. Initiatives such as Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps or youth employment and entrepreneurship programmes are designed to support their integration into society and the labour market. The focus is on creating equal opportunities, reducing regional disparities and strengthening social cohesion by involving the younger generation as actors of change.

The Republic of Moldova promotes a youth policy anchored in the decisions of the Council of Europe, as outlined in the “Youth 2030” Strategy, which emphasises the role of young people and youth organisations in the construction of participatory democracy and modern society. Following the imperative of European integration, the Republic of Moldova aligns itself with the trends in the development of youth work assumed by the European Union through the European Agenda on Youth Work, the EU Youth Goals and the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, addressing young people and youth structures as important actors in the process of implementing the National Development Strategy “European Moldova 2030” and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (hereinafter – SDGs).

The Youth Sector Development Strategy “Youth 2030” is a reference programmatic document for the Republic of Moldova, being the fourth cycle of policies in the field. First of all, it marks a stage of continuity and, at the same time, innovation in addressing the well-being of young people, by strengthening an institutional ecosystem oriented towards their real needs. On the one hand, the strategy aligns with European trends and the policies of the Council of Europe, capitalising on the European Agenda on Youth Work, the European Youth Goals and the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027. This anchoring in the European framework demonstrates not only the strategic orientation of the Republic of Moldova towards European integration, but also the desire to build a youth policy compatible with international standards. On the other hand, the document responds to the national specifics, marked by structural challenges such as youth migration, demographic aging and urban-rural disparities.

In this sense, the “Youth 2030” Strategy approaches youth policies in a multidimensional and transversal manner, focusing on:

- non-formal and informal education, complementary to formal education, to develop transversal skills (creativity, critical thinking, innovation, leadership, emotional intelligence) required on the global labour market;
- civic and decision-making participation, by strengthening dialogue platforms between young people and authorities and by promoting volunteering and social innovation;
- community involvement, with an emphasis on developing social capital and creating flexible crisis response mechanisms (health, economic or geopolitical), where young people are considered rapid mobilisation actors;
- recognition of the youth associative sector, as an essential partner in the implementation of public policies and in strengthening social cohesion;
- alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including with regard to inclusive education, gender equality and the creation of participatory mechanisms in the decision-making process.¹⁸²

Cohesion Policy: Opportunities for Youth in the Republic of Moldova

The thesis that: young people are social capital, suggests that we capitalise on the content of the

¹⁸² Ministerul Educației și Cercetării [Ministry of Education and Research], Strategia de dezvoltare a sectorului de tineret “Tineret 2030” (Proiect) [Youth Sector Development Strategy “Youth 2030” (Project)] (Chișinău, 2022), accessed August 28, 2025, <https://mecc.gov.md/ro/content/elaborarea-strategiei-de-dezvoltare-sectorului-de-tineret-tineret-2030>.

phenomenon. The notion of social capital is used in the work of Alexis de Tocqueville: “Democracy in America”. At the end of the 20th century, Robert Putnam in his work: “Creating Democracy. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy” notes that social capital refers to “the characteristics of social organisation, such as: social networks, norms and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit”.¹⁸³

In the specialised literature, two distinct approaches have emerged regarding the origins and sources of social capital: from the bottom of society to the top, and from the top to the base. Proponents of the first approach view civil society as the main source of social capital, emphasising the role of voluntary associations, non-governmental organisations, collective actions, and social interactions in its formation and in strengthening democracy. Scholars who adopt the institutional approach highlight the impact of the state and political institutions on the development of social capital. The state incorporates non-governmental organisations into institutional practices by promoting the principles of impartiality, justice, and the sanctioning of corrupt practices.

The central notion that circumscribes the concept of social capital is trust. A high level of trust among individuals and groups within a society leads to the identification of optimal solutions and fosters cooperation. However, multiple distinctions exist between trust in individuals, in others, and in institutions, as they are not associated with the same set of variables. Interpersonal or social trust is expressed by individuals who generally feel surrounded by trustworthy people, while political trust is expressed by individuals who are generally satisfied with the functioning of political institutions and politicians. Social trust is primarily based on direct, immediate experience with others, whereas political trust is more often learned indirectly and is mediated by mass media. Both dimensions are essential for the effective functioning of democracy.

Young people are open to building relationships with others and to offering support. When they take their destinies into their own hands, they encounter a series of typical transitions in their personal lives and environments: from education to employment, the shift to an autonomous lifestyle, the establishment of partnerships, or the formation of a family. Many of them face uncertainties concerning their future. Drawing on experiences and decisions regarding youth cooperation in recent years,¹⁸⁴ the European Union Youth Strategy for 2019–2027 addresses the challenges faced by young people across Europe. The EU Youth Strategy provides a framework for objectives, principles, priorities, as well as the main fields and measures of cooperation in the field of youth policy for all stakeholders, duly taking into account their competences and the principle of subsidiarity.

Therefore, the “Youth 2030” Strategy can be interpreted as a platform of convergence between European standards and national realities, aimed at harnessing the potential of young people as promoters of change and as contributors to the consolidation of social cohesion. Thus, it reflects both a continuity of previous policies and an openness to innovation, through the integration of modern approaches to non-formal education and the promotion of youth participation as key actors in sustainable development. By correlating European cohesion policies with youth policies in the Republic of Moldova, one can observe a clear convergence in terms of general objectives: reducing inequalities, strengthening social inclusion, and fostering the active participation of young people. While at the European level the emphasis is placed on digitalisation, the green transition, and transnational mobility, at the national level priorities are more strongly oriented toward combating migration, reducing urban–rural disparities, and creating sustainable mechanisms for youth involvement in decision-making processes. This complementarity generates significant opportunities for convergence. On the one hand, the Republic of Moldova can draw upon

¹⁸³ Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Tradition in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 280.

¹⁸⁴ Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States Meeting within the Council, Resolution of the Council of the European Union on a Framework for European Cooperation in the Youth Field: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027 (2018/C 456/01), *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 456, December 18, 2018, accessed September 05, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A42018Y1218%2801%29>

European experience in the fields of innovation, digital inclusion, and deliberative participation. On the other hand, by adapting European programs to local realities—for example, by extending EU4Youth-type initiatives or by developing cross-border local partnerships—both social cohesion and the gradual integration of Moldova into the European political and social space can be strengthened.

Several difficulties, however, hinder the full capitalisation of opportunities provided by cohesion policy and youth policy, notably socioeconomic exclusion and political absenteeism. Young people who are, for various reasons, excluded from community life are generally less active, and their level of trust in institutions is comparatively lower. Europe cannot afford the waste of talent, the persistence of social exclusion, or the lack of youth engagement. Young people should not only be architects of their own lives but also active contributors to positive societal change. For young people to fully benefit from EU initiatives, these must reflect their aspirations, creativity, and talents, while also addressing their needs. In turn, young people contribute to amplifying the EU's ambitions: according to the EU Youth Report, the current generation is the best educated in history and is particularly skilled in the use of information and communication technologies as well as social communication platforms.

In this context, it should be noted that inclusion represents an essential component of youth policies, with planned actions being “intended to combat both exclusion and discrimination.” Youth participation is closely linked to solidarity and social inclusion, being recognised as a determining factor of cohesion in democratic societies. Through active involvement, young people acquire a sense of belonging, develop collaboration skills, and become promoters of equity and diversity. International studies confirm that participation—both physical and digital—enhances social capital and reduces the risks of marginalisation.

In the Republic of Moldova, social inclusion of young people remains a major challenge, given external migration, disparities between urban and rural areas, and unequal access to educational and economic resources. The engagement of young people in participatory structures—youth councils, non-governmental organisations, volunteer projects—not only contributes to their personal development but also strengthens intergenerational solidarity and helps prevent social exclusion. Thus, youth participation becomes a catalyst for an inclusive democratic society, in which cohesion policy is transformed into a genuine and effective process of social integration.

Conclusions

The assimilation of the cohesion policy of the European Union is very important for the functioning of the state institutions of the Republic of Moldova, for the officials of the central and local public authorities. The impact of the Cohesion Policy on the lives of young people is immense, because European citizens are united in target groups of policies aimed at economic and social cohesion. Convincing, in this sense, are the data from the VII Report on economic, social and territorial cohesion.

The citizens of the Republic of Moldova, in the midst of the process of Europeanisation, assimilate various concepts, including those presented in this article: social capital, social cohesion, Cohesion Policy, inclusion, participatory democracy, etc. Knowledge of the concepts allows understanding the objectives of the Cohesion Policy, which, at the moment, is a priority of the Internal Policy of the Republic of Moldova, which aims to promote the social values of the European Union, to show attention and care for all disadvantaged social groups.

The development of participatory democracy in the Republic of Moldova is an important project of pro-European governance, the implementation of which will capitalise on the opportunities offered by the Social Policy and Cohesion Policy, the youth policy. But this model cannot be implemented without the active involvement in the socio-political process of the trained actor, aware of the challenges of the time in which he carries out his activity, a bearer of the political culture of participation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States Meeting within the Council. Resolution of the Council of the European Union on a Framework

- for European Cooperation in the Youth Field: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027 (2018/C 456/01). *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 456, December 18, 2018, 1–22. Accessed September 05, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A42018Y1218%2801%29>.
- Goudenhooff, Gabriela. “Incluziunea socială” [Social inclusion]. In *Europa socială în 100 de termeni. Incursiune în cultura socială și instituțională a spațiului european* [Social Europe in 100 terms. An insight into the social and institutional culture of the European space], edited by Gabriela Goudenhooff, Anamaria Brihan, and Ioan Horga, 171. București: Tritonic Books, 2018.
- Ministerul Educației și Cercetării [Ministry of Education and Research]. Strategia de dezvoltare a sectorului de tineret “Tineret 2030” [Youth Sector Development Strategy “Youth 2030”]. Chișinău, 2022. Accessed August 28, 2025. <https://mecc.gov.md/ro/content/elaborarea-strategiei-de-dezvoltare-sectorului-de-tineret-tineret-2030>.
- Putnam, Robert D. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Tradition in Modern Italy*. Princeton, New Jersey, USA: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Tsouparopoulou, Eva, Maria Symeonaki, Dimitris Parsanoglou, and Aggeliki Kazani. “European Youth and Digital Engagement: Attitudes, Skills, and Civic Participation.” *Journal of Applied Youth Studies* 8 (2025): 219–247. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-025-00168-z>.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Moldova. 2022 UN Country Annual Results Report: Republic of Moldova. 2022. PNUD Moldova. Accessed September 02, 2025. <https://moldova.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/2022%20UN%20Country%20Annual%20Results%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>.

Ukraine – EU Integration: Cross-Border Cooperation During Wartime

Yaroslav DROZDOVSKYY

Abstract. *Since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, Ukraine's EU integration has been significantly influenced by cross-border cooperation with neighbouring EU states, notably Romania. This research employs a mixed-method analysis, integrating quantitative data on trade volumes and costs with a qualitative review of legislative and infrastructure alignment, to evaluate the efficiency and strategic value of the EU's "Solidarity Lanes". The quantitative analysis confirms the critical, non-linear role of the Romanian corridor, which generated approximately EUR 64 billion in value for the Ukrainian economy. The Port of Constanța's record turnover in 2023, largely due to transiting 25 million tons of Ukrainian cargo, highlights its function as a vital logistical redundancy mechanism. The core conclusion is that the high operational costs of the Lanes are justified by their strategic, non-market value in ensuring supply chain resilience and national economic stability. Qualitatively, cooperation has dramatically accelerated structural integration, evidenced by sustained CEF and Interreg NEXT funding (over EUR 91 million) for projects like the European-gauge rail lines and the simplification of customs procedures. This collaboration holds the potential to deepen regional ties, contribute significantly to post-war recovery, and reinforce European solidarity. Continued, sustained financial and political commitment is crucial for ensuring a stable and prosperous future for the region and for strengthening Ukraine's path toward EU accession.*

Keywords: *EU integration, Cross-border cooperation, Wartime, Ukraine, Romania, Logistics*

Introduction

Since the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, Ukraine's geopolitical and economic landscape has undergone a dramatic transformation. The blockage of traditional maritime trade routes necessitated an immediate reconfiguration of logistics chains to ensure the survival of the national economy. Consequently, cross-border cooperation (CBC) with European Union neighbours – Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and notably Romania – has evolved from a tool of regional development into a critical mechanism for economic resilience and national security.

A key element of this cooperation has been the establishment of the EU's "Solidarity Lanes," which have facilitated the export of vital Ukrainian goods when Black Sea ports were blockaded or restricted. Romania has emerged as a strategic partner in this domain, managing a significant share of Ukrainian grain and commodity exports transiting through its territory, particularly via the Port of Constanța and the Danube River routes. Furthermore, financial instruments such as the Interreg NEXT programs have provided essential funding for regional development, with over EUR 91 million allocated to projects involving Ukrainian participants as of October 2024.

While the humanitarian and political aspects of this cooperation are well-documented, the *long-term economic implications* and *efficiency* of these emergency logistical shifts require deeper analysis. Specifically, it is crucial to understand how wartime cross-border initiatives are reshaping the economic and transport infrastructure required for Ukraine's future EU accession.

The primary goal of this research is to evaluate the economic efficiency of the "Solidarity Lanes" through Romania in facilitating Ukrainian exports during the wartime period (2022–2024), specifically comparing the operational capacity and cost-effectiveness of these routes to pre-war maritime logistics. Furthermore, the study aims to assess how enhanced cross-border cooperation is structurally preparing the Ukrainian transport network for EU accession.

Hypothesis: Despite higher operational costs and initial capacity constraints, the “Solidarity Lanes,” particularly the Romanian transit routes, have proven to be an indispensable, economically viable, and resilient mechanism, successfully preventing a collapse of Ukraine’s core export sectors and forging long-term infrastructure connectivity crucial for post-war recovery.

Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks of Regional Integration and Wartime Logistics

Classical regional integration theories, such as those postulated by Balassa, suggest that cross-border cooperation acts as a fundamental phase, moving countries from free trade arrangements toward deeper economic and institutional integration. The current CBC framework with Ukraine, however, operates under the pressure of wartime economics, redefining the concept of integration as a tool of national resilience and security. This context necessitates a focus on the rapid deployment of redundant supply chains, where the proximity of the EU border states, especially Romania, shifts from a geographical convenience to a strategic asset. Previous studies on EU enlargement underscore that the proximity of a candidate country to the *acquis communautaire* drives institutional harmonisation,¹⁸⁵ a process now drastically accelerated by the crisis.

Analysis of the Solidarity Lanes and Logistical Constraints

The EU’s establishment of the Solidarity Lanes in May 2022 was a direct response to the Russian blockade of Ukraine’s Black Sea ports. Initial policy evaluations highlighted severe logistical bottlenecks: the lack of sufficient rolling stock, the incompatibility of the 1520 mm (Ukrainian) and 1435 mm (EU) rail gauges, and cumbersome customs procedures. The Danube ports—Izmail, Reni, and Giurgiulești—and the Port of Constanța rapidly became the most vital nodes. Constanța’s strategic location allowed it to absorb the vast volume of Ukrainian grain, oilseeds, and iron ore. Reports from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and maritime analysts confirm that while these routes provided the necessary exit capacity, they introduced significantly higher freight costs and longer transit times compared to the traditional deep-sea routes. This established a critical trade-off between logistical cost-efficiency and supply chain security.

The Role of Financial and Institutional Instruments

The Interreg NEXT programs, initially designed for regional development, were quickly repurposed to address wartime needs. The allocation of over EUR 91 million to projects involving Ukraine demonstrates the shift from standard regional policy to crisis response and infrastructure alignment. This financing targets soft infrastructure (institutional capacity, customs simplification) and hard infrastructure (border crossing upgrades). Furthermore, the extension of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) to Ukraine and Moldova signals the EU’s long-term commitment to physically integrating Ukraine’s transport system, making current emergency investments permanent components of the future European network.

Methodology

The research employs a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies to achieve a holistic evaluation. This design is crucial for triangulating statistical evidence of logistical performance with an assessment of the institutional and structural drivers of enhanced cross-border cooperation (CBC).

Evaluating Logistical Efficiency

The quantitative component focuses on assessing the operational and cost efficiency of the “Solidarity Lanes” through the comparative analysis of trade and logistical metrics.

¹⁸⁵ Béla Balassa, *The Theory of Economic Integration* (Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, 1961).

Data Collection. Time-series data (2019–2024) is sourced from Eurostat, the State Customs Service of Ukraine, Port of Constanța authority reports, and policy documents from the European Commission. Focus is placed on Trade Volume (Tonnes of key Ukrainian exports (grain, ores) transiting through Romania) and Transit Costs (Average per-tonne cost of transportation via rail/road/river compared to pre-war Black Sea maritime rates).

Analytical Methods:

- Comparative Time-Series Analysis. Descriptive statistics (volume trends, peak utilization rates) compare wartime operational metrics against historical benchmarks.
- **Efficiency Index (E)**. A simplified index is conceptually applied to illustrate the trade-off between resilience and cost:

$$E = \frac{\text{Volume Transited (Tonnes)}}{\text{Cost} \times \text{Time}}$$

The analysis interprets the index's value not merely as market competitiveness, but as strategic viability.

Institutional and Policy Impact

The qualitative component assesses the long-term structural success of wartime CBC in accelerating infrastructure and policy alignment essential for future EU accession.

- Policy and Legislative Review: Analysis of key legislative changes, including the implementation of EU *acquis* into Ukrainian rail safety standards, bilateral agreements for customs simplification, and the transition to conducting border checks on moving trains.
- Case Study Analysis of Interreg NEXT Projects: Review of official reports detailing the implementation and outcomes of cross-border initiatives financed through Interreg NEXT (over EUR 91 million allocated) to assess their contribution to regional stability and institutional capacity building.

Results and Discussion

Efficiency of the Romanian Corridor

The quantitative analysis confirms the critical, non-linear role of the Romanian transit corridor. Since the inception of the Solidarity Lanes, they have enabled the export of over 93 million tonnes of Ukrainian agricultural products and approximately 96 million tonnes of non-agricultural goods. The total value generated for the Ukrainian economy is estimated at approximately EUR 64 billion.

The Constanța Gateway: The Port of Constanța's role was paramount. In 2023, the Port achieved a record cargo turnover of 92.5 million tons, a 22.5% increase over 2022. Ukrainian cargo accounted for approximately 25 million tons of this volume. While the Danube/rail routes were more expensive and slower than traditional maritime shipping, they provided *capacity* when the alternative was zero trade. The routes demonstrated **high resilience efficiency (E_crisis)**, which was necessary for national economic survival. The sharp decline in Ukrainian grain exports through Constanța (a drop of nearly 45% in H1 2024) following the successful establishment of the independent Ukrainian Black Sea corridor highlights the limits of the Solidarity Lanes' **cost-competitiveness (E_market)**. When a cheaper route became viable, market actors immediately shifted, confirming the Lanes' primary function as a strategic reserve and security mechanism, rather than a long-term commercial competitor to maritime freight.

Structural Integration for EU Accession

Emergency cooperation has accelerated long-term structural integration:

- Rail Interoperability. Significant financial commitments have been made to address the gauge difference. This includes the completed EUR 28.6 million project for the 1435 mm gauge line

between Uzhhorod and Chop, and the launched construction of the same gauge line from the Polish border to Sknyliv near Lviv, backed by a EUR 73.5 million grant.

- Institutional Alignment. Ukraine has adopted legislation on railway safety and interoperability in line with EU standards and has introduced streamlined procedures, such as conducting customs checks on moving trains, thereby increasing the qualitative efficiency of border crossing.
- Regional Capacity Building. The use of Interreg NEXT funding (EUR 91 million for 167 projects) fosters local capacity and regional cohesion, which are necessary prerequisites for future utilization of full EU structural funds upon accession.

Conclusions

This study confirms that the cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Romania, operationalised through the EU's "Solidarity Lanes," has been instrumental in ensuring Ukraine's economic resilience during the full-scale invasion.

Key Finding: Cost vs. Strategic Resilience

The core conclusion is that the high operational costs associated with the Romanian segment of the Solidarity Lanes should not be viewed as an indicator of economic inefficiency in the classical sense, but rather as a reflection of their strategic, non-market value during military aggression. This corridor provided critical resilience and logistical redundancy, successfully preventing the collapse of Ukraine's key export sectors and securing currency inflows (estimated at EUR 64 billion). Thus, the strategic necessity of these routes justified the higher transit expenditures, simultaneously accelerating the structural integration of Ukraine's transport infrastructure into the EU's TEN-T network as a permanent guarantee of economic security, independent of short-term price competitiveness.

Policy Recommendations: The Necessity of Sustained Financing

1. Sustained Funding for Interoperability. The EU must maintain and increase the allocation of Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) and bilateral grants to finalise key infrastructure projects, particularly the construction of 1435 mm gauge lines. This investment in interoperability transcends wartime logistics, serving as the foundation for permanent economic integration.
2. Long-Term Commitment to Regional Cohesion. Funding for programs like Interreg NEXT must be guaranteed and expanded. These initiatives are crucial for building the necessary administrative capacity, institutional trust, and social cohesion in border regions that are prerequisite for Ukraine's successful long-term absorption of EU Structural Funds.
3. Future-Proofing Redundancy. Investment in the Danube River fleet and multimodal terminals in Constanța should be maintained to ensure the Danube route remains a viable and highly scalable alternative for high-volume exports during any future Black Sea disruptions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), U.S. Department of Agriculture. "Ukraine Grain Transportation, Published June 2024." Accessed October 20, 2025. <https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/UkraineJune2024.pdf>.
- APK-Inform. "Ukrainian Grain Exports through the Port of Constanta Fell by almost 45% in the First Half of the Year." 2024. Accessed October 20, 2025. <https://www.apk-inform.com/en/news/amp/1543263>.
- Balassa, Béla. The Theory of Economic Integration. Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, 1961.
- Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. "Yulia Svyrydenko: For Passengers' Convenience, Border and Customs Checks Will Be Carried out in Train Carriages – Without Lengthy Stops at the Border." Gov.ua, 26 November 2025. Accessed November 26, 2025. <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/yuliia-svyrydenko-dlia-zruchnosti-pasazhyriv-provodyty-prykordonnyi-i-mytnyi-kontrol-budut-u-vahonakh-potiaha-bez-tryvalykh-zupynok-na-kordoni>

- European Commission. “Achievements of Cooperation with Ukraine in the Final Conference of Romania-Ukraine Programme.” 03 May 2024. Accessed October 20, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/whats-new/newsroom/05-03-2024-achievements-of-cooperation-with-ukraine-in-the-final-conference-of-romania-ukraine-programme_en.
- European Commission. Mobility and Transport. “New EU-funded Railway Line Brings Ukraine even Closer to EU.” News article, 05 September 2025. Accessed October 20, 2025. https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/new-eu-funded-railway-line-brings-ukraine-even-closer-eu-2025-09-05_en.
- European Commission. Mobility and Transport. “Solidarity Lanes: Latest figures – June 2025.” News article, 04 August 2025. Accessed October 20, 2025. https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/solidarity-lanes-latest-figures-june-2025-2025-08-04_en.
- European Neighbourhood Policy. “Ukraine.” No date. Accessed October 20, 2025. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/ukraine_en.
- Sologoub, Ilona. “Ukraine’s EU Integration: A Long Way Home.” *Intereconomics. Review of European Economic Policy* 57, no. 4 (2022): 218–224. Accessed October 20, 2025. <https://www.intereconomics.eu/contents/year/2022/number/4/article/ukraine-s-eu-integration-a-long-way-home.html>.
- Kasian, Vera. “Ukrainskaja železnaja doroga perejdet na standarty ES: Kabmin odobril zakonoproekt” [Ukrainian Railways to Adopt EU Standards: The Cabinet of Ministers Approved the Bill]. *Liga.net*, 30 October 2025. Accessed October 20, 2025. <https://biz.liga.net/ekonomika/transport/novosti/ukrainskaya-jeleznaya-doroga-pereydet-na-standarty-es-kabmin-utverdil-zakonoproekt>.
- “Ukraine Grain Pushes Romanian Constanta Port to Record Volumes in 2023.” Reuters, 10 January 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/ukraine-grain-pushes-romanian-constantaport-record-volumes-2023-2024-01-10/>.
- The Center for Transport Strategies (CFTS). “Cargo Handling in Port of Constanta Reaches Record 92 Million Tons in 2023.” 15 February 2024. Accessed October 20, 2025. https://en.cfts.org.ua/news/cargo_handling_in_port_of_constanta_reaches_record_92_million_tons_in_2023.
- The Center for Transport Strategies (CFTS). “Start of Construction of European Standard-Gauge Railway from Border to Lviv Announced.” 15 November 2025. Accessed October 20, 2025. https://en.cfts.org.ua/news/start_of_construction_of_european_standard_gauge_railway_from_border_to_lviv_announced.
- World Bank. “Ukraine’s Transport and Logistics System: Current and Prospective Opportunities and Challenges.” 2024. Accessed October 20, 2025. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/transport/publication/ukraine-transport-and-logistics-system>.

When European Identity Speaks English: Multilingualism and Social Cohesion in the European Space

Simona FER*

Abstract. *This study brings together and explores methodological, theoretical and empirical issues within the unified framework of linguistic diversity in the European space, that mirrors current interest in the topic. Language is a uniquely significant aspect of cultural diversity, owing to its pervasiveness and fundamental role in human experience. A thorough examination of contemporary multilingualism and its influence on global power structures requires a multidimensional research approach. This study will employ a combination of qualitative analysis, by exploring researchers' views in this field, conducted to gain related facts and important particularities of the historical context of language diversity. We also examine English as a lingua franca and the perspectives in finding a balance between prioritising English over other languages and the preservation of regional and minority languages to maintain true social cohesion and cultural diversity. This paper examines the historical background of multilingualism in a globalised world, investigating how colonialism and globalisation have fostered the dominance of languages like English in global communication. The research also focuses on the effects of English dominance on less widespread languages and their speakers. Additionally, the study investigates social, political and cultural implications of multilingual practices, particularly in post-colonial societies. This study aims to consolidate existing research on the mechanisms of linguistic dominance, exploring its influence on education, media, economics and cultural representation, as well as its effect on linguistic diversity and cultural identity. By doing so, we will identify gaps in the current literature and fine-tune the focus of our research.*

Keywords: *lingua franca, multilingualism, social cohesion, cultural values, unity in diversity*

Introduction

Despite the linguistic diversity of Europe, English is the dominant language of European identity and functions as a *lingua franca* across institutions and transnational communication platforms, enabling interaction among citizens from different linguistic backgrounds. While this facilitates unity and mutual understanding, it also raises important questions about cultural representation and linguistic equity. The prevalence of English may inadvertently marginalise smaller languages and undermine efforts to preserve linguistic heritage within the European Union. Thus, the role of English in constructing a shared European identity is both a tool for cohesion and a source of tension, especially in the context of policies that officially promote multilingualism and cultural diversity.

We live in a world of global communication, a world in which the currency of this communication is language, considering that researchers estimate there are approximately 8,000 languages spoken worldwide today, not to mention the dialects and variations of those languages¹⁸⁶. The exact number may vary, as both major languages and their dialects or regional variants are taken into account. However, many of these languages are spoken by very few people, and some are at risk of extinction due to globalisation and migration. It is estimated that approximately 40% of languages are spoken by fewer than 1,000 people, and many of them could disappear in the coming decades.

* University of Oradea, simonag_1976@yahoo.com

¹⁸⁶ Nicolae Saramandu and Manuela Novaci, *Multilingvism și limbi minoritare în România* [Multilingualism and minority languages in Romania] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Qual Media, 2009), 15.

This diversity is a cultural wealth, but it becomes a barrier to global communication, and in order to facilitate interaction between people with different native languages, the need for a common language of communication arises, known as a lingua franca. English was initially not a cultural choice, but rather a historical and political one. The spread of the English language has historical causes, particularly in the case of British colonialism, where the British Empire had territories on all continents, imposing English as the commercial and educational language. After World War II, the United States, as the new superpower, consolidated the position of English through economic, military and cultural influence (films, music, technology). In many countries, English is not the official language, but it is taught as the first foreign language in schools, being seen as a key to social mobility and professional success. Many people speak English as a second or third language, which gives it an almost neutral functional status, thus widely accepted. We cannot say that English is 'better' linguistically, but more 'useful,' and the choice of the English language is not related to the intrinsic value of the language, but to the political, economic and technological context of the 20th and 21st centuries. Other languages (French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese) have had or still have areas of influence, but English has been supported by the power of those who speak it. English has become the international language not because it is spoken by the most native speakers, but because it has become useful, accessible, and widespread through the power of empires, globalisation and technology, and in a world with thousands of languages, English is today the 'currency' of global communication, though not without controversies related to equity and linguistic diversity. In a dynamic society like the one we live in today, a mindset that can keep us competitive is continuous learning, with knowledge of a foreign language being particularly important for the human experience. It has become vital for the integration of migrants and for intercultural dialogue.

In a society characterised by cultural diversity and the ongoing process of globalisation, knowledge of a foreign language, especially English, represents an essential factor for the international integration success. Thus, learning a foreign language should be considered a fundamental component of individual education, regardless of age. There is no optimal moment to start learning a foreign language, and the benefits of this knowledge are indisputable, offering significant opportunities both professionally and personally. Ideally, learning foreign languages should be encouraged not only within the formal framework of educational institutions but also as a complementary activity during leisure time, similar to sports or studying a musical instrument. In this context, the idea of continuous education in foreign languages is increasingly promoted, emphasising the importance of strengthening efforts to learn these languages among adults, outside traditional academic structures. An Arabic proverb that truly reflects the importance of learning foreign languages says: "If you want to avoid a war, learn a language". It can thus be concluded that learning a foreign language is synonymous with building a bridge between people and cultures, understanding other nations and their way of thinking, as well as overcoming cultural barriers¹⁸⁷.

Literature review on the historical spread and attitudes towards the English language use

This chapter offers a critical analysis of how historical forces contributed to the spread of English and also examines the complex impact of its influence on societies, worldwide. The global status of the English language today is the product of powerful historical forces and not only a natural linguistic evolution. The Anglo-Saxon conquest was not just the arrival of a ruling minority, but the settlement of a whole people, their language remaining the dominant one¹⁸⁸. From British colonial expansion in the 17th and 18th centuries to the economic, cultural and technological influence of the United States in the modern era, English spread through deliberate political and social strategies. This chapter critically examines these forces, exploring how imperialism, trade, migration and globalisation built the rise of English and analysing the lasting consequences of its dominance in contemporary society.

¹⁸⁷ Mihaela Ivanovici, "Importanța limbilor străine în Uniunea Europeană" [The importance of foreign languages in the European Union], in *Didactica Magna* (București: Editura Universității din București, 2009), 48.

¹⁸⁸ Marianne Hundt and Daniel Schreier, *English as a Contact Language* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3.

Professor Emeritus Robert Phillipson, in his work, *Linguistic Imperialism*, one of the most influential and critical works on the global spread of English, argues that the worldwide dominance of English is not a neutral or natural phenomenon, but a form of *linguistic imperialism*, a process that supports and strengthens political and cultural inequalities. The expansion of English is tied to colonialism and continues to reflect unequal power relations between English-speaking countries (mostly the UK and the US) and others. The author asserts that specialists in English linguistics are professionally engaged in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages. They are thus deeply implicated in the “scandalous” practice of linguistic imperialism, and the scandal is that English has become the dominant international language and therefore a “world commodity” and the “cornerstone of the global capitalist system”. His conclusion is that this dominance is asserted and maintained by the continuous creation of cultural inequalities between English and other languages¹⁸⁹. He introduces the term *linguicism* to describe discrimination based on language, comparable to racism or sexism and explains that linguicism happens when English is privileged for education, jobs and prestige, while other languages are marginalised.

As concerns structural inequalities, English is embedded in institutions such as education systems and international organisations, and if we refer to cultural inequalities, the author states that English is associated with modernity and opportunity, which pressures people to adopt it, often at the expense of their own languages. He also argues that programs promoting English, framed as development aid or support for global communication, frequently serve the interests of English-speaking countries more than the receiving ones. Professor Phillipson views the global spread of English as a continuation of colonial power structures, benefiting English-speaking countries while threatening linguistic diversity and perpetuating inequality.

David Crystal, a leading expert on the English language, in his book, *English as a Global Language*, offers an engaging and informative exploration and an overview of how English became a global language across media, trade, science, by examining the historical reasons, current role and future prospects of English as the world’s primary language for international communication. The author is concerned about the use of English when is our mother tongue, because we may have mixed feelings about the way English is spreading around the world. We may feel pride, that our language is the one which has been so successful, but our pride may be tinged with concern, when we realise that people in other countries may not want to use the language in the same way that we do, and are changing it to suit themselves. He also states that we are all sensitive to the way other people use (it is often said, abuse) ‘our’ language and if there is one predictable consequence of a language becoming a global one, it is that nobody owns it any more¹⁹⁰. Next, David Crystal examines how the rise of a language to global status is rarely determined by the number of its speakers. Far more important is the influence and power of those who speak it. Latin, for example, became the international language of the Roman Empire not because Romans outnumbered the peoples they conquered, but because they were dominant. Even after Roman military power waned, Latin endured for a thousand years as the language of education, sustained by the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Language dominance is closely tied to economic and cultural power, a connection that becomes evident in the history of English. Without a strong foundation of influence, no language can establish itself as a global medium of communication. Language does not exist independently in some abstract realm, but lives in the minds, voices and actions of its speakers. When people succeed internationally, their language thrives, when they fail, it falters, too¹⁹¹.

English’s openness to foreign vocabulary sets it apart from languages like French, which have historically resisted external influences. This openness gives English a cosmopolitan quality, often seen as an asset for a global language. From a vocabulary perspective, English actually owes more to Romance languages than to its Germanic roots. Other structural features have also been noted, such as the lack of grammatical markers for social class, which can make English seem more “democratic” compared to

¹⁸⁹ Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 4–10.

¹⁹⁰ David Crystal, *English as a Global Language*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

languages that encode complex class distinctions. David Crystal also explains that the expansion of competitive industry and commerce led to a surge in international marketing and advertising and that the influence of the press reached new heights, soon to be exceeded by broadcasting media, which could effortlessly cross-national borders. Technology, particularly through films and records, spurred the rise of mass entertainment industries with a global reach. Translation has played a crucial, though often overlooked role in human interaction for millennia. Whenever monarchs or ambassadors met on the international stage, interpreters were always present. However, this approach has its limitations, Crystal says. The greater the linguistic diversity within a community is, the less it can depend on a few individuals to facilitate communication between groups. In communities where only two or three languages interact, bilingualism or trilingualism can often solve the problem, as most children can naturally acquire multiple languages with ease. But in regions with many languages in contact, such as much of Africa and Southeast Asia, this solution is far less practical. The author concludes his research wondering whether five hundred years from now, every child will automatically be exposed to English from birth or perhaps even before, and he additionally observes that if English becomes just one part of a diverse, multilingual upbringing, it could be a positive development, but if it ends up as the sole language to be learned, it would represent one of the greatest intellectual losses in human history.

Another theorist of the English language spread phenomenon is Alastair Pennycook, with his book *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*, which explores the globalisation of English by examining its colonial origins, its connections to linguistics and applied linguistics and its relationships to the global spread of teaching practices. The book provides the idea that English can never be removed from the social, cultural, economic or political contexts in which it is used. Pennycook emphasises that the spread of English is inseparable from the history of British colonialism and later American economic and cultural dominance. He argues that we must view English within the context of imperialism, more than treating its global status as accidental or natural. Pennycook strongly criticises the idea that English is simply a “neutral” global language and he argues that English carries cultural, political and ideological values tied to the societies that promote it. The teaching and learning of English reproduce Western values and worldviews, sometimes at the expense of local languages and identities. The dominance of English can reinforce global inequalities, the access to English provides social and economic advantages, and those without English proficiency risk marginalisation in international education, business and technology. Pennycook suggests that English contributes to a form of linguistic imperialism, where English-speaking countries and institutions maintain power over others. Pennycook urges teachers to adopt a critical approach, questioning what cultural values and power structures are being transmitted through English teaching. While English has been spread through imperial and global forces, Pennycook also acknowledges that local communities adapt and reshape English to suit their own purposes. For example, “World Englishes” and localised varieties reflect resistance and cultural identity rather than blind acceptance of a dominant form. The global export of English, English language teaching, and English textbooks frequently leads to situations of cultural conflict where the norms presented in the texts are in direct conflict with local social and cultural norms¹⁹².

He considers this as an area of negotiation, where English can be appropriated to serve local needs and not simply imposing Western norms. Pennycook advocates for Critical Applied Linguistics, urging scholars and educators to examine who benefits from the global dominance of English, whose voices are silenced by it and how language policies and practices perpetuate power imbalances. He believes understanding English’s role in globalisation is essential to making language teaching more equitable and culturally sensitive. Pennycook argues that although English is the primary language through which neocolonial exploitation operates, it is also the language through which powerful counter-narratives can be expressed most effectively. He concludes on an optimistic note, proposing a significant role for the English language classroom in global cultural production. Rather than being viewed as secondary or less important than other subjects, he sees it as a central space where new ideas, identities

¹⁹² Alastair Pennycook, *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language* (Routledge: London & New York, 2017), 176.

and forms of knowledge can be created. According to Pennycook, the use of English to formulate counter-discourses and articulate insurgent knowledges provides opportunities to challenge and transform the dominant cultures and ideologies that build the world. He suggests that the English classroom, alongside other cultural and political spaces, has the potential to become a fundamental site for the renewal and reimagining of both local and global cultural practices. He concludes with hope that critical English language educators will adopt the concept of worldliness he develops in his work and engage in a transformative and inclusive pedagogy through English, one that listens and creates alternative possibilities¹⁹³.

Braj Kachru, a prominent linguist who published several books and research papers related to the field of World Englishes, is best known for his work on English language use in multilingual contexts, beyond the European linguistic space, particularly focusing on how English interacts with other languages across the world. He proposed several important ideas in his work on English and multilingualism, which contributed significantly to the study of this field of research. Nowadays, English is not only a tool of communication among native speakers but also a language institutionalised in many former British and American colonies, and a lingua franca used all around the world. This fact has resulted in a great concern of the classification of World Englishes, in addition to the need to familiarise English Language Teaching to its new status. One of the ways to understand and study this phenomenon is according to Kachru's three concentric circles model¹⁹⁴. His works are particularly important in understanding multilingualism because it highlights how English coexists with other languages in regions such as: UK, USA, Canada, Australia, India, Singapore, Nigeria, China, Japan and Russia. Kachru divided the world into three concentric circles: *inner circle*, with countries where English is the native language (the UK, USA, Canada, Australia), *outer circle*, including countries where English is spoken as a second language, due to colonial history, and is institutionalised (India, Singapore, Nigeria) and *expanding circle*, consisting of countries where English is spoken as a foreign language, typically used for international communication and business (China, Japan, Russia).

Kachru's work highlights how English functions as a *second* or *additional language* in many parts of the world, coexisting with a variety of other languages. The author also emphasises the importance of language contact between English and local languages in the outer circle, leading to unique forms of English that incorporate features of local languages, called *English-based Creoles* or *Indian English* in the case of India. This multilingual environment shows the way English is used, and English, in turn, influences the local languages, this mutual influence creating *varieties of English* that are quite different from the standard forms spoken in inner circle countries. These varieties of English are valid forms of communication and reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the speakers. He also considers, as in the other theorists' works mentioned above, that the reasons for the regional or national language conflict and language rivalry are closely linked with the political ambitions of groups either nationally or regionally¹⁹⁵. Professor Kachru also explored the role of English as a *lingua franca*, a common language used to bridge communication between people who speak different native languages and this phenomenon is evident mostly in the expanding circle, where English is considered the primary means of communication in international business, academia and diplomacy. In these settings, speakers use English with a variety of accents and structures, reflecting their own linguistic backgrounds.

Also referring to the historical depth of the English language, Kachru agrees that in teaching the western languages, a teacher and a learner have, at least, a wide choice in selection of the materials, since the tradition of the textbook writing in these languages is very old. The situation in the teaching materials for the non-western languages, especially those of South Asia, is very discouraging, in terms of both their

¹⁹³ Ibid., 326.

¹⁹⁴ Mohammad A. Al-Mutairi, "Kachru's Three Concentric Circles Model of English Language: An Overview of Criticism & the Place of Kuwait in It," in *English Language Teaching* 13, no. 1 (2020): 85, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1239144.pdf>.

¹⁹⁵ Braj B. Kachru, *A Reference Grammar of Kashmiri* (Urbana: Department of Linguistics, University of Illinois, 1969), 17.

quality and their availability. Among the non-western languages, Kashmiri presents a unique problem: there are practically no teaching materials available for this language¹⁹⁶. Kachru's work acknowledges that English, as a global language, carries social and cultural capital and he notes that in many multilingual societies, proficiency in English can be associated with access to education and economic opportunity. He also cautioned against the dominance of English, as it can sometimes marginalise local languages and cultures, particularly in postcolonial contexts. Kachru was critical of the idea of "standard English" as the only "correct" form of the language and he believed that all varieties of English, whether they are used by native or non-native speakers, should be valued and respected.

When Winston Churchill wrote *The History of the English-Speaking Peoples* (1956–58), the language shared by these peoples was commonly seen as originating from England, with the peoples themselves, despite their diversity, regarded as descendants of the "mother country". However, since the publication of that history, both the world and the perspectives of the English-speaking peoples have evolved. While the origins of the language remain unchanged, they still trace back to an island off the western coast of Europe¹⁹⁷.

In their book, *Attitudes towards Language Variation* (1982), Ellen Bouchard and Howard Giles explore the ways in which language variation, mainly in relation to social and ethnic differences, is perceived by speakers and non-speakers alike. Her focus is primarily on the attitudes people have toward different dialects, and language practices, and how these attitudes can contribute to social identity and power relations. Bouchard examines how language variation is linked to social judgments, and she argues that people's attitudes toward a specific accent or dialect can be influenced by social factors like class, ethnicity or geography, in many societies, "standard" language forms being perceived as more prestigious, while regional or non-standard dialects are stigmatised. Bouchard advocates for a more inclusive and tolerant view of linguistic diversity, arguing that attitudes toward language variation should be more open and accepting. She also suggests that societies would benefit from recognising the value of different dialects and languages, both for preserving cultural diversity and for fostering social cohesion: "There is pain and agony, because language use is tied to particular habits of thought and feeling, the very stuff of cultural and individual life. No wonder, then, that immigrant parents feel they are doing something heroically challenging and self-sacrificing"¹⁹⁸.

The book places a heavy emphasis on sociolinguistics, showing how the study of language in social contexts can help us better understand the underlying societal structures that influence language attitudes. Bouchard emphasises how language variation reflects broader social dynamics, including cultural values and historical processes. Bouchard's work outlines the importance of understanding language attitudes as a means of addressing social inequalities and fostering more inclusive attitudes towards linguistic diversity, and she stresses that by examining how people perceive and react to language variation, we can gain insights into the broader social forces shaping our societies.

Disputed reactions to the use of English as a lingua franca in the European space

The role of English as a dominant language in Europe has sparked intense debates throughout history, with reactions ranging from enthusiastic adoption to fierce resistance. As the European Union (EU) and other political and social organisations have expanded, the presence of English has grown to a point where it is often regarded as a global *lingua franca*. This term refers to a common language used for

¹⁹⁶ Braj B. Kachru, *An Introduction to Spoken Kashmiri. A Basic Course and Reference Manual for Learning and Teaching Kashmiri as a Second Language* (Braj B. Kachru, 2006), accessed September 19, 2025, <https://koshur.org/SpokenKashmiri/pdf/preliminary.pdf>.

¹⁹⁷ Tom McArthur, "The English Language or the English Languages?" in *The Penguin History of Literature*, vol. 10, *The English Language*, ed. David Crystal and Whitney French Bolton (London, England: Penguin Books, 1993).

¹⁹⁸ Ellen Bouchard Ryan and Howard Giles, eds., *Attitudes towards Language Variation: Social and Applied Contexts* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), 286.

communication between people who do not speak the same native language, and this language is used for commercial, political, scientific or social purposes, to facilitate understanding between linguistically diverse groups. However, this centrality of English in European discourse has not come without controversy. The shift toward English as a fundamental language in various European contexts reflects broader sociopolitical changes, including globalisation, the rise of English-speaking superpowers like the United Kingdom and the United States, and the integration of former non-English-speaking countries into the EU. Thus, we refer to historical and contemporary disputed reactions to the use of English in Europe, analysing both positive and negative responses to its growing prominence in European affairs.

It was not until the 20th century that the language began to assume an elevated global status. Following the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945, the United States emerged as a global superpower, with its political and economic influence enhancing the global spread of English in Europe. The post-World War II era saw an expansion of American cultural, economic and military influence, consolidating English as the language of international diplomacy and trade. While English was thus increasingly seen as a tool of power, particularly in Europe, the language's rise was not universally embraced. For many, English represented the legacy of British colonialism, while for others, it symbolised the encroachment of American dominance. As Europe began to recover from the war and reintegrate itself through initiatives like the European Economic Community (EEC) in the 1950s, some European nations remained wary of English's ascendancy. While the promotion of linguistic diversity and multilingualism in Europe is crucial to its linguistic health, many argue that there is also a need for a common language of communication to which the majority of Europeans have access. At present, this role is filled by English, since it is currently recognised as the most widely used lingua franca within Europe and in many other parts of the world¹⁹⁹.

The creation of the European Union (EU) in the mid-20th century laid the groundwork for a multilingual Europe, where each member state had the right to maintain its own language while also engaging in international cooperation. The EU's linguistic diversity was initially grounded in the concept of linguistic equality, which meant that no single language should dominate within the European framework. Thus, French, German, Italian and Spanish played prominent roles in the EU's foundational years, especially French, which was widely regarded as the de facto "working language" of the EU. The use of French reflected both the geopolitical influence of France and its cultural position as the centre of diplomacy in Europe during much of the 20th century. The spread of English began to erode this linguistic balance. As the United Kingdom, Ireland and later other Anglophone nations joined the EU, English increasingly emerged as a working language due to the influence of the U.K. In 1973, the accession of the United Kingdom to the EEC marked a turning point.

Although English was one of the official languages of the EU, French remained dominant, with many important documents and communications being produced in French. Yet, by the late 20th century, the globalisation of English, along with the political and economic weight of the U.K. and the growing role of the U.S. in European institutions, started to tilt the balance in favour of English. This was particularly visible during the European Union's expansion in the 1990s and early 2000s, as new member states from Central and Eastern Europe, many of which were not traditionally Anglophone, had to adapt to the increasing use of English in EU matters. While some welcomed the rise of English as a pragmatic solution to the challenges of multilingualism, others voiced concerns over the potential marginalisation of smaller European languages and cultures.

As English became more entrenched in European institutions, a growing number of critics began to question whether the widespread use of English might undermine linguistic diversity and threaten the cultural identity of smaller European nations. The idea is widespread that all of these languages are equal in status on the EU level, but they never have been in reality. Regulation No. 1 itself provides the legal basis for inequality in Article 6, which states: "The institutions of the Community may stipulate in their

¹⁹⁹ Alessia Cogo and Jennifer Jenkins, "English as a Lingua Franca in Europe. A Mismatch between Policy and Practice," in *European Journal of Language Policy* 2, no. 2 (October 2010): 271.

rules of procedure which of the languages are to be used in specific cases.”²⁰⁰ Most institutions, especially their preparatory committees, use only the same small subset of languages regularly, which in practice always includes English and French, sometimes German, and occasionally Italian and Spanish (though other languages are not rigorously excluded)²⁰¹.

The linguistic diversity within the EU has often been viewed as an obstacle to economic development, political cohesion, and genuine democracy. To address this challenge, prominent think tanks have advocated for the adoption of a single working language within EU institutions, as well as a unified lingua franca beyond these institutions, in order to foster regional mobility and strengthen a shared public sphere, particularly through the media²⁰². Countries such as France, Germany, Italy and Spain have historically maintained strong national languages as symbols of their independence and cultural heritage and the increasing prominence of English in EU legislation and academia has been seen as a challenge to these languages’ status, and in some cases, their survival. In France, a country where linguistic preservation is considered a matter of national pride, resistance to the dominance of English has been particularly pronounced.

France has long had a policy of linguistic protectionism, from the Académie Française, which regulates the French language, to laws mandating the use of French in government and public life. This resistance intensified with the global rise of English, which many see as a tool of cultural imperialism. In response to the increasing prevalence of English in French media, education and business, French policymakers and cultural advocates have fought to protect French, sometimes passing laws to limit the use of foreign words and expressions. Similarly, Germany, with its deeply rooted cultural and educational traditions, has experienced tension between its own national language and the growing necessity of using English in business, academia and international diplomacy. Although Germany has embraced the pragmatism of English in certain fields, such as in the sciences and higher education, there has been significant pushback against the Anglicisation of German public life, including in politics and media. In Italy and Spain, language preservation has also been a sensitive issue.

While English is widely spoken and studied as a second language, there is real concern about the gradual erosion of regional languages and dialects in favour of English, mostly among younger generations. While many European countries have expressed strong resistance to English’s dominance, there is also a pragmatic acceptance of its role as a lingua franca. In the context of the European Union, English is seen by many as a neutral means of communication, in a bloc with 27 member states, each with its own official language and English, in this sense, has become an indispensable tool for political and cultural cooperation, which enables individuals from different linguistic backgrounds to engage in meaningful discourse without requiring total fluency in a particular national language. In academic and professional settings, English is increasingly the standard for research, publishing and communication and many universities in Europe have adopted English as the primary language of instruction in graduate programs, especially in fields like business and science. This trend is reflective of the globalisation of academia, where English is seen as essential for international collaboration and career advancement. However, this “compromise” has led to the unfortunate sidelining of other languages and has sparked debates about linguistic imperialism. The analysis of educational systems across different countries shows that the predominance of global languages, particularly English, creates substantial barriers for non-native speakers. Institutions in non-English-speaking countries often face pressure to conform to English-language standards, which can marginalise local languages and educational approaches²⁰³. Critics argue

²⁰⁰ The Council, Regulation no. 1, determining the languages to be used by the European Economic Community, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, accessed August 29, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31958R0001&qid=1767043029498>.

²⁰¹ Ulrich Ammon, “Language Conflicts in the European Union on Finding a Politically Acceptable and Practicable Solution for EU Institutions that Satisfies Diverging Interests,” *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 16, no. 3 (2006): 321.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 322.

²⁰³ Lukianenko Nataliia, “Language and Power: Linguistic Imperialism,” *International Science Journal of Education and Linguistics* 3, no. 5 (2024): 45.

that the dominance of English could lead to the decline of local languages in intellectual and cultural spaces, with smaller languages and dialects suffering from underrepresentation in international discourse.

The contested role of English in Europe highlights the tension between globalisation and linguistic diversity, and while English has undeniably facilitated communication and integration in Europe, it has also raised questions about cultural identity, language preservation and the future of European languages. As the EU continues to expand and more non-Anglophone countries join the union, the challenge will be to balance the benefits of a common language with the need to safeguard the rich linguistic diversity that defines European heritage. The ongoing dispute over the role of English will likely continue to contribute to European society and culture in the years to come, with multilingualism serving as both a goal and a challenge in the ever-changing linguistic landscape of Europe. Many countries implement language policies aimed at either encouraging or limiting the use of specific languages. While historically, such policies have been used to favour one official language over others, many nations today focus on safeguarding and promoting regional and ethnic languages that are at risk of disappearing. Preserving cultural and linguistic diversity has become a key concern for both researchers and political leaders worldwide²⁰⁴.

English as a lingua franca belongs to the postmodern era: it transcends national borders and lacks a fixed centre and, in many respects, it is part of a global cultural exchange, with speakers adapting it to suit their own needs, outlining their individual identities and creating their own communities. According to Anna Mauranen, it takes many shapes, as we might expect of a language which is used in an age of accelerated mobility and new contacts. It offers a rich and intriguing research field to anyone interested in the ways in which language changes, and in the ways that English is developing right in front of our eyes²⁰⁵. As already noted, advantages are not without their complications. Critics contend that the dominance of English may undermine the cultural and linguistic diversity that the EU strives to preserve, placing smaller languages and regional identities at risk. Concerns about linguistic imperialism, loss of language proficiency and mostly the marginalisation of non-English speakers highlight the complexities surrounding this issue.

Building Bridges with English: English as a Tool for European Integration and Unity

In Europe, linguistic diversity represents a fundamental aspect of our shared history and culture, with multilingualism serving as the most prominent manifestation of the principle *unity in diversity*. It is important to understand that differences among international entities exist, but multilingualism acts as a vital tool for fostering stronger connections between people. Within this multilingual framework, education, both teaching and learning, emerges as a priority, serving as a strategic cornerstone for the development of a knowledge-driven Europe in the 21st century. In an increasingly diverse and globalised society, proficiency in a second language, particularly English, is essential for international integration. As such, it should be a core component of education for individuals of all ages. The recent political and social transformations within several European societies need a re-evaluation of the values underpinning higher education, aligning them with both its functional objectives and its broader societal role. In the context of the linguistic diversity present both in Europe and globally, learning and mastering a foreign language offers numerous benefits, because a foreign language, when properly learned, not only facilitates the development of interpersonal relationships, but also opens opportunities to enjoy vacations abroad, travel more easily, advance professionally and access the culture of other nations.

Following the removal of barriers between European Union member states, all citizens have the right to freedom of movement, education and work anywhere within these countries. However, the lack of language skills remains an invisible barrier, continuing to limit people's ability to move freely. In a

²⁰⁴ Basia Nikiforova, "Language Policy and Language of Cultural Pluralism," *Santalka. Filosofija*, T. 15, no. 1 (2007): 45.

²⁰⁵ Anna Mauranen and Maria Metsä-Ketelä, "Introduction: English as a Lingua Franca," in *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 5, no. S2 (2006): 3.

linguistically diverse Europe, the teaching and learning of foreign languages is an essential priority, playing a strategic role in the development of a knowledge-based Europe nowadays. Within this multilingual context, acquiring language skills, particularly in English, can open new opportunities, given that English is considered the global lingua franca for communication, spoken at least at a basic level by about one-third of the global population (2.8 billion people out of 8.4 billion). It serves as the primary language in key sectors such as trade, business, communications, aviation, entertainment, information technology, diplomacy and IT. Therefore, mastering English can significantly contribute to the achievement of a successful career, providing young people with opportunities to live, study or work in another country and, although not always simple, the possibility of building relationships with people from diverse cultures. In organisational contexts, multilingual skills are increasingly crucial for employees, contributing to their companies' expansion into European and global markets. Whether national or multinational, companies are placing greater emphasis on hiring individuals capable of conducting conversations and drafting documents in foreign languages. Thus, knowledge of at least the English language has become an essential criterion in recruitment processes, immediately following the presentation of university studies in a CV, being considered an indispensable competence in the labour market.

It is also a crucial factor for migrant integration and worker mobility within a foreign country, aspects that significantly impact the competitiveness of the European economy. Knowledge of multiple foreign languages not only facilitates the mobility of individuals, but also contributes to reducing unemployment at the European level. For companies aiming to enter new markets and address consumers in a language they understand, multilingualism is a necessity. The lack of a multilingual policy can lead to significant losses, both in terms of missed contracts and substantial sums of money. In a dynamic and globalised society, continuous learning is key to maintaining competitiveness, and foreign language proficiency becomes increasingly important for the human experience, migrant integration and the promotion of intercultural dialogue. Learning a foreign language is always a valuable pursuit, offering numerous opportunities, and it is never too late to start. Mastering foreign languages should be considered an enjoyable and enriching activity, akin to engaging in sports or learning to play an instrument. In this context, there is a growing emphasis on encouraging language learning outside traditional educational settings, particularly by promoting the study of languages among adults. Programs such as Erasmus, Horizon Europe, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE), Creative Europe and others, play a significant role in encouraging European citizens to become proficient in at least two 'adopted languages,' in addition to their native tongue, and to incorporate them into their daily lives, whether at home or in the workplace.

Wilga Rivers, a professor of French, Russian and Spanish, teaching English-speaking students at the University of Illinois, wrote in a linguistics paper: 'We must focus on activities that help the student absorb the content. These activities should encourage the student to go beyond them, so that they can perceive and experience the cultural levels of a foreign language speaker'²⁰⁶. No one can deny that the role of English has been strengthening year after year. English has assumed a dominant position among the languages of the Member States not through any formal decision, but due to practical considerations. It has transcended its national origins and now functions as a global means of communication. Removing English from the list of official and working languages of the European Union would significantly hinder the operations of EU institutions and complicate the organisation of meetings. It remains the most commonly used language within EU institutions and the most widely studied foreign language across Member States.

The concept of a single universal language for the Union was embraced in response to increasing European integration, cross-border mobility, and cultural exchange at the start of the 21st century. As English emerged as the most widely spoken foreign language across the continent, the discussion moved towards evaluating it as the European lingua franca. The matter of a European lingua franca appeared

²⁰⁶ Iulia Liliana Ene, "Cultura, a cincea abilitate de comunicare" [Culture, the fifth communication skill], *Didactica Magna*, București, no. 26 (2010): 4.

already in the Commission's Communication of 2003, *Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity*²⁰⁷. Although the Commission acknowledged that a lingua franca had its limitations, as it does not permit any real understanding of other cultures and restricts business opportunities, it admitted that English had become a European and world lingua franca. The Commission acknowledged the benefits of these developments, highlighting that if English were spoken by the majority of Europeans, it would serve as a common tool for fundamental communication, trade and travel between Member States²⁰⁸.

Perspectives, Discussions and Conclusions

The peoples of Europe are creating a unified Union from a rich tapestry of nations, communities, cultures and linguistic groups. This Union is based on the equal exchange of ideas and traditions, grounded in the mutual respect and acceptance of diverse histories, yet united by a shared future. Creating a shared space for living, working and trading together requires developing the ability to communicate effectively and deepen mutual understanding. Learning and speaking different languages foster openness to others, their cultures and perspectives. For European citizens, the ability to comprehend and converse in multiple languages has become an essential skill. The range of foreign languages spoken by Europeans is narrow, being limited mainly to English, French, German and Spanish.

The European Commission has English as one of its primary working languages, alongside French and German. English is often used in official communications, working documents and internal correspondence and it is commonly used for policy discussions and press releases. The European Commission exposes its plans by suggesting that learning one lingua franca alone is not enough, but every European citizen should have meaningful communicative competence in at least two other languages in addition to his or her mother tongue. This is an ambitious goal, but the progress already made by several Member States shows that it is perfectly attainable. The European Commission's Action Plan outlines specific proposals for immediate, tangible improvements and suggests a series of initiatives at the European level designed to support efforts by local, regional and national authorities. These actions make use of resources already available within existing community programs and activities, meaning no additional budgetary allocations are required.

As outlined earlier, collectively, the proposed actions, along with those implemented by Member States, can lead to a significant advancement in promoting language learning and enhancing linguistic diversity. One of the main strands of the Action Plan is that life-long language learning: 'Mother tongue plus two other languages' making an early start; language learning in secondary education and training; language learning in Higher Education; Adult language learning; language learners with special needs; range of languages. Other proposals are: building a language-friendly environment: an inclusive approach; building language-friendly communities; improving supply and take-up of language learning. The Commission assures that taken together, actions proposed, and those taken by Member States, can secure a major step change in promoting language learning and linguistic diversity.

The EU has 24 official languages: Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish and Swedish and every time new members have joined the EU, they have added to the number of official languages. As previously stated, one of the EU's founding principles is multilingualism and this policy aims to: communicating with its citizens in their own languages, protecting Europe's rich linguistic diversity and promoting language learning in Europe. Multilingualism is embedded in the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights, which grants EU citizens the right to communicate with EU institutions in any of the 24 official languages. In turn, the institutions are obligated to respond in the same language. Despite the United Kingdom having left the EU, English

²⁰⁷ Commission of the European Communities, "Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity. An Action Plan 2004–2006," Brussels, 24.07.2003, COM (2003) 449 final, accessed September 11, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2003:0449:FIN:en:PDF>.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

remains an official EU language, it remains an official and working language of the EU institutions as long as it is listed as such in Regulation No 1. English is also one of Ireland's and Malta's official languages²⁰⁹.

The European Parliament offers all its sessions in 24 official languages, but English is one of the most commonly used languages for interpretation and communication. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) use English to engage in debates, particularly when they represent countries with English proficiency and in many EU documents and committee meetings, English is frequently chosen as the language of discourse, mainly for cross-border collaboration and public relations. English also plays a distinguished role in European Parliament publications, including news and updates for a global audience.

According to the Council of Europe, plurilingual and intercultural education acknowledges the value of all the languages and cultures that learners bring with them, including sign languages, minority languages and those of migrants. It emphasises the importance of school languages for academic success and views language support for migrants as essential for their integration and active participation in democratic societies²¹⁰. The official languages of the Council of Europe are English and French, which means that official documents, publications and communications of the Council of Europe are available in both languages. While English and French are the official languages of the CoE, English is also used as a working language in many contexts, mostly in meetings and day-to-day operations. The use of English alongside French permits an effective communication among the member states, which have diverse native languages. The CoE actively promotes multilingualism and linguistic diversity through various programs and the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), for example, offers initiatives to improve language teaching across Europe. While English is widely taught and promoted in many of these programs, the CoE encourages the learning of multiple languages to support both intercultural dialogue and the preservation of linguistic diversity. The CoE works to protect and promote linguistic diversity through documents like the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which safeguards minority languages in Europe. While English is used in CoE proceedings, the organisation supports the recognition and use of regional and minority languages, emphasising linguistic diversity over the dominance of any one language, including English.

While the EU is officially multilingual with 24 official languages, English is undeniably the most widely used working language across many EU institutions, serving as a common language that facilitates effective communication and the smooth functioning of EU operations, in internal communication, business and trade, cross-border and other international contexts.

As a conclusion to the present study, we highlight that while English plays a central role in stimulating and facilitating communication across Europe's diverse linguistic landscape, it should be balanced with the preservation of regional and minority languages to maintain true social cohesion and cultural diversity. By differentiating between languages for communication and languages for identity, English can serve as a means of communication without undermining the essential role of national languages in defining individual and group identity. Indeed, the challenge lies in harnessing the power of multilingualism, with English as a unifying force, while ensuring that Europe's linguistic richness continues to be celebrated and protected within the context of a shared European identity. As we navigate the complexities of a multilingual Europe, the role of English as a working language should enhance, not to replace, the broader vision of unity through linguistic diversity, ensuring social cohesion across the continent, and thus the concept of "unity in diversity" will provide the principle of being strong, cohesive and united while celebrating and embracing identities, traditions, languages and above all, human beings.

²⁰⁹ European union, "Languages," accessed September 12, 2025, https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/languages_en.

²¹⁰ Council of Europe, *Language policy*, available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Al-Mutairi, A. Mohammad. "Kachru's Three Concentric Circles Model of English Language: An Overview of Criticism & the Place of Kuwait in It." In *English Language Teaching* 13, no. 1 (2020): 85–87. Accessed September 21, 2025. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1239144.pdf>.
- Ammon, Ulrich. "Language Conflicts in the European Union on Finding a Politically Acceptable and Practicable Solution for EU Institutions that Satisfies Diverging Interest." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 16, no. 3 (2006): 319–338.
- Nota 13 - Bouchard Ryan, Ellen, and Howard Giles, Eds. *Attitudes towards Language Variation: Social and Applied Contexts*. London: Edward Arnold, 1982.
- Cogo, Alessia, and Jennifer Jenkins. "English as a Lingua Franca in Europe. A Mismatch between Policy and Practice." *European Journal of Language Policy* 2, no. 2 (October 2010): 271–294.
- The Council, Regulation no. 1, Determining the Languages to be Used by the European Economic Community. *Official Journal of the European Communities*. Accessed August 29, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31958R0001&qid=1767043029498>.
- Council of Europe. "Language policy." Accessed September 07, 2025. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy>.
- Crystal, David. *English as a Global Language*. Second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Ene, Iulia Liliana, "Cultura, a cincea abilitate de comunicare" [Culture, the Fifth Communication Skill]. *Didactica Magna* no. 26 (September 2010): ??-??.
- Commission of the European Communities. "Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity. An Action Plan 2004–2006." Brussels, 24.07.2003, COM (2003) 449 final. Accessed September 11, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2003:0449:FIN:en:PDF>.
- European Union. "Languages." Accessed September 12, 2025. https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/languages_en.
- Hundt, Marianne, and Daniel Schreier. *English as a Contact Language*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Ivanovici, Mihaela. "Importanța limbilor străine în Uniunea Europeană" [The importance of foreign languages in the European Union]. In *Didactica Magna*, ??-??. București: Editura Universității din București, 2009.
- Kachru, Braj B. *A Reference Grammar of Kashmiri*. Urbana: Department of Linguistics, University of Illinois, 1969.
- Kachru, Braj B. *An Introduction to Spoken Kashmiri. A Basic Course and Reference Manual for Learning and Teaching Kashmiri as a Second Language*. Braj B. Kachru, 2006. Accessed September 19, 2025. <https://koshur.org/SpokenKashmiri/pdf/preliminary.pdf>.
- Lukianenko, Nataliia. "Language and Power: Linguistic Imperialism." *International Science Journal of Education and Linguistics* 3, no. 5 (2024): 41–49.
- Mauranen, Anna, and Maria Metsä-Ketelä. "Introduction: English as a Lingua Franca." *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 5, no. S2 (2006): 1–8.
- McArthur, Tom, "The English Language or the English Languages?" In *The Penguin History of Literature*. Vol. 10, *The English Language*, edited by David Crystal and Whitney French Bolton, 323–341. London, England: Penguin Books, 1993.
- Nikiforova, Basia, "Language Policy and Language of Cultural Pluralism." *Santalka. Filosofija*, T. 15, no. 1 (2007): 43–54.
- Pennycook, Alastair, *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*. Routledge: London & New York, 2017.
- Phillipson, Robert. *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Saramandu, Nicolae, and Manuela Novaci. *Multilingvism și limbi minoritare în România* [Multilingualism and minority languages in Romania]. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Qual Media, 2009.

III. Investigating the social support network

Aurora-Elena GAVRIȘ (Oradea) ◀▶ *Volunteering as a Quick Way to Achieve Social Solidarity*

Reza TAVALLA (Coruna) ◀▶ *Beyond Harm: Exploring the Paradoxical Benefits of Health Misinformation on Instagram During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Iran*

Johanna FARKAS, Kund REGÉNYI (Budapest) ◀▶ *Adolf Eichmann's Psychological Examination Findings*

Volunteering as a Quick Way to Achieve Social Solidarity

Aurora-Elena GAVRIȘ²¹¹

Abstract. *Volunteering has gained momentum as a social phenomenon in Romania as well, its beneficial effects being felt both at the individual and community level: the legislation has become more relaxed through the amendments made, offering host organisations more possibilities to implement their missions; volunteers also use this method of involvement as it contributes to their own personal and professional development. In a society in constant change, with events that can occur suddenly, with moments of crisis or urgent need for intervention, volunteering is becoming increasingly valuable as a prompt human action that offers life-saving solutions. Mostly coming from non-profit institutions, from the category of non-governmental organisations, we note the involvement through public-private partnerships and state support, including from a financial and logistical point of view for the noble cause of volunteering. Not infrequently, the volunteer has found the solution to solve problems that required time to be implemented in compliance with the rigors of the law, life-saving measures. At the European level, we have also noticed an increased interest about volunteering and we believe that the importance of this type of organisation of human action will increase, as it proves its efficiency and success over time.*

Keywords: *volunteering, current legislation, agreement, crisis, social action*

Introduction

Essentially, volunteering involves the involvement of individuals without seeking profit, that is, without a profit motive, in activities or actions of public interest in various fields: art, sports, research, education, environmental protection, humanitarian aid, etc. and, usually, under the organisation of a legal entity, with or without the involvement of the state. Also, volunteering, through the volume or quality of action, often intervenes in areas that may at a given time be inefficiently supported by the state, for various reasons, such as economic or social events or crises, natural disasters or even for reasons that require a certain period for organisation such as the fulfilment of certain formalities. Thus, precisely the almost unlimited nature of the manifestation, just like private initiative, makes volunteering a mobile and versatile element, which can provide services and solve pressing problems at community level, in a relatively short time.

Immediately after the 1989 Revolution in Romania, citizens opted to exercise the rights and freedoms about they were deprived of under the communist regime, such as freedom of movement, free initiative, freedom of speech, and generally political and civil rights, while getting too little involved in volunteer activities. Gradually, however, it began to be accepted, promoted and desirable, including by public institutions, “the state recognising the social value of volunteering activities as an expression of active citizenship, solidarity and social responsibility, as well as the professional value as an expression of the personal, professional, intercultural and linguistic development of people who carry out such

²¹¹ Lecturer PhD. University of Oradea, E-mail: auroragavris@yahoo.com.

activities”²¹². In this regard, we point out the existence of an internal regulatory framework for volunteering regulated by Law no. 78/2014, successively amended in 2016 and, respectively, 2022, with the aim of encouraging and supporting the activities of host organisations, for example through the possibility of bearing by them various expenses incurred in carrying out the activity or through the possibility of concluding insurance contracts for volunteers against the risks of accident, illness or in accordance with the nature and characteristics of the activity.

Extending the objectives of volunteering to much broader desiderata, it has a role, as provided for in the special normative act on the matter, in creating a competitive labour market but also in increasing social solidarity. Through its support, including at international level, Romania recognises volunteering as an important role in the development of education and vocational training, as the European Commission itself promotes a distinct action through the European Solidarity Corps 2021–2027 with a funding of 1 billion euros with the role of supporting young volunteers in humanitarian aid activities worldwide. For the current moment, the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 aims to involve, connect and empower young people, in the sense that on 26 November 2018, the Council of Europe adopted a resolution on the new European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027,²¹³ which proposes paying particular attention to the following areas of activity: participation of young people in democratic and civic life as participatory government, connecting young people from within and outside the European Union to promote voluntary engagement – recognising that young Europeans are increasingly connected, mobility for educational purposes, solidarity and intercultural understanding, supporting the empowerment of young people through quality, innovation and recognition of youth activities. In other news, on 12 March 2019, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the Commission’s proposal for a regulation establishing the European Solidarity Corps for the period after 2020, and MEP’s voted “for” the program to become more accessible to young people with fewer opportunities, such as people with disabilities and those from isolated or marginalised communities, as well as young people with learning or health difficulties. It also voted for a clear distinction between volunteering and employment, to ensure that no participating organisation uses young people as unpaid volunteers, when quality jobs are available, the volunteering contract/agreement will be limited to 12 months, and traineeships will last between two and six months. The European Parliament also imposed a minimum duration of the employment contract of three months. Finally, it extended the scope of the European Solidarity Corps for the period 2021–2027, adding among its activities the provision of humanitarian aid in countries outside the EU²¹⁴.

Volunteering as social action

According to the Universal Declaration on Volunteerism (2001), volunteering enlivens the noblest aspirations of humanity: peace, freedom, opportunity, security and justice for all persons; domestically, according to art. 1 paragraph 1 of Law no. 78/2014 about the volunteering regulation in Romania, amended by Law no. 175/2016 and subsequently by Law no. 211/2022, social enterprises and social insertion enterprises can also organise volunteering activities, our state “supports the development of the volunteer movement at local, national and international levels, respecting its independence and diversity, for the purpose of fulfilling its artistic and cultural, sports and recreational, educational,

²¹² Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament], Lege nr. 78 din 24 iunie 2014 privind reglementarea activității de voluntariat în România [Law no. 78 of June 24, 2014 regarding the regulation of volunteering activity in Romania], art. 2 paragraph 1, accessed August 21, 2025, <https://legislatie.just.ro/public/DetaliiDocument/159292>.

²¹³ “Rezoluția Consiliului Uniunii Europene și a reprezentanților guvernelor statelor membre, reuniți în cadrul Consiliului, privind un cadru pentru cooperarea europeană în domeniul tineretului: Strategia Uniunii Europene pentru tineret pe perioada 2019–2027” [Resolution of the Council of the European Union and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027], ST/14944/2018/INIT – OJ C 456/2018, accessed August 19, 2025, EUR-Lex - 42018Y1218(01) - EN - EUR-Lex.

²¹⁴ European Parliament, “MEPs Approve the EU’s New Volunteering Programme,” accessed October 05, 2025, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210517IPR04112/meps-approve-the-eu-s-new-volunteering-programme>.

scientific, research, youth, representation, environmental, health, social, solidarity, community development, humanitarian, civic and philanthropic aid and the like”²¹⁵. Also, according to this special law on volunteering, public administration authorities support the development of volunteering activities by including in local or national development strategies distinct chapters on the role of volunteering as a resource for developing social welfare, and not as a way to reduce expenses, as well as how to support volunteering to achieve local or national priorities.

According to art. 7 paragraph 3 of Law no. 78/2014 on the regulation of volunteering activity in Romania, local public administration authorities promote and support the organisation of events on December 5, of each year – International Volunteer Day. From specific legislation but also from practice, several universal principles can be extracted that determine volunteering activity, such as that of freedom of choice and involvement – the individual participating based on their own free decision and unfettered by any form of constraint in activities of public interest; Another principle of volunteering activity, which is related to its very essence, is the exclusion of any remuneration from the host organisation in the sense provided by labour legislation (on the other hand, we specify the prohibition of Romanian legislation to substitute paid work with volunteering, in the sense that a volunteer will not be allowed to carry out identical activities corresponding to a certain vacant position in a unit, thus evading the payment of taxes arising from a legally concluded individual employment contract; however, a person can be an employee, respectively to perform paid work in a unit, including the host organisation (organiser of volunteering activities) and in another time interval, in the same unit or host organisation to carry out activity as a volunteer – the dual capacity, that of employee and that of volunteer, not being mutually exclusive.

In order to make volunteering activities accessible, equal opportunities and treatment are promoted, without discrimination, in order to acquire the quality of volunteer, the volunteer in the sense established by the law being any natural person, regardless of race, ethnic origin, religion, sex, political affiliation, opinion and who has acquired work capacity according to labour legislation and carries out volunteering activities. The activity carried out as a volunteer is of course distinguished from the work carried out under an individual employment contract, the latter designating²¹⁶ the contract under which a natural person, called an employee, undertakes to perform work for and under the guidance of an employer, a natural or legal person, in exchange for a remuneration called a salary, while volunteering is not rewarded by any remuneration of any kind. What is new in the latest legislative amendment regarding volunteering, however, comes in support of host organisations, namely that they have the possibility to cover the expenses of food, accommodation and transportation for the volunteer in carrying out the volunteer activity, respecting the limits of the amount allocated for this purpose (even in these circumstances, the volunteer can waive the settlement of expenses incurred with the volunteer activity, through a declaration on his own responsibility, approved by the management of the host organisation). In another vein, the same possibility of bearing the expenses incurred by the volunteer activity belongs to the host organisation even if the volunteer also works within the same organisation, up to the amount of the justification, although for these the volunteer can refuse the respective amounts of money – an attitude justified by the very availability of human beings towards the needs of their fellow human beings – which we caught in a statement by a young woman named Alexandra, who had been volunteering since high school, in a non-formal education organisation: “[I] support the idea of volunteering anytime and anyhow. In addition to the spiritual satisfaction, it brings you, volunteering generates a critical mass of people who want to change something and who understand that they are responsible, in turn, for what is happening around them, not just the political, economic environment, decision-makers, etc. I think it is a way of empowering civil society and I also think that it still has to face many preconceptions within Romanian

²¹⁵ Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament], Lege nr. 78 din 24 iunie 2014, art. 2.

²¹⁶ Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament], Lege nr. 53 din 24 ianuarie 2003 (*republicată*), Codul muncii [Law No. 53 of January 24, 2003 (*republished*). Labor Code], art. 10, accessed August 21, 2025, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/128646>.

society (such as ‘patriotic work’ being futile and pointless)”²¹⁷. On the other side, we must also take into account the fact that there are also relationships of mutual aid, friendship and empathy between people, often manifesting themselves in the form of physical activities carried out. For example, in the case of households or daily needs, interactions being generally burdened by the concept of good faith, which we also find written in the Constitution, which in its art. 54 specifies that “[c]itizens of Romania, foreign citizens and stateless persons must exercise their constitutional rights and freedoms in good faith, without violating the rights and freedoms of others” as well as the Romanian Civil Code²¹⁸, which in art. 14 paragraph 1 provides that any natural person or legal entity must exercise their rights and perform their civil obligations in good faith, in accordance with public order and good morals. In general, good faith is presumed as attitudinal behaviour, anything that would be invoked otherwise or out of suspicion as bad faith must be proven or proven. In the spirit of civil legal relations, according to art. 1170 Civil Code, the parties must act in good faith both when negotiating and concluding the contract and throughout its execution. Good faith (lat.: *bona fide*) was defined by Cicero – famous Roman *jurisconsultus* – as sincerity in words (lat.: *veritas*) and fidelity (lat.: *constantia*) in action and arguments. It essentially means exercising rights and fulfilling obligations in agreement with moral values, respectively with loyalty, prudence, and respect for the legal order²¹⁹; fidelity implies on the one hand confidentiality, on the other hand non-competition. The opposite of good faith is bad faith, a concept also present in the field of law and not only.

On the other hand, volunteering, as well as the origin of the word, designates what is related to one’s own will, to the person’s option as not forced by anyone, consciously and without coercion, based on the principle of consensuality or free agreement. It is also distinguished from the concept of freedom to choose the place and type of work, the person’s right to choose whether to work or not, the right to choose their own profession, if, where, for whom and under, what conditions they will work, work being specific to the contractual (conventional) character for all forms of legal employment relationships.

In everyday life, although there may be human actions such as those initiated ad hoc in a community or organised and coordinated by authorities on the occasion of increasingly frequent incidents, natural disasters, etc., they cannot be considered volunteer actions, but are regulated in various normative acts and involve the fulfilment of civic obligations in the form of protection activities as provided for by Law no. 481/2004 on civil protection²²⁰ or those regarding the management of emergency situations and fire protection. Also, although it is not paid, it is not volunteering but it is not work either, as there is no individual employment contract, but a legal obligation of a penal-executive nature²²¹ by which a person convicted of committing a crime, who is under the supervision of the execution of the sentence, must also perform “unpaid work for the benefit of the community for a period between 60 and 120 days, under the conditions established by the court, unless due to health reasons, he cannot perform this work.”²²²

²¹⁷ Andreea Giuclea, “De ce fac tinerii români voluntariat?” [Why do Young Romanians Volunteer?] in *Valențele voluntariatului* [The valences of volunteering], ed. Emilian M. Dobrescu and Nicolae Iancu (Oradea: Editura Universității din Oradea, 2011), 130.

²¹⁸ Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament], Lege nr. 287 din 17 iulie 2009 (**republicată**) privind Codul Civil [Law No. 287 of July 17, 2009 (**republished**) on the Civil Code], art. 14 para. 1, accessed August 22, 2025, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/109883>.

²¹⁹ Ion Craiovan, *Tratat elementar de teoria generală a dreptului* [Elementary treatise on the general theory of law] (București: All Beck, 2001).

²²⁰ Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament], Legea nr. 481 din 8 noiembrie 2004 (*republicată*) privind protecția civilă [Law no. 481/2004 of November 8, 2004 (*republished*) on civil protection], accessed August 22, 2025, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/56923>.

²²¹ Lavinia Onica-Chipea, “Regimul juridic al voluntariatului în sistemul de drept românesc” [The volunteer legal regime in the Romanian legal system], in *Valențele voluntariatului* [The valences of volunteering], ed. Emilian M. Dobrescu and Nicolae Iancu (Oradea: Editura Universității din Oradea, 2011), 84.

²²² Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament], Codul penal din 17 iulie 2009 [Criminal Code of 17 July 2009], accessed December 28, 2025, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/223635>.

In the same time, unpaid activities which do not constitute volunteering or forced labour are considered activities imposed by public authorities “in case of force majeure, namely war, catastrophes or threat of catastrophes such as: fires, floods, earthquakes, epidemics or violent epizootics, animal or insect invasions and, in general, in all circumstances that endanger the life or normal conditions of existence of the entire population or of a part of it” as well as the performance of compulsory military service²²³. Another activity that is not subject to volunteering rules is that carried out by one of the members of the families benefiting from inclusion aid who, at the request of the mayors of the administrative units in which they reside, are obliged to perform activities or works of local interest on a monthly basis, while respecting the normal duration of working hours and occupational health and safety standards²²⁴.

Specificity of Volunteering Agreement /Contract

According to the provisions of Law no. 78/2014 on the regulation of volunteering in Romania,²²⁵ republished, volunteering is the public interest activity carried out on one’s own initiative (through a freely consented decision) by any natural person, for the benefit of others, without receiving any material or monetary compensation. The public interest activity can be carried out in areas such as: social assistance and services, protection of human rights, medical and sanitary, cultural, artistic, educational, scientific, humanitarian, religious, philanthropic, sports, protection of the social environment, community and other similar²²⁶.

As previously mentioned, volunteering is carried out on the basis of a volunteering contract, which is a free agreement concluded between a natural person, called a volunteer, and a legal person called host-organisation, under which the first person undertakes to provide an activity of public interest to the second, without obtaining a material consideration. The legal definition allows the outline of the characteristic features of the volunteering contract: the parties to the volunteering agreement/contract are, on the one hand, always a natural person, the volunteer who undertakes to provide the volunteering activity for the benefit of the volunteering beneficiary and, on the other hand, a natural person or a legal person, which may be identical or different from the host organisation, a legal person under public law or private law, without patrimonial purpose, which administers the volunteering activity. The host-organisation has, among other obligations, to keep a register of volunteers, the duration and time of the activity carried out by them.

One of the legal characteristics of the volunteer contract is the synallagmatic one, namely by its conclusion this legal act gives rise to mutual and interdependent obligations on the part of both parties. This also implies a synallagmatic contract, namely from its valid conclusion, correlative obligations and rights arise for the contracting parties; for example, a sales contract is also a synallagmatic contract, the buyer having the obligation to pay the price and the seller, to hand over the good.

The volunteer contract is also a bilateral contract, since its validity presupposes the manifestation of will of two parties: the volunteer and the host organisation (for example, the individual employment contract is also a bilateral legal act because its validity presupposes the manifestation of will of two parties, the employee and the employer). According to the purpose pursued by the parties when concluding it, the volunteering contract falls into the category of gratuitous contracts, because the volunteer provides a patrimonial advantage to the volunteering beneficiary without seeking to obtain a material consideration in return. The gratuitous nature is related to the nature of the volunteering contract, an agreement between the parties whereby the volunteer would be remunerated for the activity performed

²²³ Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament], Legea nr. 53 din 24 ianuarie 2003 art. 4 para. 3 let. d) and a).

²²⁴ Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament], Lege nr. 196 din 31 octombrie 2016 privind venitul minim de incluziune [Law no. 196 of October 31, 2016 about minimum inclusion income], article 59, para. 1, accessed August 21, 2025, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/183328>.

²²⁵ Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament], Lege nr. 78 din 24 iunie 2014, art. 7.

²²⁶ Mihaela Vlăsceanu, *Organizații și comportament organizațional* [Organisations and organisational behaviour] (Iași: Polirom, 2003).

being impossible, as it would determine a change in its legal nature, thus transforming it, most likely, into an individual employment contract, or into a service contract.

The personal character (lat.: *intuitu personae*) of the volunteer contract has as its main effect the execution of the contractual obligations that fall to the volunteer, personally by him, the execution by representation being thus impossible.

The solemn character expresses the idea that the written form of the volunteer contract represents a condition *ad validitatem* (for its validity), its disregard entailing the absolute nullity of the contract. The solemn contract is that contract that is concluded validly only by expressing the consent of the parties in a certain form – solemn – provided *ad validitatem* by an express provision of the law or by a prior agreement of the parties. Failure to comply with the solemn form entails the absolute nullity of solemn contracts, the form being a constitutive element of this contract and an essential condition of its validity. The form in which solemn contracts are concluded is that of an authentic document or, more rarely, a document under private signature. Among solemn contracts, we exemplify: the donation contract, real estate alienation contracts, mortgage contracts, loan contract for the construction or purchase of a property (conventional subrogation consented by the debtor).

On the other side, similar to the subordination relationship existing between the employee and the employer within the individual employment contract, the volunteer is also subordinated in the execution of his duties to the management of the legal entity with which he concluded the contract, namely the host organisation which may be the same or different from the beneficiary of the volunteering. This subordination is manifested thereby: the right of the host-organisation to determine the content of the volunteer's obligations, respectively its power to organise the execution manner of the obligations by the volunteer. The rules of volunteering prohibit the conclusion of a volunteering contract in order to avoid the conclusion of an individual employment contract or, as the case may be, of a civil contract for the provision of services or another civil contract for consideration for the performance of the respective services, being struck by absolute nullity volunteering contracts concluded in violation of the provisions of Law no. 78/2014 on the regulation of volunteering activity in Romania²²⁷.

Among the rigours of a volunteering contract or as provided by the provisions of the law, we specify that in the event that, through the performance of volunteering activities, damages are caused to third parties, the host organisation is jointly and severally liable with the volunteer, if these were not determined by the exclusive fault of the volunteer (in the latter case, the stipulations of the volunteering contract or the rules of contractual civil liability provided for by the Civil Code – Law no. 287/2009 are taken into account²²⁸). Disputes arising from the conclusion, execution or termination of the volunteering contract are within the jurisdiction of the common law courts, if the parties cannot resolve them amicably. Given the liability of both parties – the volunteer and the host organisation – towards the beneficiary (who is the natural person, other than the spouse and children, or the legal person for whose benefit the volunteering activity is carried out), we emphasise the importance of organising a volunteering action, especially the selection and recruitment stage.

According to art. 10 para. 2 of Law no. 78/2014 on the regulation of volunteering activity in Romania, volunteering activity is considered professional and/or specialised experience, depending on the type of activity, conditioning that it's carried out in the field of graduate studies.

Foreign citizen volunteers are guaranteed residence on the territory of the Romanian state for the duration of the volunteering contract, within the limits and conditions imposed by the legislation on the regime of foreigners in Romania (art. 8 paragraph 2 of Law no. 78/2014 on the regulation of volunteering activity in Romania). The volunteering contract must contain the obligation of the volunteer to maintain the confidentiality of the information to which he has access during the volunteering activity, during the time of the volunteering contract and for 2 years after its finishing (art. 13 letter d) of Law no. 78/2014 about volunteering activity in Romania). Regarding the advantages offered by a volunteering activity, taking into account the fact that the activity carried out constitutes professional experience, at some point

²²⁷ Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament], Legea nr. 78 din 24 iunie 2014, art. 10, para. 1.

²²⁸ Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament], Lege nr. 287 din 17 iulie 2009, art. 1350.

it was desired that it should provide more advantages to those who practice it, namely seniority in work. In this regard, in 2013 there was a legislative proposal initiated by Mr. deputy Mihai Sturzu who considered that the voluntary could be considered professional experience,²²⁹ which requested the amendment of the volunteering law, namely if the volunteer were paid by the host organisation their social security rights, they could benefit from seniority as a result of the activity performed. This legislative proposal was, however, rejected, under the argument that then the activity performed by the respective person would lose its voluntary character, that is, exactly the basic characteristics of volunteering; exactly the same idea was taken up again in 2018, an initiative rejected this time as well.

The Volunteering Usefulness

The current social context, local, regional or global, is subject to major influences as a result of decision-making aimed at joint actions of different forums. The constantly changing development that is gaining momentum is predictable but still indeterminable, sometimes becoming unpredictable, the prospective nature of social events providing certainty only in terms of human action, as is the case with volunteering; the changes that occur at all levels of social life require compliant, adequate, timely and appropriate human actions, adapted to social needs²³⁰.

As stated in the specific literature on the evolution of society as a whole, developed differently and rapidly at the end of the last century and the current one, society is entering a new stage, considered post-industrial, postmodern or even called by some authors the “third wave”²³¹ or computerisation society²³². In this society, transformations are no longer given by spectacular accumulations of capital, but by influences of human capital in education, of cognitive capital generating knowledge and of an institutional capital that regulates relations between people, there being a strong interdependence that generates dual effects. So, on the one hand a new economy is taking shape in which knowledge and information technology are the main catalysts with consequences in the unprecedented development of social and individual well-being, and on the other hand a degradation of the social order and an accelerated increase in the risks and uncertainties of individuals’ lives such as job instability, lack of trust in fundamental institutions of governance or in the institutional rules that regulated relations between people, lack of personal security, etc. However, there is the scientifically substantiated premise of restoring and re-establishing social order²³³.

Among the prosocial behaviours that add value to a society or community is the one manifested and organised as volunteering, being considered “intentional behaviour, carried out outside of work obligations and oriented towards supporting, preserving and promoting social values”²³⁴. Indeed, volunteering manifested in the relationships between individuals and in relation to them and to society as a whole can also be evidence of social responsibility, generating a feeling of satisfaction in relation to the help offered. The complex feeling created by helping one’s peers can be transposed into the norm of social responsibility applicable to people who have reached critical situations through no fault of their own but which also imposes the obligation of support on the volunteer; also from a sociological perspective, in literature was noted the norm of reciprocity²³⁵ as an expression of supporting those from

²²⁹ Andreea Tobias and Vasile Măgrădean, “Inițiativă a deputatului Mihai Sturzu ca voluntariatul să fie recunoscut ca experiență profesională” [Deputy Mihai Sturzu’s initiative for volunteering to be recognised as professional experience], *Gândul*, July, 14, 2013, <https://www.gandul.ro/politica/initiativa-a-deputatului-mihai-sturzu-ca-voluntariatul-sa-fie-recunoscut-ca-experienta-profesionala-11121607>.

²³⁰ Mihaela Vlăsceanu, *Sectorul nonprofit: contexte, organizare, conducere* [The nonprofit sector. Contexts, organisation, leadership] (București: Paideia, 1996), 182.

²³¹ Alvin Toffler, *Șocul viitorului* [Future shock] (București: Ed. Politică, 1973) quoted in Chipea, 66.

²³² Chipea, 66.

²³³ Francis Fukuyama, *Marea ruptură. Natura umană și refacerea ordinii sociale* [The great disruption: human nature and the reconstitution of social order] (București: Humanitas, 2002), quoted in Chipea, 66.

²³⁴ Septimiu Chelcea, *Psihosociologie. Teorii, cercetări, aplicații* [Psychology. Theories, research, applications], (Iași: Polirom, 2008), 228.

²³⁵ Chipea, 78.

whom help was once received, even if in the future this counter-service will no longer exist. From another perspective, Bandura's well-known social learning theory,²³⁶ volunteering can be an expression of social learning from a functionalist or pragmatist-functionalist perspective in the sense that individuals adopt prosocial behaviours through social action, an important role in their generation being played by primary education, school and the media²³⁷.

Indeed, the social role of volunteering, in particular, can be assimilated to a social service, but when it serves a common and public interest it is assimilated to a community service in the sense provided by the legal norms. So, according to art. 6 of Law no. 292/2011 about social work,²³⁸ community services are social services organised in an administrative-territorial unit organised at the level of commune, city, municipality and concern services provided at home and in day centres, as well as residential services addressed exclusively to citizens of the respective administrative-territorial unit. Therefore, community services compared to volunteering actions are similar to social services provided in the community. On the other side, important by providing the social services, given the expansion and development of voluntary activities in areas that lend themselves to volunteering actions, is the partnership with civil society, which through non-governmental organisations and the individual contribution of volunteers can carry out activities at reduced costs.

Not to be neglected is the process of selecting volunteers, which in a genuine volunteering action, the host-organisation has to undertake. The selection and recruitment of volunteers is the process by which an organisation attracts and invites people to get involved in volunteering activities. The success and achievement of a volunteering action greatly depending on the quality and skills of the volunteers; therefore, it is essential to select the most suitable ones. The failure of the recruitment process can lead to the partial or total failure of the volunteering action – due to a poor representation in terms of quality of volunteers (the selection or training of the most suitable volunteers was not successful) or due to the total lack of volunteers, the activity can no longer be carried out.

Indeed, young people are often selected and preferred as volunteers – who, although they do not obtain financial benefits, benefit from these experiences, which is why they get involved, gaining experience, friends and a plus in personal and professional development: “[v]oluntarism gave me the chance to assert myself and contribute to something that mattered, even if only for a very limited segment. It provided me with the environment and resources necessary to put all my ideas into practice and helped me figure out what I would like to do in the future and what would suit me – Raluca”²³⁹. In addition to the personal benefits, volunteering also offers young people the opportunity to experiment professionally, to get in touch with various fields and to find out what suits them and what they want to do next, being a very suitable way to learn.

It is also important to note that volunteers should be people with experience in a certain field or who have participated in similar volunteering activities, their presence being foreseen from the project phase, but also in relation to the needs and capacity of the host organisation. Although there is a legal relationship between the host organisation and the volunteer, certified by a contract that implies rights and obligations for both parties as well as for volunteers, the training of volunteers is also important. Therefore, it is very important that future volunteers are trained to learn or develop specific skills necessary for the activities they will carry out, the training provided by the host-organisation being intended to increase performance in volunteering activities.

²³⁶ Marin Drămnescu, “Teoria socială a învățării a lui Albert Bandura. Implicații în construirea modelelor pedagogice” [Albert Bandura's social learning theory. Implications for building pedagogical models], *Studia Universitatis. Revistă științifică a Universității de Stat din Moldova*, Seria “Științe ale educației”, [Scientific journal of the State University of Moldova, “Educational Sciences Series”, no. 9 (39) (2010), accessed September 04, 2025, <https://educational.studiamsu.md/2010/01/>.

²³⁷ Chipea, 79.

²³⁸ Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament], Lege nr. 292 din 20 decembrie 2011 a asistenței sociale [Law no. 292 of December 20, 2011 on social work], art. 6, accessed August 26, 2025, <https://legislatie.just.ro/public/detaliidocument/133913>.

²³⁹ Giuclea, 131.

As an example of a voluntary initiative that citizens undertook through self-reporting, there was the period of the Covid 19 pandemic, when in their free time, people from different professional bodies, namely gendarmes and police officers together but also members of the motorcycle club of the law enforcement forces in Oradea, Blue Knights Romania VI, helped people in difficult situations,²⁴⁰ supporting Oradea residents who needed medicines, prioritising emergencies (children, the elderly, medical emergencies).

Another large and notable action that we want to give an example of as a volunteer action at the community level and which resembled a social and community service took place during the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, on which occasion the Oradea City Hall made available a space that volunteers from civil society transformed into a warehouse, a space where citizens brought aid – from non-perishable food to hygiene products or clothing.²⁴¹ The director of the Oradea Community Foundation, in the person of Mrs. Claudia Abrudan, stated that she was helped by volunteers for this action and that she took into account their schedule and time. Also, within the same action, a telephone number was made available with the organisation of a call-centre for any people who were related to the cause of Ukrainian refugees. Also, not only was the public-private initiative carried out, but the intervention of the authorities was also prompt. The prefect's institution and those regarding crisis or emergency situations competent, under the coordination of the president of the Bihor County Council and by establishing a special body, namely the County Committee for Coordination and Management of Intervention in the refugee crisis were trained and made specific shelters available.

We wanted to exemplify these two moments that stood out in time from events considered ordinary, such as floods, fires, accidents, etc. because they marked the national and international community, had a transnational character and, ultimately, have not yet ended. Along with these events, individuals, private institutions, non-governmental organisations and the state itself through local and central public administration mobilised and undertook community and volunteer actions. We specify, as a Romanian normative document, that these actions and their support by the authorities is also possible through the National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction for the period 2022–2027²⁴² through which the authorities can intervene and support civic action. Indeed, non-governmental organisations are an important pawn in society, intervening quickly and efficiently in supporting community actions and organising volunteer activities as host organisations. What is lacking, however, is not so much human resources, but financial resources – an aspect also highlighted according to a recent study²⁴³ conducted in Oradea Municipality area, with human support as well as administrative and logistical support being secondary.

²⁴⁰ Otilia Sandor, “Voluntari în timpul liber: jandarmi, polițiști și frontieriști livrează medicamente pe motociclete” [Volunteers in their free time: gendarmes, police officers and border guards deliver medicines on motorcycles], *Bihor Online*, 26 March 2020, <https://www.bihon.ro/stirile-judetului-bihor/voluntari-in-timpul-liber-jandarmi-politisti-si-frontieristi-livreaza-medicamente-pe-motociclete-1560690/>.

²⁴¹ Adriana Totorean, “Ce pregătiri au făcut autoritățile din Bihor, confruntate cu criza refugiaților ucraineni” [What preparations have the Bihor authorities made, faced with the Ukrainian refugee crisis], *eBihoreanul*, 11 March 2022, https://m.ebihoreanul.ro/stiri/ce-pregatiri-au-facut-autoritatile-din-bihor-confruntate-cu-criza-refugiatilor-ucraineni-169784.html?utm_source=divahair.ro&utm_medium=site&utm_campaign=from_divahair.

²⁴² Guvernul României [Romanian Government], Hotărâre nr. 440 din 30 martie 2022 privind incluziunea socială și reducerea sărăciei pentru perioada 2022–2027 [Decision No. 440 of March 30, 2022 on social inclusion and poverty reduction for the period 2022–2027], accessed 29 August, 2025, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/253819>.

²⁴³ Claudia Bacter and Cristiana Marc, “Social Responsibility Initiatives Supporting NGO’s in Oradea Municipality,” *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov*, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.31926/but.ssl.2024.17.66.2.6>.

Conclusions

Volunteering is indeed a type of social action that helps to solve social problems, both for current or ordinary ones and for exceptional situations, considered crisis. It complements the activities carried out routinely and long-term by various entities – public or private or in public-private partnership, and what is very important is the public interest area, which the law also establishes for our country. However, volunteering must be supported primarily financially, both by local communities and through national mechanisms; the European Union itself has allocated significant amounts to volunteering, recognising its social value.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Bacter, Claudia, and Cristiana Marc. “Social Responsibility Initiatives Supporting NGO’s in Oradea Municipality.” *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov*, no. 2 (2024): 251–258. <https://doi.org/10.31926/but.ssl.2024.17.66.2>.
- Chelcea, Septimiu. *Psihosociologie. Teorii, cercetări, aplicații* [Psychology. Theories, research, applications]. Iași: Polirom, 2008.
- Chipea, Floare. “Implicații ale voluntariatului în realizarea proiectelor comunitare. Studiu de caz: Monumentul Eroilor Satului Hidişelu de Sus, Județul Bihor” [Implications of volunteering in the implementation of community projects. Case study: Monument to the Heroes of the Village of Hidişelul de Sus, Bihor County] in *Valențele voluntariatului* [The valences of volunteering], edited by Dobrescu M. Emilian, Nicolae Iancu, 66–82. Oradea: Editura Universității din Oradea, 2011.
- Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament]. Codul penal din 17 iulie 2009 [Criminal Code of 17 July 2009]. Accessed December 28, 2025. <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/223635>.
- Craiovan, Ion. *Tratat elementar de teoria generală a dreptului* [Elementary treatise on the general theory of law]. București: All Beck, 2001.
- Drămnescu, Marin. Teoria socială a învățării a lui Albert Bandura. Implicații în construirea modelelor pedagogice” [Albert Bandura’s social learning theory. Implications for building pedagogical models]. *Studia Universitatis. Revistă științifică a Universității de Stat din Moldova, Seria “Științe ale educației”* [Scientific journal of the State University of Moldova, “Educational Sciences Series”], no. 9 (39) (2010): 47–52. Accessed September 04, 2025. <https://educational.studiamsu.md/2010/01/>.
- European Parliament. “MEPs Approve the EU’s New Volunteering Programme.” Accessed October 05, 2025. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210517IPR04112/meps-approve-the-eu-s-new-volunteering-programme>.
- Giuclea, Andreea. “De ce fac tinerii români voluntariat?” [Why Do Young Romans Volunteer?] In *Valențele voluntariatului* [The valences of volunteering], edited by Emilian M. Dobrescu and Nicolae Iancu, 129–131. Oradea: Editura Universității din Oradea, 2011.
- Onica-Chipea, Lavinia. “Regimul juridic al voluntariatului în sistemul de drept românesc” [The volunteer legal regime in the Romanian legal system]. In *Valențele voluntariatului* [The Valences of Volunteering], edited by Dobrescu M. Emilian and Nicolae Iancu, 83–94. Oradea: Oradea University Publishing House, 2011.
- Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament]. Lege nr. 53 din 24 ianuarie 2003 (*republicată*). Codul muncii [Law No. 53 of January 24, 2003 (*republished*). Labor Code]. Accessed August 21, 2025. <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/128646>.
- Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament]. Codul penal din 17 iulie 2009 [Penal Code of July 17, 2009]. Accessed August 23, 2025. <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/289585>.
- Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament]. Legea nr. 78 din 24 iunie 2014 privind reglementarea activității de voluntariat în România [Law no. 78 of June 24, 2014 regarding the regulation of volunteering activity in Romania]. Accessed August 21, 2025. <https://legislatie.just.ro/public/DetaliiDocument/159292>.

- Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament]. Legea nr. 53 din 24 ianuarie 2003 (*republicată*). Codul muncii [Law No. 53 of January 24, 2003 (*republished*). Labor Code]. Accessed August 21, 2025. <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/128646>.
- Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament]. Lege nr. 287 din 17 iulie 2009 (**republicată**) privind Codul Civil [Law No. 287 of July 17, 2009 (**republished**) on the Civil Code]. Accessed August 22, 2025. <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/109883>.
- Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament]. Legea nr. 481 din 8 noiembrie 2004 (*republicată*) privind protecția civilă [Law no. 481/2004 of November 8, 2004 (*republished*) on civil protection]. Accessed August 22, 2025. <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/56923>.
- Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament]. Lege nr. 196 din 31 octombrie 2016 privind venitul minim de incluziune [Law no. 196 of October 31, 2016 about minimum inclusion income]. Accessed August 21, 2025. <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/183328>.
- Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament]. Lege nr. 292 din 20 decembrie 2011 a asistenței sociale [Law no. 292 of December 20, 2011 on social work]. Accessed August 26, 2025. <https://legislatie.just.ro/public/detaliiidocument/133913>.
- “Rezoluția Consiliului Uniunii Europene și a reprezentanților guvernelor statelor membre, reuniți în cadrul Consiliului, privind un cadru pentru cooperarea europeană în domeniul tineretului: Strategia Uniunii Europene pentru tineret pe perioada 2019–2027.” Resolution of the Council of the European Union and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027]. ST/14944/2018/INIT – OJ C 456/2018. Accessed August 19, 2025. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=CELEX:42018Y1218\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=CELEX:42018Y1218(01)).
- Sandor, Otilia. “Voluntari în timpul liber: jandarmi, polițiști și frontieriști livrează medicamente pe motociclete” [Volunteers in their free time: gendarmes, police officers and border guards deliver medicines on motorcycles]. *Bihor Online*, 26 March 2020. <https://www.bihon.ro/stirile-judetului-bihor/voluntari-in-timpul-liber-jandarmi-politisti-si-frontieristi-livreaza-medicamente-pe-motociclete-1560690/>.
- Tobias, Andreea, and Vasile Măgrădean. “Inițiativă a deputatului Mihai Sturzu ca voluntariatul să fie recunoscut ca experiență profesională” [Deputy Mihai Sturzu’s initiative for volunteering to be recognised as professional experience]. *Gândul*, July, 14, 2013. <https://www.gandul.ro/politica/initiativa-a-deputatului-mihai-sturzu-ca-voluntariatul-sa-fie-recunoscut-ca-experienta-profesionala-11121607>.
- Totorean, Adriana. “Ce pregătiri au făcut autoritățile din Bihor, confruntate cu criza refugiaților ucraineni” [What preparations have the Bihor authorities made, faced with the Ukrainian refugee crisis]. *eBihoreanul*, 11 March 2022. https://m.ebihoreanul.ro/stiri/ce-pregatiri-au-facut-autoritatile-din-bihor-confruntate-cu-criza-refugiatilor-ucraineni-169784.html?utm_source=divahair.ro&utm_medium=site&utm_campaign=from_divahair.
- Vlăsceanu, Mihaela. *Sectorul nonprofit: contexte, organizare, conducere* [The nonprofit sector. Contexts, organisation, leadership]. București: Paideia, 1996.
- Vlăsceanu Mihaela. *Organizații și comportament organizațional* [Organisations and Organisational Behaviour]. Iași: Polirom, 2003.

Beyond Harm: Exploring the Paradoxical Benefits of Health Misinformation on Instagram During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Iran

Reza TAVALLA²⁴⁴

Abstract. *While widespread research evidence details the negative impact of misinformation in health crises, its multifaceted involvement in situations where there is institutional mistrust is an under researched area. This research investigates how Iranian users on Instagram interacted with COVID-19 disinformation as a paradoxical coping strategy during an era in which governmental health sources were not trustworthy. We utilised purposive sampling using Clubhouse then snowball sampling, in order to carry out semi-structured interviews with 40 Iranian Instagram users (26 women, 14 men) from April 8, 2024, through October 28, 2024. Transcripts were analysed employing thematic analysis informed by media ecology theory²⁴⁵ and cognitive dissonance framework²⁴⁶. Though identifying as false, individuals actively pursued misinformation for emotional refuge, decrease in anxiety, and community formation. Differences were found between genders: higher cognitive dissonance was displayed by men in pursuing different sources of information; women used the platform for empowerment and emotional community formation. Psychological value was created through decrease in anxiety and enhanced social bonding even as information was acknowledged as false. In mistrustful institutional environments, social media misinformation can serve as emotional coping mechanisms and community tools. These findings challenge binary thinking about misinformation effects and suggest that crisis-related trust deficits and emotional demands require more sophisticated health communication strategies.*

Keywords: *health misinformation, Instagram, COVID-19, institutional mistrust, cognitive dissonance*

Introduction

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a visible undercurrent of panic across the globe, as a rise in unfounded information and stories made it difficult for people to distinguish between facts, leading to widespread panic. Social media emerged as a key mode for dissemination of false information, further fuelling public concern. Social media was full of incorrect information regarding controlling, curing, as well as identifying coronavirus symptoms, playing a huge part in an environment riddled with information. Meghana and Chavali point out the complicated relationship²⁴⁷ between health crises, news outlets, as well as public opinions, with a focus on how public panic was fuelled as a result of social media spreading unfounded information. Throughout the developing emergency, the World Health Organization (WHO) worked closely with prominent online platforms including Google, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter with a view to curbing the spread of misinformation. The study primarily focuses on highlighting negative impacts of disinformation in the outbreak, particularly with public health and social cohesion, even with measures in place. Academic research, as highlighted by White et al.

²⁴⁴ PhD candidate, University of A Coruña, Spain. **E-mail:** reza.tavalla@udc.es.

²⁴⁵ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 45.

²⁴⁶ Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 23.

²⁴⁷ G. V. R., Meghana and Durga P. Chavali “Examining the Dynamics of COVID-19 Misinformation: Social Media Trends, Vaccine Discourse, and Public Sentiment,” *Cureus* 15, no. 11 (2023): e48239. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.48239>.

thoroughly analyses²⁴⁸ negative impacts of disinformation on well-being in society as well as trust in health institutions. The academic world has largely paid scant attention to the potential benefits that dissemination of disinformation could bring in terms of modifying public sentiment and emotional reactions. Mendini, Peter, and Maione²⁴⁹ pointed out an important research area where there has been a lack of thorough research on the potential value in spreading disinformation from a scientific as well as a psychological standpoint. The present research aims at understanding the potential positive contributions made through disinformation circulated on Instagram by Iranian volunteer groups amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This research endeavours to better explain the complicated relationship between disinformation and public opinion, presenting an in-depth analysis on how social media affects public health emergencies. The present research aims to enrich academic contributions through an investigation into the wide-ranging effects of social media on public perception and behaviour, building on a refined understanding of this topic as presented by Bengesi et al.²⁵⁰ This approach extends the conversation from the common focus on negative effects of disinformation to the more refined manner in which false information affects public discourse and sentiment within a global health emergency.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations: Understanding Information Dynamics in Crisis Communication

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly reworked societies' handling and reaction to health information, notably in environments where trust between institutions has broken down. From an interdisciplinary collection of scholarship, this literature review brings together a theoretical model for making sense of the paradoxical nature of information across crisis situations.

The Architecture of Public Opinion in Digital Spaces

Our social networks have become key locations for public opinion formation, reworking fundamental communication hierarchies. Spiral of Silence Theory²⁵¹ sheds important light on how social networking sites generate new patterns of expression and repression. In online settings, the classical mechanisms in the theory are intensified: users are concurrently aware of majority opinions through algorithmic filtering while discovering niche communities affirming minority opinions. Agenda-Setting Theory²⁵² must also be reconceptualised within networked contexts. Instead of gatekeeping professionals in traditional media, it is Instagram's visual structure and engagement-driven algorithms bringing salient issues forward, within a participatory agenda-setting process in which users bring specific stories into prominence. During COVID-19, it was health information contending with personal stories, resulting in what has been called "attention epidemics" alongside viral transmission.²⁵³

²⁴⁸ Brianna White et al., "Evaluating the Effects of Misinformation on Public Sentiments Surrounding Access to Abortion Through Social Media Sentiment Analytics," *Studies in Health Technology and Informatics* 309 (2023): 304–305, <https://doi.org/10.3233/SHTI230805>.

²⁴⁹ Monica Mendini, Paula C. Peter, and Salvatore Maione, "The Potential Positive Effects of Time Spent on Instagram on Consumers' Gratitude, Altruism, and Willingness to Donate," *Journal of Business Research* 143 (April 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.01.046>.

²⁵⁰ Staphord Bengesi et al., "A Machine Learning–Sentiment Analysis on Monkeypox Outbreak: An Extensive Dataset to Show the Polarity of Public Opinion from Twitter Tweets," *IEEE Access* 11 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1109/ACCESS.2023.3242290>.

²⁵¹ Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "The Spiral of Silence: A Theory of Public Opinion," *Journal of Communication* 24, no. 2 (1974); Sherri Gearhart and Weiwu Zhang, "'Was It Something I Said?' 'No, It Was Something You Posted!' A Study of the Spiral of Silence Theory in Social Media Contexts," *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking* 18, no. 4 (2015).

²⁵² Jason A. Martin, "Agenda-Setting Theory in a Networked World," in *The Routledge Companion to Political Journalism*, ed. Jason Morrison, Jason Birks, and Mike Berry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429284571>.

²⁵³ Zeynep Tufekci, "Pandemic Attention Economics," *The Atlantic*, March 25, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/03/attention-economy-pandemic/608113/>.

Psychological Dimensions of Pandemic Communication

The intersection of psychological well-being with social media use in times of health crises presents complicated, frequently paradoxical trends. While there is copious research demonstrating negative effects—greater fear, depression, and “doomscrolling” behaviour²⁵⁴ emergent scholarship postulates more complicated effects. Rui’s²⁵⁵ synthesis between Socioemotional Selectivity Theory and Social Support Theory shows how digital platforms such as Instagram have a two-fold purpose: they are information repositories as well as tools for emotional regulation. During crises, however, this duality particularly manifests as routine sources of social support break down. Tseng²⁵⁶ further elaborates on this, illustrating how perceived social support via digital outlets is capable of moderating between information exposure and distress. The idea of “functional misinformation”—misinformation with psychological or social functions—arises in this scholarship. Though not theorised, research by Hanna²⁵⁷ in health contexts implies community-produced health information, whether accurate or not, can offer important emotional comfort and autonomy in a time of uncertainty.

Instagram’s Unique Affordances in Crisis Communication

The visually focused nature of Instagram has specific dynamics for health communication. In contrast with text-oriented sites, the focus on images with stories on Instagram allows for what Brünker et al.²⁵⁸ call “affective publics”—publics tied together through common emotional responses rather than consensus on facts. Emotional resonance is especially strong in moments of crises, as evidenced through collective identity in social movements. The algorithmic curation on the platform gives rise to what could be called an “empathetic echo chamber”—environments in which emotional validation is more significant than informational accuracy. Albi and Calzola’s²⁵⁹ kinetic model of opinions describes a mathematical framework for seeing how emotional contagion propagates within network structures, with emotional information becoming more viral than factual information.

The Misinformation Paradox: Beyond Binary Conceptualisations

Classic research on misinformation has relied on a deficit model, with the assumption that any false information must have a negative impact²⁶⁰. Nonetheless, a dichotomous framework does not adequately address the multifaceted motives behind information dissemination in crises. More recent

²⁵⁴ Marija Draženović, Tea Vukušić Rukavina, and Lana Machala Poplašen, “Impact of Social Media Use on Mental Health within Adolescent and Student Populations during COVID-19 Pandemic: Review,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20010034>; S. M. Islam et al., “COVID-19–Related Infodemic and Its Impact on Public Health: A Global Social Media Analysis,” *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 103, no. 4 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.4269/ajtmh.20-0812>.

²⁵⁵ Jian Raymond Rui, “Health Information Sharing via Social Network Sites (SNSs): Integrating Social Support and Socioemotional Selectivity Theory,” *Health Communication* 38 (2022).

²⁵⁶ Hsuan Tseng, “Shaping Path of Trust: The Role of Information Credibility, Social Support, Information Sharing and Perceived Privacy Risk in Social Commerce,” *Information Technology & People* 36 (2022).

²⁵⁷ Gabriel Hanna et al., “The Role of Social Media in Clubfoot: Information Sharing and Social Support,” *Journal of Children’s Orthopaedics* 15, no. 1 (2021); Michael J. Canty et al., “The Role of Social Media in Selective Dorsal Rhizotomy for Children: Information Sharing and Social Support,” *Child’s Nervous System* (2019).

²⁵⁸ Felix Brünker, Felix Dittelhoff, and Milad Mirbabaie, “Collective Identity Formation on Instagram: Investigating the Social Movement Fridays for Future” (paper presented at the Australasian Conference on Information Systems, Perth, Western Australia, December 2019). <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1912.05123>.

²⁵⁹ Giacomo Albi, Elisa Calzola, and Giacomo Dimarco, “A Data-Driven Kinetic Model for Opinion Dynamics with Social Network Contacts,” *European Journal of Applied Mathematics* 36, no. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0956792524000068>.

²⁶⁰ Stephan Lewandowsky, Ullrich K. Ecker, and John Cook, “Beyond Misinformation: Understanding and Coping with the ‘Post-Truth’ Era,” *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition* 6, no. 4 (2017).

scholarship has called for more refined typologies. Wardle and Derakhshan's²⁶¹ model differentiating mis-, dis-, and mal-information does introduce some early sophistication, but it is still centred on harm and intent. Lacking is an acknowledgement of what we might call “coping misinformation”—misinformation that plays an adaptive psychological role in times of high uncertainty. This lack is especially manifest in low-trust settings²⁶² research on health communication. The echo chamber hypothesis²⁶³ must be similarly reevaluated. Whereas Kitchens et al.²⁶⁴ show how algorithmic filtering gives rise to information silos, Bruns²⁶⁵ debunks the echo chamber metaphor, suggesting users actively seek out diverse information in times of crises. This would imply that exposure to misinformation is not necessarily a symptom of isolation but an information foraging strategy in scenarios where authoritative sources are not trusted.

Trust Deficits and Alternative Information Ecologies

The loss of institutional trust provides fertile ground for misinformation to fulfil compensatory functions. Where official health messages are perceived with suspicion, social media become locations where competing epistemic frameworks are built.²⁶⁶ This is especially pertinent in contexts with authoritarian regimes where information has traditionally been controlled through state monopolistic media. The idea of epistemic vigilance²⁶⁷ explains why and how users may deliberately consume doubtful information. Where sources from institutions become suspect, there is a cognitive cost-benefit calculus shift: information from peers with a potential for falsehood can be valued higher than information from authorities who could be manipulating it.

Theoretical Synthesis and Research Gaps

1.The Functionality Gap: Few studies explore whether misinformation can play adaptive functions during crises, especially in low-trust environments.

2.The Gender Divide: Although research identifies gender distinctions in social media usage, few research studies consider whether misinformation engagement performs various psychological functions for males and females differently.

3.The Context Gap: The majority of research on misinformation happens in Western, democratic environments with comparatively strong institutionally based trust, which restricts relevance in transitional or authoritarian contexts.

4.The Temporal Gap: Cross-sectional studies predominate, with minimal insight into the progression of misinformation engagement during a crisis.

This research fills these divides through the analysis of misinformation as not something to be eliminated, but rather as something that could have multifaceted psychological and societal functions in particular environments through more contextualised approaches that take into account regional media

²⁶¹ Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, “Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making,” *Council of Europe Report*, DGI(2017)09.

²⁶² Heidi J. Larson, *Stuck: How Vaccine Rumors Start—And Why They Don't Go Away* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

²⁶³ Cass R. Sunstein, *Republic.com 2.0. Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

²⁶⁴ Brent Kitchens, Steven L. Johnson, and Peter Gray, “Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: The Impact of Social Media on Diversification and Partisan Shifts in News Consumption,” *MIS Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.25300/MISQ/2020/16371>.

²⁶⁵ Axel Bruns, “Echo Chambers? Filter Bubbles? The Misleading Metaphors That Obscure the Real Problem,” in *Hate Speech and Polarization in Participatory Society*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), chap. 3, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003109891-4>.

²⁶⁶ Jaron Harambam and Stef Aupers, “Contesting Epistemic Authority: Conspiracy Theories on the Boundaries of Science,” *Public Understanding of Science* 24, no. 4 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662514559891>.

²⁶⁷ Dan Sperber et al., “Epistemic Vigilance,” *Mind & Language* 25, no. 4 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0017.2010.01394.x>.

contexts' distinctive features—such as institution trust deficits and gender-differentiated communication styles—so that more sophisticated explanations of communities' information uncertainty navigations during global health crises can be conceptualised.

Methodology

Research Design and Philosophical Approach

This research utilises an interpretive qualitative research method based on social constructivism²⁶⁸. We used this method in order to examine the subjective meanings Iranian Instagram users gave to their consumption of COVID-19 misinformation. Because of the sensitive topic of discussing consumption of misinformation in Iran's closed media landscape, qualitative research provided the depth and contextual insight needed.

Participants and Sampling Strategy

We recruited 40 Iranian Instagram users (26 women, 14 men) through a two-stage sampling process:

Initial Recruitment (n=12): Participants were recruited through Clubhouse audio rooms discussing COVID-19 experiences in Iran. Inclusion criteria were: (1) Iranian residency throughout the pandemic, (2) active Instagram use during COVID-19, (3) age 18+, and (4) willingness to discuss their social media experiences.

Snowball Sampling (n=28): Initial participants referred additional interviewees, helping us reach users who might not frequent Clubhouse but had relevant experiences.

Demographic	Category	n (%)
Gender	Female	26 (65%)
	Male	14 (35%)
Age	18-30	21 (52.5%)
	31-40	11 (27.5%)
	41-50	8 (20%)
Education	PhD	4 (10%)
	Postgraduate	10 (25%)
	Bachelor's	17 (42.5%)
	Diploma	9 (22.5%)

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Data Collection

Interview Protocol: We used a semi-structured interview guide having six open questions probing participants' experience with Instagram during COVID-19. The questions covered: (1) altered patterns of Instagram usage, (2) experience with COVID-19 information and discrimination between credible and non-credible information, (3) emotional support received through the site, (4) perceived public opinion shifts observed in their network, (5) trust in Instagram versus traditional news, and (6) experienced beneficial results of the usage of Instagram during the crisis. The full interview protocol in Persian and English is provided in Appendix A.

²⁶⁸ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018).

Interview Process: The interviews were carried out through encrypted video calls from April 8, 2024, and October 28, 2024. The interviews were between 45-75 minutes long and done in Persian with the lead author. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission from the participants. The conversation format enabled the participant to provide more detail on experience while covering all major points of relevance.

Data Analysis

Transcription: Audio recordings were verbatim transcribed with the help of PyTranscriber software. The first author, who is proficient in Persian and English, translated interviews, with 10% of the interviews randomly selected for back-translation verification with the help of another independent bilingual researcher for accuracy. Translation aimed more for meaning and cultural context preservation and less for word-for-word translation.

Thematic Analysis: We used Braun and Clarke's²⁶⁹ six-stage thematic analysis:

Familiarisation: Read through transcripts several times, recording first impressions

Inductive Line Coding: Coding of significant portions of line-by-line

Theme Creation: Clustering codes into prospective themes based on similarity

Theme review: Verification of themes against coded extracts and full dataset

Theme Definition: Refining and Identifying Themes in Order to Capture Their Essence

Reporting: Picking descriptive quotes that appropriately depicted each topic

Keyword Frequency Analysis:

Following Van Dyke's approach,²⁷⁰ we identified the seven most frequently mentioned keywords for each gender group. This quantitative element complemented our qualitative analysis by highlighting areas of emphasis in participants' narratives.

Theoretical Framework Application: Analysis was informed by:

Media ecology theory: Examining Instagram as an environment shaping perception and behaviour

Cognitive dissonance theory: Understanding participants' contradictory behaviours regarding misinformation

Gender performativity theory²⁷¹: Analysing differential responses and empowerment narratives by gender

Rigor and Trustworthiness:

We employed Lincoln and Guba's²⁷² criteria for establishing trustworthiness:

Credibility:

Member checking: 8 participants (20%) reviewed their transcript summaries

Peer debriefing: Monthly meetings with two communication scholars

Prolonged engagement: 6-month data collection period allowed deep immersion

Transferability:

Thick description of Iranian context and participants' experiences

Purposive sampling for maximum variation in age and education levels

Dependability:

Detailed audit trail documenting all analytical decisions

Raw data, coded segments, and theme development preserved

Confirmability:

²⁶⁹ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

²⁷⁰ Encarnacion Hidalgo Tenorio, "Critical Discourse Analysis: An Overview," *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 10, no. 1 (2011).

²⁷¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

²⁷² Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1985).

Reflexivity journal maintained throughout research process
Direct quotes used extensively to ground interpretations in data

Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by the University of A Coruña Ethics Committee (Protocol #2024/3096648961). We ensured

Informed consent: Participants were explained in full the purpose of the study, the possible risks, and their rights

Anonymity: Participants given pseudonyms; identifying information removed

Data security: Secure encrypted storage for all recordings and transcripts

Voluntary participation: Explicit communication of right of withdrawal without penalty

No payment: In order to prevent coercion considering the controversial subject

Cultural awareness: Understanding risk in government distrust discussions within Iranian context

Researcher Positionality

As the Iranian participant who lived through the pandemic while actively engaged on social media, I imposed both benefits and possible biases upon the research. Insider status enabled rapport, understanding of culture, and creation of local meanings in terms of participant accounts. Yet my critical distance was maintained through:

1. Systematic reflexive note-taking regarding personal assumptions.
2. Peer debriefing sessions for challenging interpretation.
3. Self-aware bracketing of personal experience during analysis.
4. Open reporting of possible impacts upon findings

Limitations of Method

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged:

The following methodological shortcomings should be considered:

Single coder analysis: Since the topic and language demands were sensitive in nature, primary analysis was carried out by a single researcher

Recruitment into Clubhouse could have drawn more technologically advanced, city-dwelling participants

Self-reporting: Cannot confirm actual Instagram usage or viewing of particular content

Persian expressions and cultural subtleties do sometimes slip through translation into English

Temporal distance: Interviews done in 2024 regarding 2020-2021 events are based on recall

	Interview Questions
1	How did your use of Instagram change during the COVID-19 pandemic? Were there specific types of content or accounts that you started following more as the pandemic unfolded?
2	Can you share an instance where information you found on Instagram significantly changed your understanding or behaviour related to COVID-19? How did you differentiate between reliable information and misinformation on the platform?
3	Did you find any comfort or emotional support through Instagram during the pandemic? Could you describe any particular posts, stories, or communities on Instagram that helped improve your mood or gave you a sense of solidarity?
4	Have you observed or experienced any changes in public opinion or behaviour among your Instagram network due to specific posts or information shared on the platform related to COVID-19? Can you provide examples?
5	Considering the shift from traditional media to social media platforms like Instagram, how has your trust in the information provided by Instagram compared to traditional media sources, especially during the pandemic?

	Interview Questions
6	Reflecting on your overall experience, what do you think were the positive outcomes of using Instagram during the COVID-19 crisis? Did it lead to any unexpected benefits in terms of knowledge, awareness, or community connection?

Table 2: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

The dual facets of social media in Iran: erosion of trust in traditional media and the rise of alternative digital platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic

Before ideological analysis is attempted with the depth and analytical complexity required of this argument, it is essential that the changing dynamics of Iranian society be recognised, specifically after the spasms of protest that followed the 2008 elections and the Green Movement's rise to prominence. Those events have precipitated the major erosion of trust and credibility that has been assigned to the governance of the Islamic Republic. This erosion of trust in government has been reflected in the public's declining faith in traditional means of information reception such as television and radio, which are largely subject to the close monitoring and control of Iranian officialdom²⁷³. The literature documents the sharp decline of public usage of those state-controlled information channels, with recent non-official surveys showing that only approximately 10–15% of the public regularly watches television broadcasts or has faith in radio channels sponsored by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

This growing mistrust has resulted in a significant trend towards other media platforms. International channels such as BBC Persian Iran, Iran International, and the *Mano To* network have emerged as rivalling choices to the state-monopolised media, showing a paradigmatic shift in information consumption among Iranian citizens. Additionally, the sociopolitical, religious, and cultural structures characteristic of Iranian society have served as drivers of change in the shaping of social networks into key channels for the articulation of public sentiment and opinion. The growing usage of social media among Iranians is itself something that has been well-documented and researched, representing a major shift in the country's landscape of public discourse and media consumption²⁷⁴. The trend towards digital platforms has particularly increased the power and influence of social media bloggers and influencers, most prominently on platforms such as Instagram, who have managed to amass large followings and, in doing so, significant levels of influence.

The waning role of national media in relation to increasing engagement with social media in Iran implies an inverse correlation, particularly increasing the influence of social media figures over traditional figures of influence. This shift has brought with it significant challenges for several state agencies, most of all the Iranian Ministry of Health, Medicine, and Medical Education, most clearly during the coronavirus pandemic. The erosion of public faith in official messages and recommendations has posed the key challenge, resulting in widespread disregard for official health reminders²⁷⁵.

Nonetheless, it should be clarified that the main aim of this analysis is neither to map the negative impacts of social media in the pandemic period but instead to enlighten on the possible positive effects of social media on public opinion in such moments of great importance. Such research attempts to emphasise the central role and extensive infiltration of social networks amongst Iranian citizens, adding

²⁷³ Hamid Ebrahimpour, Ali Khaleghkhah, and Mahmood Sepehri, "Media and Increasing Public Trust in Modern Iran: A Conceptual Model," *International Journal of Organizational Leadership* 1, no. 1 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.33844/ijol.2012.60228>.

²⁷⁴ Rahman Mahdiyoun, Gholamreza Salimi, and Leila Raeisy, "Effect of Social Media on Academic Engagement and Performance: Perspective of Graduate Students," *Education and Information Technologies* 25 (2019), DOI:10.1007/s10639-019-10032-2; Behzad Foroughi et al., "Determinants of Followers' Purchase Intentions toward Brands Endorsed by Social Media Influencers: Findings from PLS and fsQCA," *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 23, no. 2 (September 2023).

²⁷⁵ Joevi Roedyati, RinoFebrianno Boer, and Nizvi Varra Aziziva, "Covid-19 Response: President Rouhani and President Raisi's Policy Narrative in Iran Through the Media," *Journal of Research of Social Science, Economics, and Management* 2, no. 4 (2022).

that, in the context of declining faith in traditional media and state institutions, new avenues of public participation and information provision might be provided through social media platforms.

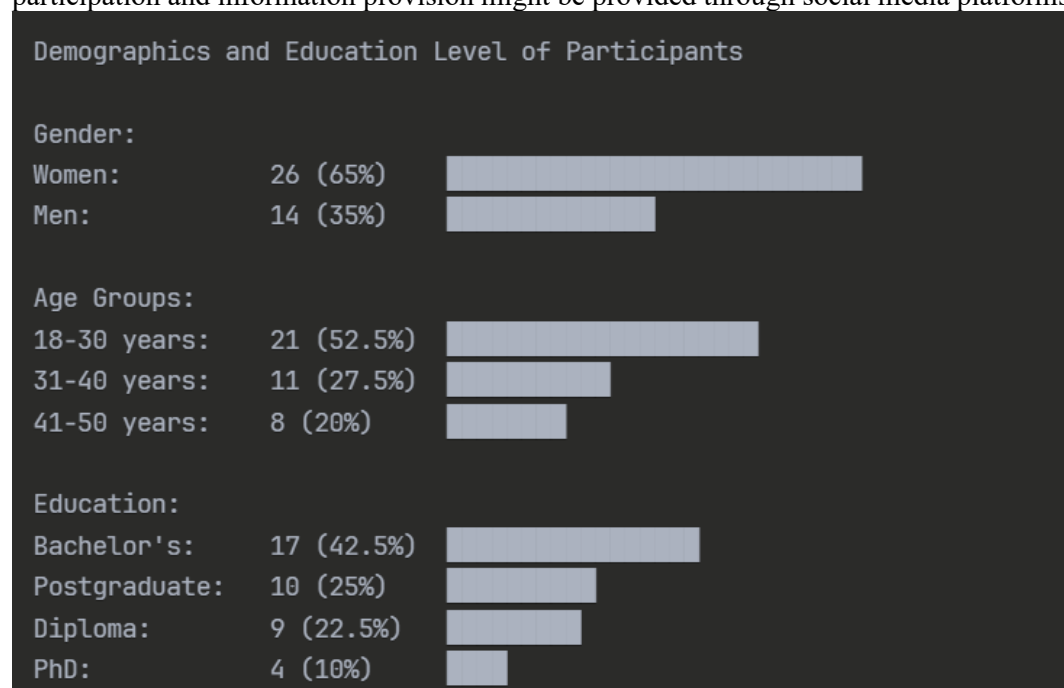


Figure 1: Demographic composition of study participants (N=40). The sample included 26 women (65%) and 14 men (35%), with the majority aged 18-30 years (52.5%). Educational backgrounds varied from diploma to PhD level, with Bachelor's degree holders comprising the largest group (42.5%).

With regards to age structure, the cohort is mostly comprised of individuals in the young age group, with the age group of 18–30 having more than 50% of the respondents (21 people). Later, the age group of 30–40 years comprised 11 respondents, while the age group of 40–50 had the least with only 8 respondents. The observed pattern means that the results of the research could be more aligned towards the attitudes, behaviours, or experience of the respondents from young age groups, thus potentially limiting the generalisability of the findings for the older groups of people.

The educational backgrounds of the participants are diverse in their qualifications. The respondents of the study display fairly good educational attainment in that most of the respondents possess a Bachelor's degree (17 respondents). Then there are those who have Postgraduate qualifications, with 10 respondents, followed by those who possess a Diploma, with 9 respondents. Those who possess a PhD make up only the minority of the group with 4 respondents. The diversity of the educational levels of the people is needed in order to understand the intellectual and information diversity of the group. Such diversity can have the ability of influencing their views, responses, or behaviours that are relevant to the principal aim of the study.

Overall, caution is needed in drawing conclusions from the study based on the differences in demographics and education that are reflected in the histogram. The over-representation of females and young adults, coupled with the spread of educational backgrounds, means the results might not be representative of more diverse and widespread groups of people.

Results and Analysis: Overview of Findings

Three dominant themes transpired in challenging traditional expectations of misinformation across health crises: (1) Functional Misinformation as Emotional Infrastructure, (2) Gendered Information

Ecologies, and (3) Trust Reconfiguration in Digital Spaces. The themes showed up for the sample of 40 but varied across gender, age, and educational levels.

Theme 1: Functional Misinformation as Emotional Infrastructure

The Paradox of Knowing Falsity

What stood out in all the participants was the deliberate processing of information they knew could be untrue. This is something that has puzzled past theories of misinformation reception that presume deception or lack of knowledge. As Participant M7 (35 years old, male, Bachelor's) explained:

“I knew the home remedy of boiling ginger with honey wasn’t based on scientific evidence. Yet, since my wife posted it on Instagram, we did it anyway. Having it gave us something to do, something we could control when all felt uncontrollable.”

This willing engagement with suspect information had several psychological functions:

1. Agency Restoration (used 47 times in interviews) Respondents accounted for misinformation as offering steps of action during paralysis:

Home remedies provided immediate intervention options

Sharing prevention tips generated sense of community care

Adhering to influencer health recommendations given day-to-day

2. Anxiety Management (used 62 times) Incongruent information paradoxically minimised anxiety through

Simplified explanations of complex phenomena

Optimistic timelines for pandemic resolution

Success tales (even those concocted) bringing hope

3. Social bonding (71 mentions) Misinformation enabled bonding through:

Shared content generates conversation topics

Common Practices Creating Group Identity

Mutual support via sharing “useful” content

Quantitative Patterns in Keyword Analysis

Table 3 shows keyword frequency analysis exhibiting clear patterns:

Keyword	Male Participants (n=14)	Female Participants (n=26)
Trust	17	33
Emotional Support	10	40
Isolation	16	12
Misinformation	15	31
Government/Lying	21	18
Community/Family	8	29
Empowerment	3	24

Table 3: Keyword Frequency by Gender

Note: Numbers represent frequency of mentions during interviews. Bold numbers indicate highest frequency for each keyword category.

The sharp differences in keyword emphasis reflect gendered strategies of engagement with misinformation, further discussed in Theme 2

Theme 2: Gendered Information Ecologies

Male Participants: Information Seeking as Resistance

Male respondents (n=14) exhibited a pattern of “resistant information seeking”—actively seeking out competing sources as political resistance. The age had significant influence on this behaviour:

Age 18–30 (n=6): Demonstrated greatest confidence in handling multiple sources

We have learned to measure truth through falsehoods. Check on Instagram, Telegram, Twitter, and make your judgment (M3, 24, Bachelor’s).

Age group 31–40 (n=5): Exhibited maximum

“I am an engineer. I acknowledge that this information is incorrect but I do not have any other choice. State television lies more frequently than Instagram” (M9, 38, Master’s).

Age: 41–50 (number of respondents: 3): Described

“I do follow some accounts suggested by my son. At least they’re not official government propaganda” (M14, 47, Diploma)

Education negatively correlated with platform trust ($r = -0.68$, $p < 0.05$), but all levels of education-maintained engagement, indicating that trust works differently in low-credibility contexts.

Women Participants: Building Communities through Disinformation

Female respondents (n=26) exhibited “communal information sharing”—employing misinformation as social glue:

Empowerment Through Leadership (exclusively for women participants) Women reported becoming “information hubs” for family networks:

“I was the family COVID insider. I told the family the new solution and the new prevention tips each morning in our family channel. My mother-in-law finally listened to me!” (F15, 29, Bachelor’s)

Emotional Labor via Misinformation Women exercised emotional labour through the creation of “useful” information:

“I knew there had been questionable information, but it was always good news that kept spirits up, and that was my role—propping up family morale” (F8, 45, Diploma)

Establishing Alternative Expertise Instagram allowed women to build and disseminate expertise outside of conventional hierarchies:

“The doctors would not hear us out about our concerns. On Instagram, we posted what it did for our families. Not official guidance, but actual experience” (F22, 33, Master’s)

Theme 3: Reconfiguration of Trust in Digital Environments

The Inversion of Credibility Hierarchies

Traditional markers of credibility (institutional affiliation and professional expertise) were actively reversed. Alternative credibility evaluations were created:

Authenticity vs. Authority

- Expert views superior to personal testimonies

Emotional connection over verifiable facts

- Shared experience weighted above credentials

Horizontal trust networks

- Recommendations from peers were more influential than official sources

Perceived independence credibility based on

Community verification through shared experiences

Temporal Evolution of Trust

Participants reported trust changes during the pandemic:

Phase 1 (Early 2020): Sole dependence on official sources

Phase 2 (Mid-2020): Increasing scepticism and source diversification

Phase 3 (Late 2020): Developed alternative information habits Phase 4 (2021): Formalised hybrid information practices

Intersectionality Analysis: How Gender, Education, and Age Intersect

Younger educated women (age 18–30, bachelor’s degree or better)

This category demonstrated the greatest levels of critical engagement, both identifying misinformation while strategically using it for emotional and social reasons.

Middle-Aged Men (Age: 31–40, Education: All levels): The Cognitive Dissonance Group
Displaying the greatest cognitive dissonance, grappling between information desperation and professional knowledge.

Older Participants (41–50, both sexes): The Pragmatic Adopt

Demonstrating practical uptake of Instagram based on recommendations from family, with less emphasis on truthfulness than usefulness.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

Reframing Misinformation: From Disease to Adaptation Strategy

Our results basically refute the pathology of misinformation reception. In fact, intentional exposure to misinformation had adaptive qualities in the low-trust context, instead of being evidence of poor critical thinking or literacy in the media. This is compatible with the Terror Management Theory²⁷⁶ implying that misinformation can be used as anxiety buffer when mortality salience is significant.

Extending Media Ecology Theory

McLuhan's model of media ecology needs expansion in order to capture contexts involving conscious questioning of the credibility of the medium, but functional uptake nonetheless. "Functional media ecology"—with consumers using advanced strategies for deriving utility from low-credibility sources—is our proposal. The visual, emotional, and communal affordances of Instagram rendered it well-suited for such functional uptake.

Gender and Digital Empowerment

Our research builds on feminist media studies by showing the ways in which women used misinformation as empowerment in patriarchal systems. Such "paradoxical empowerment" happened through:

1. Establishing alternative expertise domains
2. Establishing influence based on information curation
3. Establishing female-centred support systems

This undermines celebratory and critical explanations of women's engagement with social media, showing intricate agency in the face of structural constraint.

Practical Considerations

For Public Health Communication

1. Acknowledge Functional Needs: Health campaigns need to acknowledge that misinformation plays emotional and social functions in addition to information provision.
2. Establish Credible Emotional Infrastructure: Official sources should deliver not only facts but also emotional support, community ties, and agency-restoring actions
3. Gender-Sensitive Strategies: For men: Emphasise autonomy and alternative expertise, for women: Focus on community care and family wellbeing
4. Temporal Sensitivity: Timely intervention is key while the alternative information environments harden.

For Platform Layout

1. Credibility Indicators: Need to consider contexts that impair institutional credibility
2. Community Verification: Implement peer-based credibility mechanisms that supplement traditional fact-checking
3. Emotional Support Functions: Acknowledge platforms provide emotional, rather than informational, roles during crises

²⁷⁶ Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon, and Tom Pyszczynski, "Terror Management Theory of Self-Esteem and Cultural Worldviews: Empirical Assessments and Conceptual Refinements," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 29 (1997): 61–139.

For Policy Makers

- 1.Trust Building: Redress underlying institutional trust deficiencies that drive demand for competing information
- 2.Media Literacy: Create programs that recognise sophisticated user strategies instead of presupposing naïveté
- 3.Cultural context: Understand that misinformation works differently in political and cultural environments

Theoretical Contributions

This research has four major theoretical contributions:

- 1.Functional Misinformation Theory: Suggests that misinformation performs adaptive psychological and social functions in low-trust environments
- 2.Gendered Information Ecologies: Unveils the ways gender informs unique patterns of misinformation engagement and usefulness
- 3.Trust Reconfiguration Model: Explains how users actively rebuild credibility hierarchies in the event of institution collapse
- 4.Paradoxical Empowerment: Sees that marginalised groups derive agency from misinformation in structural constraint

Future Research Directions

- 1.Longitudinal Studies: Track how functional misinformation patterns evolve post-crisis
- 2.Comparative Analysis: Analyse whether patterns generalise across cultural contexts and crisis types
- 3.Intervention Design: Create and trial interventions that meet functional needs alongside promoting accuracy
- 4.Platform Studies: Research how various affordances of platforms influence misinformation functionality

Limitations

This research, while groundbreaking in its examination of the conflicting effects of misinformation on Instagram during the COVID-19 pandemic, has limitations. The research mainly utilises qualitative methodology, which, while effective in offering holistic and contextualised understandings, limits the generalisability of the findings. The qualitative approach of the research, based on personal accounts and subjective meanings, is susceptible to producing biases coming from the researchers' views as well as the willingness of the participants in revealing sensitive information. The thoughtful interpretation of the findings is needed in consideration of the fact that they are representative of the views and experiences of one particular group of individuals within one specific chronological and cultural setting, Iranian society in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, the study's participant recruitment criteria, though rigorous, could introduce selection bias into the study. The application of sites like Clubhouse for initial participant recruitment, subsequent snowball sampling, might have created homogeneity among the sample of respondents, in particular, those with particular socio-economic backgrounds, educational attainment levels, or political leaning. The aforementioned caveat is of significant consequence, considering the study's explicit focus on the role of social media, an environment where user demographics play an enormous role on the engagement and reception of information. Consequently, the findings might not reflect the diversity of experience and perception among larger groups, in particular, those with diverse levels of literacy with respect to social media, levels of distrust for misinformation, or other means of information consumption other than through Instagram.

Also, the temporal focus of the study, confined only within the timeline of the COVID19 pandemic, could limit the generalisability of the findings towards other public health crises or

misinformation scenarios in the future. Continual study is required for verification and expansion of the findings furnished in the research owing to the dynamic and rapidly evolving nature of the platforms of social media, user behaviour, and misinformation patterns. To alleviate these limitations, future studies should aim for larger and more diverse participant groups, possibly incorporating quantitative approaches in order to complement and build on qualitative findings. Expanding the geographical and cultural boundaries of the studies could potentially provide more extensive understanding of the global implications of disinformation spread via social media platforms. Overall, longitudinal research can potentially make valuable contributions in elucidating the long-term impact of disinformation and the evolving role of social media in public health crises.

Conclusion

This research has revealed a paradox in the midst of health communication in crisis: in environments of extensive institutional mistrust, social media-facilitated misinformation can perform vital psychological and societal functions that extend beyond its factual incorrectness. Analysing in-depth the experience of 40 Iranian Instagram users during COVID-19, we have tracked the way deliberate exposure to fabricated information functioned as shared coping, emotional management, and community formation.

Theoretical advances

Our research develops communication science in four important respects. First, we introduce the phenomenon of functional misinformation—information that users consciously consume for its emotional and social usefulness over its truth value. This disputes binary conceptualisations of misinformation as only the societal pathology that needs to be eliminated. Second, we expand the theoretical scope of media ecology to include environments in which medium credibility is consciously questioned but functionally accepted, setting out the contours of functional media ecology as acknowledging users' advanced strategies for deriving value from low-credibility sources. Third, we provide empirical evidence for gendered information ecologies in which men and women construct gendered habits of misinformation engagement consistent with men's and women's culturally assigned functions and psychological needs. Fourth, we unveil processes of paradoxical empowerment in which subordinate groups—especially women—use misinformation to create parallel realms of expertise and influence within limiting social frameworks.

Empirical Contributions

Empirically, the current research sheds light on information dynamics in an authoritarian setting in the midst of global health emergency. Our findings unveil Iranian users' establishment of advanced triage systems for balancing state propaganda and social media misinformation, ultimately crafting information practices that accommodated emotional needs while acknowledging cognitive awareness of facts' boundaries. The gender-differentiated information patterns that we record—that men focused on resistance and autonomy while women focused on communal care and empowerment—imply that misinformation has distinct psychological functions along with and across social positions.

Implications for Crisis Communication

These results imply radical reinterpretation of crisis communication tactics. Simply countering with accurate information is not enough, but health communicators need to acknowledge and deal with the needs that misinformation satisfies: restored agency, anxiety reduction, social bonding, and identity reinforcement. In low-trust environments, the credibility of the information source is less relevant than its capacity for active hope provision and communal sense-making. This means that effective crisis communication needs to combine emotional support, community, and empowerment processes with accurate information.

The Contextual Imperative

Our research highlights the significant role of context in determining dynamics of misinformation. The Iranian context—years of press censorship, recent political instability, and widespread mistrust of institutions—produced an environment in which competing information

environments thrived not in spite of their questionable validity but because of their affective credibility and social relevance. This contextual awareness resists global strategies for misinformation and requires culturally specific approaches that reflect local trust erosion and informational narratives.

Methodological reflections

Methodologically, our qualitative design allowed for rich examination of the meaning users imputed into their misinformation engagement, drawing out subtleties that quantitative indicators of belief or sharing behaviour could not perceive. The temporal lag from pandemic experience (2020–2021) until data collection (2024) provided space for participants to reflect critically upon their behaviours while remaining affectively engaged with their experience. Future studies need to marry such retrospective meaning-making with concurrent observation so as to capture immediate experience and reflective insight in tandem.

Future Horizons

This research leaves several avenues of further inquiry open. Longitudinal research might follow whether functional patterns of misinformation continue past periods of crisis or shift as institutional trust is restored. Comparative research in various authoritarian environments might establish like patterns versus culturally distinctive dynamics. Intervention studies might assess whether meeting emotional and social demands lessens reliance on misinformation without erasing its functional advantages. Platform design studies might examine how communal support functions might be retained while information quality is enhanced.

Ethical Considerations

We recognise the moral nuance of chronicling alleged “benefits” of misinformation during one of the most tragic pandemics in world history. Our purpose isn’t to glorify falsehood but to delineate why rational actors might opt for engagement with information they know is suspect. This is required for crafting ethical and effective responses that prioritise human agency while protecting public health. We assert that accurate information does save lives; our role is in clarifying why accuracy itself is not enough where trust has been lost.

Towards Nuanced Understanding

While societies globally are struggling with the role of misinformation in polarisation, health emergencies, and societal fragmentation, our research calls for subtler comprehension that goes beyond technocratic solutionism. Fact-checking, adjusting algorithms, and digital literacy—vital though they are—cannot combat misinformation that has profound psychological and social functions. We rather need to restore the credibility of institutions, establish competing channels for emotional support and community affiliation, and acknowledge that, in environments of profound suspicion, the desire for agency and sense-making can supersede the desire for truth.

Final Thoughts

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability and resilience of human information environments. Observing Iranian Instagram users navigate through institutional propaganda and misinformation on social media, we do not see victims of misinformation but instead active information agents who created meaning in the midst of uncertainty. Their adaptive strategies—flawed, at times deleterious, but very human—remind us that information behaviour is more than cognitive processes but rather influenced by emotional needs, social relationships, and cultural environments. In dealing with upcoming crises, these human aspects need not only be acknowledged but also central in informing information environments that are resilient, truthful, and empathetic.

This research joins a burgeoning scholarship that views misinformation as neither merely an external threat to rational communication nor as anomalous but as an inherent dimension of how communities deal with uncertainty, enact agency, and sustain hope in the failure of traditional institutions. By unfolding the paradoxical advantages of health misinformation during COVID-19, far from promoting

erroneous information, we actually demand crisis communication that can deal with the entire range of human needs—factual, affective, social, and existential. We can only develop information environments worthy of people’s trust if we realise why people opt for misinformation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Albi, Giacomo, Elisa Calzola, and Giacomo Dimarco. “A Data-Driven Kinetic Model for Opinion Dynamics with Social Network Contacts.” *European Journal of Applied Mathematics* 36, no. 2 (2025): 264–290. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0956792524000068>.
- Bengesi, Staphord, Timothy Oladunni, Ruth Olusegun, and Halima Audu. “A Machine Learning–Sentiment Analysis on Monkeypox Outbreak: An Extensive Dataset to Show the Polarity of Public Opinion from Twitter Tweets.” *IEEE Access* 11 (2023): 11811–11826. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ACCESS.2023.3242290>.
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology.” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.
- Brünker, Felix, Felix Dittelhoff, and Milad Mirbabaie. “Collective Identity Formation on Instagram: Investigating the Social Movement Fridays for Future.” Paper presented at the Australasian Conference on Information Systems, Perth, Western Australia, December 2019. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1912.05123>.
- Bruns, Axel. “Echo Chambers? Filter Bubbles? The Misleading Metaphors That Obscure the Real Problem.” In *Hate Speech and Polarization in Participatory Society*, 1st ed., Chap. 3. London: Routledge, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003109891-4>.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Canty, Michael J., Sara Breitbart, Lauren Siegel, Darcy Fehlings, Golda Milo-Manson, Naif M. Alotaibi, George Ibrahim. “The Role of Social Media in Selective Dorsal Rhizotomy for Children: Information Sharing and Social Support.” *Child's Nervous System* (2019): 1–7.
- Creswell, John W., and Cheryl N. Poth. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018.
- Draženić, Marija, Tea Vukušić Rukavina, and Lana Machala Poplašen. “Impact of Social Media Use on Mental Health within Adolescent and Student Populations during COVID-19 Pandemic: Review.” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20010034>.
- Ebrahimpour, Hamid, Ali Khaleghkhah, and Mahmood Sepehri. “Media and Increasing Public Trust in Modern Iran: A Conceptual Model.” *International Journal of Organizational Leadership* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.33844/ijol.2012.60228>.
- Festinger, Leon. *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957.
- Foroughi, Behzad, Mohammad Iranmanesh, Mehrbakhsh Nilashi, Morteza Ghobakhloo, Shahla Asadi, and Mana Khoshkam. “Determinants of Followers’ Purchase Intentions toward Brands Endorsed by Social Media Influencers: Findings from PLS and fsQCA.” *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 23, no. 2 (September 2023): 888–914. doi:10.1002/cb.2252.
- Gearhart, Sherri, and Weiwu Zhang. “Was It Something I Said? ‘No, It Was Something You Posted!’ A Study of the Spiral of Silence Theory in Social Media Contexts.” *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking* 18, no. 4 (2015): 208–213.
- Greenberg, Jeff, Sheldon Solomon, and Tom Pyszczynski. “Terror Management Theory of Self-Esteem and Cultural Worldviews: Empirical Assessments and Conceptual Refinements.” *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 29 (1997): 61–139.
- Hanna, Gabriel, Brian D. Batko, James Potter, Joseph Ippolito, and Folorunsho Edobor-Osula. “The Role of Social Media in Clubfoot: Information Sharing and Social Support.” *Journal of Children’s Orthopaedics* 15, no. 1 (2021): 81–88.

- Harambam, Jaron, and Stef Aupers. "Contesting Epistemic Authority: Conspiracy Theories on the Boundaries of Science." *Public Understanding of Science* 24, no. 4 (2015): 466–480. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662514559891>.
- Islam, Md Saiful, Tonmoy Sarkar, Sazzad Hossain Khan, Abu-Hena Mostofa Kamal, S.M. Murshid Hasan, Alamgir Kabir, Dalia Yeasmin, Mohammad Ariful Islam, Kamal Ibne Amin Chowdhury, Kazi Selim Anwar, Abrar Ahmad Chughtai, and Holly Seale. "COVID-19–Related Infodemic and Its Impact on Public Health: A Global Social Media Analysis." *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 103, no. 4 (2020): 1621–1629. <https://doi.org/10.4269/ajtmh.20-0812>.
- Kitchens, Brent, Steven L. Johnson, and Peter Gray. "Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: The Impact of Social Media on Diversification and Partisan Shifts in News Consumption." *MIS Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2020): 1619–1649.
- Larson, Heidi J. *Stuck: How Vaccine Rumors Start—And Why They Don't Go Away*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich K. Ecker, and John Cook. "Beyond Misinformation: Understanding and Coping with the 'Post-Truth' Era." *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition* 6, no. 4 (2017): 353–369.
- Lincoln, Yvonna S., and Egon G. Guba. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1985.
- Mahdiyoun, Rahman, Gholamreza Salimi, and Leila Raeisy. "Effect of Social Media on Academic Engagement and Performance: Perspective of Graduate Students." *Education and Information Technologies* 25 (2019): 2427–2446. DOI:10.1007/s10639-019-10032-2.
- Martin, Jason A. "Agenda-Setting Theory in a Networked World." In *The Routledge Companion to Political Journalism*, edited by Jason Morrison, Jason Birks, and Mike Berry, 370–373. Abingdon: Routledge, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429284571>.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.
- Meghana, G. V. R., and Durga P. Chavali. "Examining the Dynamics of COVID-19 Misinformation: Social Media Trends, Vaccine Discourse, and Public Sentiment." *Cureus* 15, no. 11 (2023): e48239. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.48239>.
- Mendini, Monica, Paula C. Peter, and Salvatore Maione. "The Potential Positive Effects of Time Spent on Instagram on Consumers' Gratitude, Altruism, and Willingness to Donate." *Journal of Business Research* 143 (April 2022): 16–26. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.01.046>.
- Noelle-Neumann, Elisabeth. "The Spiral of Silence: A Theory of Public Opinion." *Journal of Communication* 24, no. 2 (1974): 43–51.
- Roedyati, Joevi, Rino Febrianno Boer, and Nizvi Varra Aziziva. "Covid-19 Response: President Rouhani and President Raisi's Policy Narrative in Iran Through the Media." *Journal of Research of Social Science, Economics, and Management* 2, no. 4 (2022): 569–587.
- Rui, Jian Raymond. "Health Information Sharing via Social Network Sites (SNSs): Integrating Social Support and Socioemotional Selectivity Theory." *Health Communication* 38 (2022): 2430–2440.
- Sperber, Dan, Fabrice Clément, Christophe Heintz, Olivier Mascaro, Hugo Mercier, Gloria Origgi, and Deirdre Wilson. "Epistemic Vigilance." *Mind & Language* 25, no. 4 (2010): 359–393. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0017.2010.01394.x>.
- Sunstein, Cass R. *Republic.com 2.0. Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Tenorio, Encarnacion Hidalgo. "Critical Discourse Analysis: An Overview." *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 10, no. 1 (2011): 183–210.
- Tseng, Hsuan. "Shaping Path of Trust: The Role of Information Credibility, Social Support, Information Sharing and Perceived Privacy Risk in Social Commerce." *Information Technology & People* 36 (2022): 683–700.
- Tufekci, Zeynep. "Pandemic Attention Economics." *The Atlantic*, March 25, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/03/attention-economy-pandemic/608113/>.

- Wardle, Claire, and Hossein Derakhshan. "Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making." *Council of Europe Report DGI(2017)09*.
- White, Brianna, Fekede Kumsa, Nupur Singh, Chad Melton, and Arash Shaban-Nejad. "Evaluating the Effects of Misinformation on Public Sentiments Surrounding Access to Abortion Through Social Media Sentiment Analytics." *Studies in Health Technology and Informatics* 309 (2023): 304–305. <https://doi.org/10.3233/SHTI230805>.

Adolf Eichmann's Psychological Examination Findings

Johanna Farkas²⁷⁷
Kund Regényi²⁷⁸

Abstract. *Adolf Eichmann, a key figure in the deportation of Jews from Hungary, was captured by Israeli Intelligence Service in Argentina in 1961 and subsequently transported to Israel. During his detention, Eichmann claimed insanity, leading to the involvement of Prof. Kulcsár, a psychiatrist tasked with evaluating his mental state. This assessment included several psychological tests, one of which was a Hungarian test. The study aims to present the results of these tests and reconstruct Eichmann's personality profile, an aspect that has not been sufficiently detailed in existing literature. The study focuses on Eichmann's psychopathic traits, utilising both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The research encompasses an extensive literature review and a documentary and content analysis of the English correspondence between Kulcsár and Prof. Selzer from 1975 to 1978. Additionally, document and content analysis methods were employed to process data from psychological studies conducted between January and April 1961. Furthermore, valuable insights were obtained from interviews with Kulcsár's son. The findings underscore the importance of re-labelling, counting, and analysing Eichmann's Rorschach protocol according to the Hungarian standards established by Mérei, as this approach provides a more nuanced understanding. The significance of the results is amplified by the fact that the tests have previously been published only partially or incompletely in English and French. The innovative aspect of this research lies in the re-evaluation and analysis of tests administered by a Hungarian psychiatrist under the supervision of Zsuzsanna Kulcsár, a Hungarian psychologist, according to Hungarian standards from the 1960s. Notably, the test developed by Lipót Szondi, a Hungarian psychiatrist, using a large Hungarian sample, is presented. By examining the original records, a valid cross-sectional picture of Eichmann's psychological state and characteristics during his imprisonment can be obtained.*

Keywords: *Rorschach-test, Szondi-test, psychopathy, psychological profiling*

Introduction

Adolf Eichmann was a high-ranking SS officer and one of the principal architects of the Holocaust, responsible for organising the logistics of mass deportations of Jews to extermination camps. Captured by Israeli agents in 1960 and brought to trial in Jerusalem in 1961, Eichmann became a symbol of bureaucratic complicity in genocide. His trial not only marked a pivotal moment in legal history, but also opened a profound debate about the 'nature' of perpetrators. The psychological assessment conducted during his detention offers a rare opportunity to examine the inner structure of a man who helped implement industrialised mass murder not from a position of overt sadism, but from within the apparatus of routine administration. Eichmann's case continues to challenge distinctions between normality and pathology, obedience and moral agency, and remains not only history, but also forensic psychology.

²⁷⁷ PhD, Ludovika University of Public Service, Faculty of Law Enforcement, Budapest, Hungary. **E-mail:** farkas.johanna@uni-nke.hu.

²⁷⁸ PhD, Heim Pál National Paediatric Institute, Budapest, Hungary. **E-mail:** regenyi.kund@uni-nke.hu.

The Jerusalem trial turned Eichmann's personality into a global problem of interpretation, too²⁷⁹. Courtroom narrative, political philosophy, and clinical psychology each offered a different key: the prosecution's moral issues, the theorist's portrait of bureaucratic person, and the evaluator's bundle of test records²⁸⁰. Subsequent debate has often reduced these perspectives to a stark choice between evil as ideological intent and/or administrative routine²⁸¹. The Hungarian interpretation of the 1961 study adds colour to this picture by highlighting the Hungarian culture of Rorschach test evaluation, which regarded test results as narrative indicators. It also retrieves why the most interesting clinical material rarely reached the witness stand and how that omission fostered a simplified public memory of the defendant's mind.

The analysis begins by situating Hungarian clinical psychology within its intellectual and institutional context, focusing on how its distinctive methods were carried by Kulcsár into the Israeli setting. From there, the discussion turns to the Jerusalem examination itself, drawing on available sources to explore its structure and to consider why its more complex psychological findings remained absent from the courtroom record. This leads naturally to a reconsideration of the projective techniques used (e.g. Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), Rorschach-test, Szondi-test) interpreted through the lens of Mérei's Hungarian school, which is contrasted with the dominant actuarial models that emerged in the post-war West. A closer look at the Szondi test follows, not only as an empirical depth, but also as a rhetorical tool that came to symbolise Eichmann's inner danger in legal and public discourse. The article incorporates comparative insights from psychological evaluations of other Nazi war criminals, offering a broader frame within which Eichmann's profile can be situated. Finally, the institutional history of the Vienna Central Office for Jewish Emigration is examined as a formative context, an early laboratory of administrative violence, where psychological tendencies and bureaucratic incentives converged in preparation for the machinery of extermination.

Hungarian clinical frames, methods

Hungary's clinical culture before and after the Second World War placed unusual weight on projective techniques, depth-psychological reasoning, and qualitative interpretation²⁸². The two most influential figures in this tradition were Lipót Szondi and Ferenc Mérei. Szondi elaborated a drive-diagnostic system that inferred latent motivational balances from repeated choices among faces associated, in his typology, with psychiatric syndromes. The method assumed that stable attraction-avoidance patterns, observed across a full series, indexed enduring dispositions. Mérei developed a national school of nuanced projective reading for the Rorschach. The Hungarian orientation was at odds with a different trajectory that came to dominate in the United States and the United Kingdom after 1945 (psychometrics, actuarial scoring, and standardised norms). That sensibility travelled with clinicians of Hungarian origin. For example, Kulcsár worked in Israeli institutions and helped to shape the psychological reading of Eichmann²⁸³.

Published legal-historical analyses make two points that matter for a psychological reading²⁸⁴. First, the court's mandate was criminal responsibility, not personality theory; judges centred their reasoning on intent and knowledge, not on trait structure. Second, although the state gathered extensive

²⁷⁹ José Brunner, "Eichmann's Mind: Psychological, Philosophical, and Legal Perspectives," *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 1, no. 2 (2000); Michael Selzer, "The Murderous Mind: The Psychology of Evil," *New York Times Magazine*, 27 November 1977.

²⁸⁰ David Cesarani, *Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes and Trial of a "Desk Murderer"* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2012).

²⁸¹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963).

²⁸² Ernst Falzeder, Eva Brabant, and Patrizia Giampieri-Deutsch, *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi (1908–1914)*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1993); Géza Róheim, "Psycho-Analysis of Primitive Cultural Types," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 13, no. 1-2 (1932).

²⁸³ Shlomo Kulcsár, Shoshanna Kulcsár, and Lipot Szondi, "Adolf Eichmann and the Third Reich," in *Crime, Law and Corrections*, ed. Ralph Slovenko (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1966).

²⁸⁴ Brunner.

psychiatric and psychological material, the bench limited expert testimony to avoid converting the proceedings into a seminar on the defendant's inner life. The upshot was a selective public reception: one or two dramatic fragments became famous, while the broader, more ambivalent file did not. Within that frame, the examination reportedly included clinical interviews, standard cognitive measures, several projective techniques (e.g. Rorschach test, Szondi-test and T.A.T.) test administered across multiple sessions. The principal clinician interacted directly with the prisoner in German; the chief psychologist synthesised the projective data; and a drive-diagnostic series was forwarded for an outside reading.

Mérei's Rorschach

Rorschach interpretation in the Hungarian school was never simply a tally of locations and determinants²⁸⁵. Form quality and popular answers mattered, but so did the semantic aspects (e.g. the kinds of objects seen). In profiles attributed to Eichmann's record by later commentators, several motifs stand out: a preference for impersonal or reified objects; stylised scenes of courtesy and display; and a recurring move from dynamic life to static emblems. Despite its qualitative and narrative emphasis, the Hungarian interpretation remains compatible with the idiographic applications of the internationally standardised R-PAS system²⁸⁶.

Szondi-test

Lipót Szondi (Leopold Szondi) was a Hungarian psychiatrist and psychoanalyst best known for developing the Szondi test, a projective diagnostic tool based on the theory of familial unconscious and inherited drives. His work reflected a unique synthesis of depth psychology and psychiatric classification, aiming to reveal latent motivational patterns through repeated preference-based choices. As a Jewish intellectual during the Holocaust, Szondi was deported from Hungary but survived by being included among the passengers of the 'Kasztner train' a controversial rescue operation that brought a group of Jews to Switzerland in 1944²⁸⁷. In his emigration, he continued his clinical and theoretical work in exile, contributing significantly to European depth psychology through both his publications and teaching.

Szondi's drive-dynamics theory is rooted in depth-psychological traditions, yet it constitutes a distinct and original conceptual system. At the core of this theory lies the assumption that human behaviour and destiny formation are governed by fundamental, inherited instinctual vectors. According to Szondi, these drives, such as Sexual Vector, Paroxysmal Vector, Ego Vector, and Relations Vector are organised along four primary axes, and their interactions determine both the structure of personality and the individual's existential choices. One of the pioneering aspects of the theory is its integration of both genetic and psychodynamic factors, emphasising the idea that "the ego chooses its fate," a principle grounded in unconscious motivational forces. In this way, drive dynamics becomes applicable not only to psychopathology but also to understanding normal development and decision-making processes.

Professor Kulcsár sent Adolf Eichmann's Szondi test results to Lipót Szondi in Switzerland, anonymised to preserve the subject's identity.

Dichotomy

Philosophical and legal readings of Eichmann have been haunted by a dichotomy: an ideologue of extermination versus a grey administrator of logistics²⁸⁸. Clinical synthesis, as reconstructed in legal-psychological scholarship, points elsewhere. The theme is simultaneous ordinariness and deviation: no psychosis, adequate intellect, and a drab outward style coexisting with severe deficits of fellow-feeling, rigid role adherence, and an instrumental gaze that reduces persons to functions. In this

²⁸⁵ Kulcsár et al., "Adolf Eichmann and..."

²⁸⁶ Gregory J. Meyer et al., *Rorschach Performance Assessment System: Administration, Coding, Interpretation, and Technical Manual* (Bern: Rorschach Performance Assessment System LLC, 2011).

²⁸⁷ Tamás Kovács, "A Zsidó Tanácsok Magyarországon 1944-ben" [The Jewish Councils in Hungary in 1944], *Rubicon*, no. 4 (2013).

²⁸⁸ Brunner.

view, “banality” names not emptiness but a cultivated manner—useful for self-protection, and highly compatible with organised harm. Comparative materials from post-war assessments of Nazi elites and collaborators support this logic. Test archives from Nuremberg and from occupation contexts reveal a heterogeneous set: no single “Nazi type,” but recurring combinations of formality, emotional shallowness, and authoritarian themes. The most rigorous overviews warn against hunting for a unitary criminal essence; they advocate reading structure and meaning together, case by case. Eichmann fits comfortably within that framework, he is not a unique example, he was in the wrong place at the wrong time, which had disastrous consequences.

A Hungarian re-reading also invites a look upstream, at Eichmann’s Viennese phase²⁸⁹. Historical work on the Central Office for Jewish Emigration in Vienna portrays an apparatus that combined forced migration with comprehensive asset-stripping, rationalising coercion behind euphemistic paperwork. It was a training ground in which procedural ingenuity, financial expropriation, and the manipulation of Jewish communal structures were welded into a single pipeline that would later facilitate deportation. The setting rewarded officials who could translate human needs into forms and who could present coercion as compliance. The later clinical profile and this institutional script fit neatly together.

Methods

The present article is a synthetic, document-based re-reading. It relies on three types of sources²⁹⁰. First, legal-philosophical analyses of the Jerusalem trial and its handling of expert knowledge offer a structured account of what psychologists and psychiatrists did, how their reports were used, and why their testimony was curtailed. Second, comparative psychological studies of Nazi-era test records, including Nuremberg materials and later re-analyses, provide a frame for judging how unusual or typical Eichmann’s putative profile appears within that corpus. Third, institutional histories of Eichmann’s Viennese office ground the clinical synthesis in a concrete administrative ecology. The use of these sources is conservative: emphasis falls on cross-author convergence, on repeated patterns across sessions and tests, and on themes that reappear across distinct archives.

Findings

The analysis of Adolf Eichmann’s Szondi test results is of particular importance, as it offers profound insight into the personality structure and psychological predispositions of a convicted war criminal. Interpreted as a blind test, the Szondi protocol revealed Eichmann’s uncontrollable homicidal impulses and extreme criminal tendencies—traits that Lipót Szondi considered unprecedented in comparison to thousands of prior cases²⁹¹. These results provide empirical support for Eichmann’s profound lack of empathy and his complete inability to identify with his victims, which helps explain how he could carry out mass murder with bureaucratic precision and no apparent remorse. Furthermore, the Szondi test reveals that, unlike figures such as the Marquis de Sade, who channelled aggression into elaborate erotic fantasy, Eichmann transformed his destructive impulses into cold, systematic administration—manifesting in methodical annihilation disguised as procedural order. Overall, the interpretation of the test results deepens our psychological understanding of Holocaust perpetrators, affirming that Eichmann’s personality was exceptionally destructive and dangerous, even by clinical standards²⁹².

²⁸⁹ Gabriele Anderl and Dirk Rupnow, *Die Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung als Beraubungsinstitution* (Wien; München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2004).

²⁹⁰ Eric A. Zillmer et al., *The Quest for the Nazi Personality: A Psychological Investigation of Nazi War Criminals* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1995).

²⁹¹ “Eichmann-per: Kulcsár pszichiáter-professzor szakértői jelentése” [Eichmann trial: Expert report by psychiatrist Professor Kulcsár], *Infovilág. A hiteles híportál*, 29 August 2015, https://infovilag.hu/eichmann_per_kulcsar_pszichiater_profess/.

²⁹² Ibid.

Taken together, the sources support a coherent picture with several interconnected traits²⁹³. Evaluators consistently found no evidence of psychosis, confusion, or cognitive defect; Eichmann's language was elaborate yet emotionally flat, his answers pedantic and couched in official phrasing—suggesting intact executive functioning alongside constricted affect. His projective responses indicated an instrumental mode of social perception, reducing people to formal figures, emblems, or inventories, where social complexity collapsed into etiquette and human presence into stillness. This tendency was reinforced by an over-identification with his bureaucratic role: the self-fused with the job description, not as mere obedience but as a strategy to ward off anxiety by disappearing into rules, with ideology providing meaning and license. Affective shallowness further marked the profile, showing what later commentators termed “cold empathy”—the capacity to adopt another's perspective for purposes of control, without genuine concern. This psychological pattern mirrors the administrative cruelty noted in other post-war assessments of elite perpetrators, where high form control and low human movement predominated. Finally, the institutional setting of the Vienna Central Office illustrates how such traits could be honed into effectiveness, as coercion became procedure, expropriation compliance, and violence a matter of paperwork—precisely the kind of environment in which a personality like Eichmann's would thrive.

Discussion

The clinical portrait neither confirms nor refutes the philosophical claim that great evil can be enacted by ordinary minds, but it does clarify the psychological construction of that appearance²⁹⁴. In this view, “banality” is not a lack of depth but a crafted style—one that allows a control-driven personality to feel secure while presenting mass harm as routine. The legal framework of the trial rightly focused on intention and knowledge; it was not designed to accommodate the richer vocabulary of personality structure without jeopardising the clarity of criminal responsibility. This division helps explain the tension between public simplification and clinical nuance. Methodologically, the case underscores the value of cross-cultural assessment. The Hungarian approach, with its qualitative depth and symbolic attention, captured the social dramaturgy of responses that actuarial models might overlook. Yet actuarial methods rightly warn against overinterpreting isolated elements. The best synthesis draws from both—treating recurring patterns as convergence, not prophecy—thus avoiding the twin pitfalls of romanticising projectives or dismissing them as noise. Finally, the Viennese institutional context shifts interpretation away from trait essentialism. That office rewarded bureaucratic ingenuity in coercion, masked expropriation as efficiency, and used euphemism for moral concealment. A personality shaped in such a setting is not an anomaly. The clinical record shows how a person can become a function; the institutional record shows why such a function is sustained.

Implications

Perpetrator psychology oscillates between two temptations: to declare the actors' monstrous exceptions, or to insist that anyone could have been them²⁹⁵. The composite profile assembled here pushes against both. It affirms difference—severe affective deficits and rigid role fusion are not evenly distributed in any population—while insisting that context selects and magnifies those differences. For risk assessment, that means attending to both dispositions and environments: authoritarian codes that license harm; organisations that valorise impersonal rule; and career ladders that reward depersonalisation. For prevention, it suggests institutional design that diffuses authority, enforces independent review, and embeds dignity-protecting routines in everyday practice.

Conclusions

A Hungarian re-reading of the 1961 examination yields a sober lesson. Eichmann's mind, as

²⁹³ Kulcsár et al.

²⁹⁴ Brunner

²⁹⁵ Zillmer et al.

reconstructed from legal-philosophical syntheses and comparative test studies, was neither an unfathomable darkness nor the harmless blank suggested by clichés about mediocrity²⁹⁶. It was a tightly organised, anxious, emotionally thinned system that made a vocation of rule and order, and that learned (e.g. in Vienna) how to turn violence into paperwork. Understanding that system neither excuses nor mystifies; it helps to describe the mechanism by which bureaucratic roles, institutional incentives, and constricted personalities can converge into mass harm. In that sense, the clinical strand enriches, rather than replaces, the historian's and the court's accounts.

Limitations

No single instrument can bear the moral weight of explaining mass crime²⁹⁷. The projective methods discussed here are historically important and remain interpretively useful, but they must be handled with restraint. Cross-validation across interviews, different tests, and institutional history is essential. Even then, a profile describes vulnerabilities and styles; it does not predict acts outside a context that rewards them. Ethically, clinical language should never be allowed to blur responsibility. The Jerusalem court's narrow gate for expert testimony reflected precisely that concern.²⁹⁸ This synthesis relies on published legal-psychological analyses, comparative test anthologies, and institutional histories. It does not reproduce confidential primary protocols. As a result, some details—exact subtest scores, verbatim test responses—are discussed only at the level available in public sources. Where the secondary literature differs, the article adopts the conservative reading: convergence from multiple authors and archives is treated as more probative than isolated claims.

When modern clinicians encounter bureaucratic perpetrators—officials who facilitate harm from behind desks—the Jerusalem file offers three reminders. First, surface coherence is not dispositive: intact cognition can coexist with profound interpersonal deficits. Second, role-fusion is itself a clinical warning sign when it abolishes private moral horizons. Third, environmental selection matters: institutions that reward rule absolutism and depersonalisation will preferentially elevate the very profiles most dangerous in such settings.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Viking Press, 1963.
- Anderl, Gabriele, and Dirk Rupnow. *Die Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung als Beraubungsinstitution*. Wien; München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2004.
- Brunner, José. "Eichmann's Mind: Psychological, Philosophical, and Legal Perspectives." *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 1, no. 2 (2000): 429–463.
- Cesarani, David. *Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes and Trial of a "Desk Murderer"*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2012.
- Falzeder, Ernst, Eva Brabant, and Patrizia Giampieri-Deutsch. *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi (1908–1914)*, Vol. 1. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1993.
- Kovács, Tamás. "A Zsidó Tanácsok Magyarországon 1944-ben" [The Jewish Councils in Hungary in 1944]. *Rubicon*, no. 4 (2013): 74–79.
- Kulcsár, Shlomo, Shoshanna Kulcsár, Lipot Szondi. "Adolf Eichmann and the Third Reich." In *Crime, Law and Corrections*, edited by Ralph Slovenko, 18–36. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1966.

²⁹⁶ Brunner.

²⁹⁷ Zillmer et al.

²⁹⁸ Bettina Stangneth, *Eichmann Before Jerusalem: The Unexamined Life of a Mass Murderer* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), quoted in Máté Zombory, "Antifasiszta olvasatok: Magyar történeti dokumentáció az Eichmann-ügyben" [Anti-Fascist Readings: Hungarian Historical Documentation on the Eichmann Case], *Múltunk. A Politikatörténeti Intézet folyóirata* [Our Past. Journal of the Institute of Political History] 1 (2022): 17.

- “Eichmann-per: Kulcsár pszichiáter-professzor szakértői jelentése” [Eichmann trial: Expert report by psychiatrist Professor Kulcsár]. *Infovilág. A hiteles híportál*, 29 August 2015. https://infovilag.hu/eichmann_per_kulcsar_pszichiater_profess/.
- Meyer, Gregory J., Donald J. Viglione, Joni L. Mihura, Robert E. Erard, and Philip Erdberg, *Rorschach Performance Assessment System: Administration, Coding, Interpretation, and Technical Manual*. Bern: Rorschach Performance Assessment System LLC, 2011.
- Róheim, Géza. “Psycho-Analysis of Primitive Cultural Types.” *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 13, no. 1-2 (1932): 1–224.
- Selzer, Michael. “The Murderous Mind: The Psychology of Evil.” *New York Times Magazine*, 27 November 1977.
- Zillmer, Eric A., Molly Harrower, Rob P. Archer, and Barry Ritzler. *The Quest for the Nazi Personality: A Psychological Investigation of Nazi War Criminals*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1995.

Focus

George Angheloiu (Bucureşti) ◀▶ *Weimarisation of the European Public Space*

Weimarisation of the European Public Space

George ANGLIȚOIU²⁹⁹

Abstract. *In the interwar period, democracy, centrism and political self-moderation failed especially in Germany under the pressure of totalist values brought forth by the extremes of Nazism and Communism. The Republic of Weimar, despite its good promises and expectations, crashed under the joint actions of the exceptionalists of the day, Hitler and Stalin, and the world experienced the losses, destructions and horrors of a second global war. Ridden by the current lot of autocratic charismatics, the new wave of Weimarisation tends to engulf the EU in a struggle for survival. The bitter lesson of WWII was that democracy is given a chance only after the systemic failures of offensive war. In order to Make Europe Good Again, the EU citizens do not need MEGA solutions promised by illiberalism but a comeback to commitment and respect for peaceful resolution of differences.*

Keywords: *Weimarisation, MEGA (Make Europe Great Again), Illiberalism, Demokratura, Businessocracy*

The handbook of abusing history

One of the standard but often forgotten truisms is that history never lies but could be lied about. Throughout the ages owning history has been a priority especially for leaders aiming to optimise or compensate reality with artefacts and adjudgments of the desired past legitimising present and future. When dealing with manipulation of the past, it should be acknowledged that not only the winners write “official” history but also the losers, later on, if and when given the chance to do so. Abusing is caring by other means and this applies to history also because rewriting and adapting history to one community’s needs could come out as a patriotic or loyalist duty to the very identity and prestige of a political group. Boasting rhetorics like making something great again also means making something else small again. Renaming places, making geostrategic offers or claims, and postulating reenactment of golden ages could come in handy for those exceptionalist leaders willing to make history either by war or by the prequel of it – bullying diplomacy.

History has been used for good reasons to settle disputes and create frameworks for international peace and stability but only and if agreed upon by the signatory powers of treaties, regardless of future discontent and revisionist goals of those eager to see the past only on their terms of conquest and domination.

Totalism

This concept represents the most appropriate theoretical approach for dealing with political myths inspired by approximate facts of history misused to proclaim past golden ages in order to inspire mobilisation for similar great and immediate future. But renovating present time is a daunting task, often described by its promoters as sacrificial and salvational, which requires activism and denial of ambiguity. In turn, the purge of ambiguity should trigger the exclusion of centrism as political option based on setting up a common denominator as middle ground between extremes. Therefore, history offers many examples of how easier it was to convert opposite radicals than accept moderates, the interwar period

²⁹⁹ Professor of International Relations - National School for Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest; Visiting Professor - University of Münster, Münster. **E-mail:** george@anglitoiu.ro.

showcasing how socialist militants were adverse to national socialists who in turn fought against national communists and so on, cyclically, only for some of them, including leaders, to change sides and become ardent sympathisers of the opposite, under the mirage and opportunity of forging new but historic destiny.

The failed experiment of the Weimar Republic

In the interwar period, democracy, centrism and political self-moderation failed especially in Germany under the pressure of totalist values brought forth by the political extremes of Nazism and Communism. The Weimar Republic,³⁰⁰ despite its good promises and expectations, crashed under the joint actions of the exceptionalists of the day, Hitler and Stalin, and the world experienced the losses and horrors of a second global war. But the democratic failure has also to be understood in the context of maximalist demands of France, the main Western continental victor in the first world war, the war debt imposed on Germany and the overall revanchism promoted by Paris severely undermining Berlin's capacity to transition from imperial expansionist rule to democratic pacifist government. The Weimar Republic was characterised by inner shortcomings and inefficiencies but nonetheless represented the first true attempt at democratic rule by non-aristocratic privileges or constitutional preservation of monarchic unilateralism. The democratic constitution of the Weimar Republic instituted true universal suffrage, meaning for both men and women, aged similarly over 20. Thus, postbellum Germany became one of the most advanced countries for women's rights of that time, many representative feminine figures excelling in various domains of the public sphere.

The constitutional regime was complemented by a Bill of Rights which guaranteed political and religious freedoms, and equality before the law for all citizens. The successor to the Second Reich was committed more to the benefits of its citizens, rather than their expandable nature in wars of aggression, and bore the traits of a welfare state. To that effect, the government introduced and expanded vast and enhanced social programs, including pensions, sickness benefits, and unemployment insurance. Also, it embarked on undertaking public works projects like accessible housing and community parks in order to rejuvenate and rehabilitated urban areas.

From a foreign policy perspective, the Republic of Weimar was not a role model³⁰¹ in terms of seeking peaceful resolution of disputes and conflicts but prioritised diplomacy³⁰² over war in order to comeback to importance in the international society that was shaping up after The Great War which had brought so much destruction and none of its promises for imperial Berlin. Therefore, it contributed to many of the international initiatives seeking dialogue and limitation of armaments and complied to the territorial losses, financial penalties and general limitations imposed on it by the Treaty of Versailles.

The cyclical comeback to Weimar

³⁰⁰ For a general but detailed assessment of the Weimar Republic, including the thesis that the rise of extremism was not inescapable by default but the aggregated effect of complex national, plus foreign agents, factors, dynamics and powers, see Hans Mommsen, *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy* Kindle edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

³⁰¹ While actively engaged in seeking status restoration in international relations, the Weimar Republic sought nonetheless alternative solutions in order to secure its interests in Eastern Europe by agreeing in 1922 the Treaty of Rapallo with the pariah of the international society, the Soviet Union (defined as "the Russian Socialist Soviet Republic and its allies"). Secret military clauses, circumventing the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles were inserted in the treaty providing for joint military exercises and development of the defense industrial base which contributed to German rearmament and foreshadow the surprise Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 1939. See German-Russian Agreement; April 16, 1922 (Treaty of Rapallo), Yale Law School. Lillian Goldman Law Library, The Avalon Project, accessed October 26, 2025, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/rapallo_001.asp.

³⁰² Noteworthy in this regard was the personality of Gustav Stresemann, chancellor (1923), foreign minister (1923, 1924–1929) of the Weimar Republic, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1926, jointly with the French foreign minister Aristide Briand for promoting reconciliation and diplomacy in bilateral and world affairs. For his overall role as the most effective decision-maker in the efforts to contain Hitler's totalitarian rise, see Jonathan Wright, *Gustav Stresemann. Weimar's Greatest Statesman*, Kindle edition (Oxford University Press, 2004).

Ridden by a new lot of autocratic charismatics, the new wave of Weimarisation tends to engulf the EU in a struggle for survival. Recent reports and surveys (e.g. Austria³⁰³) present an escalation of far-right radicalism by around 25 percent compared to previous year. In such a context, a peculiar supplementary development is the fact that the new extremists (pro-Putin, pro-*special military operations*) are pitted against the old extremists (anti-Kremlin, pro-Ukraine) when it comes to their incoherent perspective on regional and global affairs.

But such a historical pattern should not overlook the impact of fundamentalist radicals who distinct from regular extremists pose their own challenge to constitutionalism and democracy which in their totalist playbook have no relevance when compared to the mandatory self-sufficiency of Sharia.³⁰⁴

During the initial presentation in conference of my taking points on the topic, the audience raised two relevant questions which will address here as well.

Q1: *Given the cyclical nature of political extremism and its resurgence in European public spaces, do you see historical awareness as a viable tool to counteract Weimarisation, or is it inherently limited by the emotional appeal of totalist narratives?*

A1: History and civic education should be the cornerstones of better and inclusive education of younger generations in order to foster good citizenship ethics. The past false promises and catastrophic results of aggressive politics should be learned in school. Moderation should not be confused for weak use of coercion by lawful means.

Q2: *You highlight the crumbling of centrist positions and the polarisation of political discourse. In this context, how can democratic institutions effectively promote moderation without appearing weak or ineffective in the face of rising autocratic charismatic movements?*

A2: Democratic institutions should find solutions to mitigate the impact of imbalance between the few very rich and the so many at risk of losing the basic means of subsistence. Democracy is not very resilient when faced with economic uncertainty and crisis as seen during the first global economic crisis of 1929–1933 which contributed greatly to the demise of the Weimar Republic.

Pillow democracy

The bitter lesson of the second world war still is that democracy is given a chance only after the systemic failures of offensive war. Re(learning) the language and practice of democracy take at least two social and political groups, and requires time and diligence in society.

Weimarisation was a complex political and security set of dynamics which exponentially reflected many of the inner and outer challenges to democracy and stability. After millennia of stratocracy, autocracy, monarchy, theocracy, dictatorship, imperium, and other forms and denominations of unrestricted rule by a few, ‘chosen’ ones, democracy still is and feels like the odd system of sharing power. Regardless of ideology, “power to the people” has seldom come through the ages on virtues of peaceful transitions and turns of political dominion.

Borrowing a legal notion from corporate affairs, *ultimate beneficial owner*, it can be reached the conclusion that some democratically elected officials distrust the very system that has empowered them. Why so? How come? Just picture the large role to which a President of the Board or Chief Executive Officer are entitled to. Then compare it to the limited role in scope and time attributed constitutionally to a post-modern democratic leader: 2 terms in office, of usually 4-5 years, and then the risk of political oblivion. Being a former and not an incumbent is not something to be desired by the post-Aristotelian

³⁰³ See for instance Direktion Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2024*, Bundesministerium für Inneres, Wien, 2025, accessed October 19, 2025, https://www.dsn.gv.at/501/files/VSB/205_2025_VSB_2024_V20250929_webBF.pdf.

³⁰⁴ For a comprehensive analysis of penal patterns of Jihadi terrorism, right-wing terrorism, left-wing and anarchist terrorism, ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism, and violent extremism for all of them, including other and unspecified ones, in the EU, see EUROPOL, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2025*, (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2025), accessed October 29, 2025, https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/EU_TE-SAT_2025.pdf.

political animal. Regular standards of democracy asking for power-sharing and limitations of terms in order to prevent tyranny of one or few stand in the way of the most ambitious of them, eager and able to get rid of them by overt or greyish challenges and changes to constitutional system, with excuses of justifications of popular demand or urgent national imperatives.

Education plays a critical role in underpinning a democratic regime especially when confronted with hostile propaganda based on fake news. While hybrid wars are not that new as theorists, media analysts and recent strategies claim, but have been used since ancient times, better education for young pupils has not been around for a similar amount of time. Understanding the fundamentals of democracy requires institutionalisation of rigorous, proportionate and unbiased teaching in order to showcase both the merits and defects of politics and policies, including open society and democracy. But when teachers and educational organisations, which are supposed to be role models, become too entrenched in militancy and reject ethical self-moderation,³⁰⁵ the outcomes could have major adverse effects on the future of society.

Political pluralism is a major trait of democracy but in the last years has been severely challenged by the charismatic illiberals of sorts. The Western traditional system of bipartisanship on major topics of the political agenda has been undermined especially in the US under the initial impact of first Trump administration and emergence to power of the MAGA movement. No late afterwards, such trends have been replicated in the EU, political polarisation and diminishing of large bipartisan coalitions of democratic parties impacting governmental stability and endurance. Under the assault of populists, the European Commissions of the last two presidents have still managed to be based on majority building in the European Parliament among the most important two political families (Christian Democrats and Socialists) whose clout has nonetheless steadily declined to an all-time low, manifest in the European elections of 2024. Combined with national resurgence of nazi or fascist nostalgics or re-enablers in the most important Western European democracies, plus the constant endurance of communist appeal, such trends add new layers to the overall decline of pluralism as key to safeguard for democracy on the basis of reaching common denominators or rotation of power.

The crumbling of the Centre-right

Tackling the MAGA movement will not be easy by the moderates of the centre-right either in the United States or Europe. The American dream is exceptionalism by other means, therefore prone to MAGA-like ideologies based on Tea Party-like carving out of the GOP. In order to understand the origins and magnitude of MAGA it should be stated that this slogan was a Reagan and not Trump electoral campaign proposal. A closer look into its evolution has to observe the overall misleading dependency of Trump's rhetoric on the legitimising patterns of Reagan administration's ideology. With roots in the ultra-religious social-conservatism within the Republican Party in the '60s (as a reaction to the Democratic Party's reach to younger American generations under the spell of the Kennedy administration), MAGA has taken over the GOP and reshape it in the mould of what it takes to be an absolute follower of Trump and his personalised erratic politics. What began as a curiosity with slim chances of electoral success, transformed radically into a one-man drive inside the GOP presidential primaries traditionally run until then by more predictable groups and even families of conservatives.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the Brexit was happening simultaneously. After containing the Scottish movement for independence in a troublesome referendum, and winning by a high margin the general elections of 2015, prime minister David Cameron miscalculated the leverage of a new referendum by which to settle the outstanding British grievances against the EU. The very fact that his cabinet was split in their allegiance for or against Brexit, marked the drift which was engulfing the Conservative Party under the impact of internal firebrands like Boris Johnson or Nigel Farage-type of demagogues acting

³⁰⁵ Take for instance the negative practice in Romanian universities of rectors with unlimited number of terms. Some of them serve also as ministers, and in order to secure their positions as undisputed heads of universities they suspend themselves for the duration of the ministerial mandate which contributes to decisional vacuums and inefficiencies, and leads to personification of institutional power.

from outside the Tory circles but aiming to overcome the British centre-right. The debacle which followed the surprising defeat for “Remain” was welcomed not only by Trump but also the “sovereignists” of Europe eager to emulate what they saw as a useful precedent of liberation from the constraints of regulation and oversized supranational/federal-like government. But “taking back control” proved to be a messy political affair, the Tory governments of Theresa May and Boris Johnson zigzagging with many hardships and losses of credibility out of the EU. By the end of the 2010s, an insignificant Eurosceptic and far-right populist party like UKIP (now Reform) transformed on the back of Tory failures into a threatening force for the very existence of moderate conservatism. Promises of DOGE-like reforms similar to MAGA, and inner fears of right-wing politicians to avoid losing out on the next route to electoral success, have brought Farage demagoguery to the forefront of British politics with a view to winning next general elections,³⁰⁶ eventually an alliance of convenience with a declining, carved out Conservative Party.

The excesses of the Centre-left

The enduring false appeal of Communism despite historical facts represents a defining characteristic of the post-Cold War period. Leftist intelligentsia seems to be untouched by the huge amount of historical evidence portraying each and every Communist regime of Eastern Europe and beyond as genocidal and anti-democratic. The fascination with Communism as the perfect political regime (maybe not properly implemented by ineffective or traitorous leaders) continues to exert appeal to Western political circles which have not directly experienced the horrors of real Communism. Starting with student age and ending up in regular, mature political age, Communism has had a continuous existence and electoral success, albeit marginal. Consolidated democracies like France, Italy, Germany or Greece still experiment with the parliamentary attraction of Communism. If we consider for example the current status of the leader of the French Communist Party, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the biased, misbalanced view on world affairs is easily visible, with negative effects on domestic stability and security.³⁰⁷

On the other hand, *Cancel culture* wars are not much different than far-right intolerance to diversity of opinions, or rigorous interpretation and contextualisation of facts. History cannot be rewritten to accommodate everyone’s take on the past or need for justice/justification. But if it is respected as a science then it should lead the humankind, regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion or political belief, to a better understanding of human character as complex, imperfect and manifest between good and bad, aiming for positive or malign goals achieved accordingly or not.

Remedies

There are many arguments in favour of the EU as still functional beacon of hope, after providing 75 years of peace among its members which represents the longest such period of time in European history. In order to ***Make Europe Good Again***, the EU citizens do not need MEGA solutions promised by illiberalism but ethical comeback to moderation and respect for peaceful resolution of differences.

³⁰⁶ For Reform Party’s electoral forecast and insights on its first, tumultuous months in power at regional level, see Alex Forsyth, “What a UK Government Led by Reform Would Look Like,” *BBC*, 5 November 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cm2kyjrg77eo>.

³⁰⁷ Regarding accusations of anti-Semitism and support of Islamist, terrorist groups like Hamas, see, for instance, “Mélenchon Condemned as ‘Enemy of the Republic’ over Attacks on French Jewish Organisation,” *Euronews* with AFP, 10.10.2023, <https://www.euronews.com/2023/10/10/melenchon-condemned-as-enemy-of-the-republic-over-attacks-on-french-jewish-organisation>. For an overall media depiction of him as denier of general views on far-left wing leaders (like Venezuelan Presidents Hugo Chavez or Nicolas Maduro) or even nationalistic autocrats (e.g. Vladimir Putin, whom he sees as rightful countermeasure to American hegemony and victim of its propaganda framing him as “threat”), see Alexander Hurst, “Jean-Luc Mélenchon is a Disaster for the French Left – His Response to the Attack on Israel Proves It,” *The Guardian*, 23.10.2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/oct/27/jean-luc-melenchon-french-left-israel-france>.

Firstly, it is wiser to use conceptualisation and not vision for defining public space and society. Despite the fact that many use words like vision, revelation, dream or foresight to describe wisdom and know-how, modernity has outlined the need for science and technology, research and development, to encompass and express proper use of neuronal activity.

Secondly, it is better to use the democratically enacted laws to counter extremism and anarchy. In order for it to be complied with, the European public space needs unbiased education for raising law-abiding citizens, and dissemination of true information for understanding the real nature of facts and things³⁰⁸.

Thirdly, it is more trustworthy to promote political dialogue, cooperation and accountability within an already functional union of states and peoples than to revert to the level of secret diplomacy and alliances which lead twice from European concert of powers to world wars.

The external factors

*Putinisation*³⁰⁹ should be considered as the main external driver of Weimarisation in the sense that radical political leaders in the EU are trying to emulate/copycat Putin and his active charismatic leadership. On such basis, *Trumpisation*³¹⁰ should be counted as the secondary external driver: a Putin emulator imposing a new American way on the EU and its member states' inner politics. Both processes are built upon the impression of a strong ruler's charisma and share the strategic goal of subversion of the democratic fabric of society based on parliamentary rule of law, civilian control over security sector, secularism, moderation and tolerance. In order to achieve such un-democratisation, similar tactics are used: election interference, new media extensive fake news, religious agitation and pseudo-historicism, diplomatic bullying, offensive military posturing potentially or effectively leading to aggression/coercion. But the most important tactic of all is the personalisation of power, leading to the unchallenged, supreme role of the leader, portrayed as seemingly infallible, almighty secular ruler, able and willing to restore the greatness of a golden age.

³⁰⁸ See for instance the positive joint initiative of Radio France International, Deutsche Welle and TVP World to create *The Information Shield* to combat disinformation from abroad, especially from Russia and China. Council of the European Union, General Secretariat of the Council, "Note," 15425/1/25, Brussels, 14 November 2025, accessed November 02, 2025, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15425-2025-REV-1/en/pdf>.

³⁰⁹ Personal concept defined an autocratic and abusive form of national and international leadership based on the idiosyncratic charisma of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and aiming to restore (at least and at last) the imperial grandeur and status of the Kremlin-based state. For details, see my previous works: George Anglițoiu, "Putinization and Neo-Containment," *Europolity* 12, no. 2 (2018), accessed October 30, 2025, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3461881; George Anglițoiu, "Putinisation and the European Union of Insecurity," *Eurolimes*, 31-32, *The Eastern Borders of the European Union: From Peace to Conflict*, ed. Edina-Lilla Mészáros et al. (Oradea: Oradea University Press, Spring-Autumn 2022).

³¹⁰ Compare for instance the minimal weight given to Russia as threat and aggressor (at least when paired with previous American official strategies) with the outsized criticism of Europe and the EU in the national security strategy of the second Trump Administration. Self-described as "Trump corollary" to the Monroe doctrine, it sees Europe facing "the prospect of civilizational erasure," setting up a mission for the US as the greatest and most successful nation in history, and preeminent state in the Western Hemisphere to help it "correct its current trajectory". The document identifies only a few positives about Europe, noting "the growing influence of patriotic European parties" giving to the US the mission of "cultivating resistance to Europe's current trajectory within European nations". It also estimates that "censorship of free speech and suppression of political opposition," "loss of national identities," low demographics and unwise migration policies will make Europe unrecognisable and many NATO allies "non-European". Its internal incoherence is on display throughout its contents, arguing for instance to accept Middle East leaders "as they are" and seeking "strategic stability" with the Kremlin, which is an "existential threat" mainly from a European, unrealistic perspective (for peace in Ukraine). *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington: The White House, November 2025), accessed October 18, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>.

The strange case of Elon Musk

Musk, as ultimate beneficial owner of Tesla, Twitter, Space X, Starlink and other venture capital businesses, is representative for the new type of autocrat built on wealth, new media leverage and strategic state programs, projects and subsidies. He is not the first to try and influence politics (e.g. by behaving like a *Citizen Kane* mogul) but the first having a global agenda with a view to new conquistador-like mentality and goals³¹¹. In such a mind frame it is not unreasonable to depict him as eager to focus on the *Space* as a kind of *New Indies*, where access and control of resources is granted by him as proprietor of both intergalactic means of transportation and artificial intelligence.

Musk's opportunistic way has been evident in his shifting political choices, stances and donations. A long time Democrat voter in the presidential elections up to 2020, according to his own statements, Musk switched his position on Trump from "not the right guy" (2016) and "it's time for Trump to hang up his hat & sail into the sunset" (2022) to "first buddy" (2024)³¹². But the post-DOGE rift with Trump is the most relevant because it showcased the lack of substance of "same" conservative views which is indicative of the real limits of cooperation the agents of Weimarisation have in their pursuit of exclusive and over-dominant vision on life, people, society, government and power.

It is interesting to use one of Musk's most proffered tools, the AI, in order to quantify his relationship with the EU. In a nutshell, the AI sees Musk as an adversary "due to his public clashes with EU officials, his criticism of the EU's regulations, and his perceived support for right-wing political parties in Europe that challenge the bloc's unity". If we unpack this, what matters is how much such hi-tech scientist and billionaire disregards regulation, enforcement, diversity, equality, integration and all the other values promoted and enshrined not only in the EU treaties and other pieces of legislation but also in the US Constitution and the subsequent acts and bills that made the American democracy so appreciated by theorists like Alexis de Tocqueville and a role model for post-imperial Europe. If we are to identify a red thread into his rhetoric and that of the political leaders he supports is *freedom* as focal concept. This can justify any criticism when something is contrary to his interests, starting up with his non-compliance to medical mandates (because Covid-19 affected his business triggering his bravado of opening up his factories despite lockdown and other restrictions), or digital market norms (when confronted with investigations, fines, and criticism of how he operates new media and rejects fake news content moderation³¹³). It also includes the liberty of claiming rightness of far right ideology and practice because such parties, crusaders of truth and virtue, are being oppressed by the EU bureaucracy and member states so eager to surrender Europe to progressive/Communist ideas, economic downturn and migrants perverting its identity.³¹⁴ And it can bear no more moral significance when it means an altruist, voluntary

³¹¹ For a visually humorous but still serious and scientifically based approach on Musk's Mars colonising drive, see Kelly Weinersmith and Zach Weinersmith, "Mars Attacks: How Elon Musk's Plans for Mars Threaten Earth," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 20, 2025, <https://thebulletin.org/2025/03/mars-attacks-how-elon-musks-plans-to-colonize-mars-threaten-earth/>.

³¹² For the on-off-on relationship between the world's richest man/"Rocket Man" and the "greatest president God ever created," see for instance Tim Levin et al., "From 'First Buddy' Bromance to a Feud to a Thaw, Here's how Elon Musk and Donald Trump's Relationship Has Evolved," *Business Insider*, Updated November 20, 2025, <https://www.businessinsider.com/elon-musk-donald-trump-feud-relationship-timeline-2022-7>.

³¹³ For EU conclusions on Musk's decision to remove preventive measures for pro-Kremlin accounts on Twitter after becoming its owner which contributed significantly (by 36%) to the expansion of Russian war propaganda and disinformation, see European Commission, *Digital Services Act: Application of the Risk Management Framework to Russian Disinformation Campaigns*, 1st edition (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023). For details on the fine of 120 million euros imposed the European Commission, see European Commission, "Commission fines X €120 million under the Digital Services Act," (Press Release, December 5, 2025), accessed November 04, 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_25_2934.

³¹⁴ For a comprehensive analysis of Musk's flurry of political interferences in European politics in favour of the far-right parties and activists especially after helping Trump regaining the presidency, but also of its related impact on Tesla declining sales in the respective countries among pro-democracy buyers, see Andrew Macaskill, Andrew R.C. Marshall and Nick Carey, "Musk Rallies the Far Right in Europe. Tesla Is Paying the Price," *Reuters*, 04 March 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/musk-rallies-far-right-europe-tesla-is-paying-price-2025-03-04/>. For a detailed

gesture for Ukraine of providing essential Starlink access in the beginning of the Russian aggression, only to be reneged later on when the choice to stay free and to resist invasion tends to become too successful.³¹⁵

Musk's fondness for sci-fi literature can also help us understand better why *real Tony Stark* ("Iron Man"³¹⁶) impersonation³¹⁷ is relevant to summarise his political actions as ad-hoc personal/corporate domestic and foreign policy meant to augment his direct and unmitigated *businessocratic* rule of the world anyway, -when, -where he sees fit, which should supplant both historical stratocracy and modern democracy.

Conclusions

Definable as "general process with spillover pattern of structural weakening and ultimate replacement of the democratic fabric of society and state based on constitutionalism by agents, factors, dynamics and powers which reject plurality, dialogue, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and overall centrism and self-moderation," Weimarisation represents a critical challenge to the very existence of the European public space, physical and digital, and its most recognisable institutionalisation – the European Union of like-minded peoples and states.

Beyond the historical example of the Republic of Weimar which should be not be ignored but studied thoroughly, is the need to acknowledge and act to safeguard the values and principles that make

analysis of his use of X to boost the credentials of social-media influencers/admirers as the new breed of far-right militants turned politicians with a view to access to EU and national parliamentary or executive branches of power, see Erika Kinnetz and Aaron Kesler, "Musk, a Social Media Powerhouse, Boosts Fortunes of Hard-Right Figures in Europe," *The Associated Press*, 01 August 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/musk-europe-politicians-influence-x-twitter-extremists-89746e1e17bcc134206c14a204efcbce>.

³¹⁵ Musk's posture is controversial and contradictory on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as well, going from providing satellite connectivity to Ukrainian defenders (and being commended for it by President Zelensky) to peace proposals on Twitter which acknowledged Kremlin's right to some of the territories subjected to aggression, especially Crimea "formally part of Russia, as it has been since 1783 (**until Khrushchev's mistake**)". For instances of Musk interfering on the battlefield, see: Joey Roulette, Cassell Bryan-Low and Tom Balmforth, "A Reuters Special Report: Musk Ordered Shutdown of Starlink Satellite Service as Ukraine Retook Territory from Russia," *Reuters*, 25 July 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/investigations/musk-ordered-shutdown-starlink-satellite-service-ukraine-retook-territory-russia-2025-07-25/>. For details of his peace poll for Ukraine and Ukrainian diplomacy furious reaction, see ***, "Ukraine War: Elon Musk Sparks Fury in Kyiv over Twitter Comments about Crimea and Russia," *Euronews*, 03 October 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/2022/10/03/elon-musk-under-fire-for-inflammatory-ukraine-twitter-comments>.

³¹⁶ For his comic book biography and psychological profile (characterised by narcissistic disorder and autistic tendencies), see "Anthony Stark (Earth-616)," *Marvel Database*, accessed October 30, 2025, [https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Anthony_Stark_\(Earth-616\)#Personality](https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Anthony_Stark_(Earth-616)#Personality) and Sébastien Chapellon et Florian Houssier, "Iron Man: entre confusion identitaire et addiction à la technologie," *Santé mentale au Québec* 42, no 2, *Trouble mental et travail : accompagnement et inclusion professionnelle pérenne*, ed. Sonia Laberon, Antoinette Prouteau and Marc Corbière (Université de Montréal, Automne 2017), accessed November 06, 2025, <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/smq/2017-v42-n2-smq03262/1041926ar/>.

³¹⁷ Terry Zeller, "Robert Downey Jr. Calls out Elon Musk for 'Cosplaying' as Tony Stark, Hopes He'll 'Control His Behavior'," *Daily Mail*, 22 October 2024, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-13985113/Robert-Downey-Jr-calls-Elon-Musk-cosplaying-Tony-Stark-hopes-hell-control-behavior.html>. Over the last decade, several of his Twitter/X posts alluded to his intentions to build up a Iron Man-like armored suit either for the Pentagon or for his own protection following Trump assassination attempt of July 2024: Elon Musk (@elonmusk), "Something about a flying metal suit...", X, June 09, 2016, https://x.com/elonmusk/status/740723195431538689?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E740723195431538689%7Ctwgr%5Ef4b3eaae7d8fdc20f613c83fcce28abbca4e049%7Ctwcon%5Es1_c10&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cnn.com%2F2016%2F06%2F08%2Fpolitics%2Felon-musk-ash-carter-pentagon and Elon Musk (@elonmusk), "Maybe it's time to build that flying metal suit of armor," X, July 14, 2024, <https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1812283045069861085>.

united Europe a peaceful and democratic place and not the new battleground for other 7, 30, 80, 100 years, world wars.

Statesmen and citizens alike have the responsibility to protect the common heritage of 80 years of peace, stability and increased prosperity that have encountered many of the crises that have contributed to the demise of the original Weimar Republic but have nonetheless been overcome through wisdom, solidarity and *Europeanness*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anglițoiu, George. "Putinisation and the European Union of Insecurity." *Eurotimes*, 31-32, *The Eastern Borders of the European Union: From Peace to Conflict*, edited by Edina-Lilla Mészáros, Klára Czimre, and Mykola Palinchak, 141–151. Oradea: Oradea University Press, Spring-Autumn 2022.
- Anglițoiu, George. "Putinization and Neo-Containment." *Europolity* 12, no. 2 (2018): 179–190. Accessed October 30, 2025. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3461881.
- "Anthony Stark (Earth-616)." Marvel Database. Accessed October 30, 2025. [https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Anthony_Stark_\(Earth-616\)#Personality](https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Anthony_Stark_(Earth-616)#Personality).
- Chapellon, Sébastien, et Florian Houssier. "Iron Man: entre confusion identitaire et addiction à la technologie." *Santé mentale au Québec* 42, no 2, *Trouble mental et travail : accompagnement et inclusion professionnelle pérenne*, edited by Sonia Laberon, Antoinette Prouteau and Marc Corbière, 245–261. Université de Montréal, Automne 2017. Accessed November 06, 2025. <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/smq/2017-v42-n2-smq03262/1041926ar/>.
- Council of the European Union, General Secretariat of the Council. "Note." 15425/1/25. Brussels, 14 November 2025. Accessed November 02, 2025. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15425-2025-REV-1/en/pdf>.
- Direktion Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst. *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2024*. Bundesministerium für Inneres, Wien, 2025. Accessed October 19, 2025. https://www.dsn.gv.at/501/files/VSB/205_2025_VSB_2024_V20250929_webBF.pdf.
- Elon Musk (@elonmusk). "Maybe it's time to build that flying metal suit of armor." X, July 14, 2024. <https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1812283045069861085>.
- Elon Musk (@elonmusk). "Something about a flying metal suit..." X, June 09, 2016. https://x.com/elonmusk/status/740723195431538689?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etwetembed%7Ctwterm%5E740723195431538689%7Ctwgr%5Ef4b3ebae7d8fdc20f613c83fcee28abbca4e049%7Ctwcon%5Es1_c10&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cnn.com%2F2016%2F06%2F08%2Fpolitics%2Felon-musk-ash-carter-pentagon.
- European Commission. "Commission Fines X €120 Million under the Digital Services Act." Press Release, December 5, 2025. Accessed November 04, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_25_2934.
- European Commission. *Digital Services Act: Application of the Risk Management Framework to Russian Disinformation Campaigns*. 1st edition. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023.
- EUROPOL. *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2025*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2025. Accessed October 29, 2025. https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/EU_TE-SAT_2025.pdf.
- Forsyth, Alex. "What a UK Government Led by Reform Would Look Like." *BBC*, 5 November 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cm2kyjrg77eo>.
- German-Russian Agreement; April 16, 1922 (Treaty of Rapallo). Yale Law School. Lillian Goldman Law Library, The Avalon Project. Accessed October 26, 2025. https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/rapallo_001.asp.
- Hurst, Alexander. "Jean-Luc Mélenchon is a Disaster for the French Left – His Response to the Attack on Israel Proves It." *The Guardian*, 23.10.2023

- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/oct/27/jean-luc-melenchon-french-left-israel-france>.
- Kinnetz, Erika, and Aaron Kesler. "Musk, a Social Media Powerhouse, Boosts Fortunes of Hard-Right Figures in Europe." *The Associated Press*, 01 August 2025. <https://apnews.com/article/musk-europe-politicians-influence-x-twitter-extremists-89746e1e17bcc134206c14a204efcbce>.
- Levin, Tim, Lloyd Lee, Brent D. Griffiths, Jaures Yip, Ana Altchek, Jordan Hart, Alice Tecotzky, Kelsey Vlamis, Sarah Jackson, and Lauren Edmonds. "From 'First Buddy' Bromance to a Feud to a Thaw, Here's how Elon Musk and Donald Trump's Relationship Has Evolved." *Business Insider*, Updated November 20, 2025. <https://www.businessinsider.com/elon-musk-donald-trump-feud-relationship-timeline-2022-7>.
- Macaskill, Andrew, Andrew R.C. Marshall, and Nick Carey. "Musk Rallies the Far Right in Europe. Tesla Is Paying the Price." *Reuters*, 04 March 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/musk-rallies-far-right-europe-tesla-is-paying-price-2025-03-04/>.
- "Mélenchon Condemned as 'Enemy of the Republic' over Attacks on French Jewish Organisation." *Euronews* with AFP, 10.10.2023. <https://www.euronews.com/2023/10/10/melenchon-condemned-as-enemy-of-the-republic-over-attacks-on-french-jewish-organisation>.
- Mommsen, Hans. *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy*. Kindle edition. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017.
- National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington: The White House, November 2025. Accessed October 18, 2025. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>.
- Roulette, Joey, Cassell Bryan-Low, and Tom Balmforth. "A Reuters Special Report: Musk Ordered Shutdown of Starlink Satellite Service as Ukraine Retook Territory from Russia." *Reuters*, 25 July 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/investigations/musk-ordered-shutdown-starlink-satellite-service-ukraine-retook-territory-russia-2025-07-25/>.
- "Ukraine War: Elon Musk Sparks Fury in Kyiv over Twitter Comments about Crimea and Russia." *Euronews*, 03 October 2022. <https://www.euronews.com/2022/10/03/elon-musk-under-fire-for-inflammatory-ukraine-twitter-comments>.
- Weinersmith, Kelly, and Zach Weinersmith. "Mars Attacks: How Elon Musk's Plans for Mars Threaten Earth." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 20, 2025. <https://thebulletin.org/2025/03/mars-attacks-how-elon-musks-plans-to-colonize-mars-threaten-earth/>.
- Wright, Jonathan. *Gustav Stresemann. Weimar's Greatest Statesman*. Kindle edition. Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Zeller, Terry. "Robert Downey Jr. Calls out Elon Musk for 'Cosplaying' as Tony Stark, Hopes He'll 'Control His Behavior'." *Daily Mail*, 22 October 2024. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-13985113/Robert-Downey-Jr-calls-Elon-Musk-cosplaying-Tony-Stark-hopes-hell-control-behavior.html>.

Book reviews

Carmen UNGUR-BREHOI (Oradea) ◀▶ *Conflict Management and the Future of EU Foreign and Security Policy*

Ioana BORDEIANU (Oradea) ◀▶ *Law, Migration, and the Construction of Whiteness: Mobility Within the European Union*

Cristina-Maria Dogot (Oradea) ◀▶ *The New International Challenges, some Inflection Points*

Conflict Management and the Future of EU Foreign and Security Policy

Carmen UNGUR-BREHOI³¹⁸

Review of: Alcaro Riccardo and Bargués Pol, *Conflict Management And The Future Of EU Foreign And Security Policy. Relational Power Europe*, London and New York: Routledge, 2025, 140 p, ISBN: 9781032902999 (hbk) ISBN: 9781032999906 (pbk) ISBN: 9781003559467 (ebk).

The book *Conflict Management and the Future of EU Foreign and Security Policy. Relational Power Europe* by Riccardo Alcaro and Pol Bargués is a very recent Routledge (Taylor and Francis Group) editorial appearance. Published in 2025, it is edited by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI-editor Leo Goretti), the Rome - based think tank founded in 1965 on the initiative of Altiero Spinelli. The volume is part of the series Trends and Perspectives in International Politics - “an innovative series of analytically sound, policy - relevant volumes,” as described in the book’s *Acknowledgement*.

Written in English, it contains 140 pages of comprehensive exploration of international affairs, examining global issues in regard the European Union. The authors, Riccardo Alcaro and Pol Bargués, are two young and yet experienced researchers, experts in the field of international relations. The Italian Alcaro is specialising in transatlantic relations, particularly focusing on U.S. and European policies toward Europe’s neighbouring regions, authoring several publications, including *Europe and Iran’s Nuclear Crisis* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), and he occupies the Research Coordinator and Head of the Global Actors Programme positions at the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) in Rome. His co-author Bargués is a Spanish researcher and senior fellow at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB) and his research focuses on the European Union’s external action, particularly in areas of limited statehood and contested global orders. He has also taught International Relations courses at the University of Groningen and the Institut Barcelona d’Estudis Internacionals.

Together, Alcaro and Bargués bring a wealth of expertise to their collaborative work, offering a nuanced analysis of the EU’s foreign and security policy through the lens of relational power, offering a fresh interpretation of the EU’s role in international security, one that shifts away from institutional structures to focus on the relational dynamics between the EU, its internal challenges, and external pressures. The book represents the results of three years of research conducted within a JOINT project carried out by a consortium of fourteen research centres from the EU.

The main idea of the study was to examine how the EU has responded to major crises – including Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Iran’s nuclear standoff, and the Syrian civil war, in order to illustrate how systemic constraints (geopolitical rivalries, fragmented regional governance) and internal divisions across member states shape EU policy and performance.

The structure of the book consists of an Introduction followed by five chapters (*The Evolution of EU Foreign and Security Policy Discourse, Inside - out Theories of EU Foreign and Security Policy, an Outside - in Perspective of EU Foreign and Security Policy, The Strengths and Limits of Relational Power Europe, The Future(s) of Relational Power Europe*), *Conclusions, References* and *Index*.

The introductory pages set the stage for the 21st century European Union (EU) and its “mounting... insurmountable obstacles” that it dealt and still deals with in the pursuit of its foreign and security policy, situating the EU within a rapidly evolving international order. After years of scholarly debate, multipolarity started to take concrete form in the 2010s, as power became increasingly dispersed

³¹⁸ PhD lecturer at The University of Oradea, The Faculty of History, International Relations, Political Sciences and Communication Sciences, The Department of Political Sciences and Communication Sciences. **E-mail:** carmenbrehoi@gmail.com, carmenbrehoi@yahoo.com.

among numerous global and regional actors. The concept can be understood as three concentric circles of competitive multipolarity: the innermost circle is Europe, where Russia's war in Ukraine has disrupted the remnants of the post-Cold War security order; the next circle encompasses the Middle East, marked by persistent interstate rivalries; and the outermost circle involves the growing strategic competition between China and the United States in the Indo-Pacific. The book is underlining here its main purpose: to examine how the EU and its member states responded to crises and conflicts – including Russia's two invasions of Ukraine, Iran's nuclear dispute, Syria's civil war, and others – spanning roughly the mid-2000s to the early 2020s. In the next chapters it will explore the strategies, tactics, and practices the EU employed to orchestrate an increasingly challenging environment, aiming to contribute to conflict and crisis management. The analysis will highlight persistent trends that characterise the EU's actorness in international security. Alcaro and Bargués argue that conventional frameworks – normative power, civilian power, or Europe market power – are insufficient for capturing the EU's evolving actorness. Instead, they introduce the concept of EU “relational power,” developed drawing from the literature on pragmatism and relationality rather than on power in International Relations, emphasising that the EU's influence emerges through the interaction of internal dynamics and external pressures.

Chapter 1 – *The Evolution Of EU Foreign And Security Policy Discourse* – traces the evolution of the EU's discourse on its role in international security, highlighting the link between its self-representation as a security actor and changing international and internal contexts in search for a “safer Europe”. This chapter practically “reads” the EU documents in which the EU has proclaimed itself an international security actor to signal a shift from the confident (from the common foreign policy since the Maastricht Treaty transformed the European Economic Community into the larger EU in the early 1990s to the newly Common Foreign and Security Policy), outward-looking posture of the early 2000s—focused on promoting security, prosperity, and democracy abroad—toward more pragmatic and restrained characterisations in later years (such as the 2003 European Security Strategy). From the 2010s onward, EU's discourse increasingly emphasised practical approaches to managing complex conflicts and crises (the 2016 Global Strategy for the EU's foreign and security policy and the 2018 Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises). More recently, the EU has begun cultivating a defensive, “geopolitical” conception of its foreign and security policy, caused by the high number of menaces (from Covid-19 pandemic and wars, to regional conflicts and the old rivalry between the United States and China), reflecting a broader recalibration of its international role. The conclusion of the chapter observes that the EU is simultaneously shaped by and continually responding to a “shifting external environment,” which in turn influences domestic European politics.

Inside-out Theories of EU Foreign and Security Policy, that is the second Chapter, situates the study within existing literature, evidencing EU foreign and security policy (EUFSP) as shaped by both European integration and broader contextual factors. The authors start reviewing the theories that have sought to “grapple with an evolving EUFSP in order to flesh out own contribution” – two academic debates that have created the prevailing understanding of EU foreign and security policy (EUFSP). The first concerns the extent to which the drivers of European integration – whether member states, supranational institutions, issues of identity, or a combination thereof – support the view that the EU possesses a distinctive actorness in international security. The second debate focuses on the nature of the EU's power: whether it is civilian, normative, military, or another form of power. Despite differing and sometimes conflicting perspectives, these debates share a common “inside-out” approach, emphasising the internal mechanisms and functioning of the EU in addressing these questions. Furthermore, during the second chapter it is analysed how internal EU factors, such as different institutions, member-state politics, and normative skeleton can shape its foreign and security policy. Alcaro and Bargués explore in the sub-chapters Theoretical accounts of EU foreign and security policy, Theoretical constructions of the EU's “power”, and Relational Power Europe, the decision-making mechanisms, the role of the High Representative, and the structural limits imposed by differing national interests, concentrating on the

EU's norms and institutional structure as well as its resources as "the main lens through which EU foreign and security policy can best be understood"³¹⁹.

After checking how EU faces multipolar competition, regional fragmentation and internal contestation, all the facts that compose the context in which EU and national policymakers deal with crises and conflicts, Chapters 3 (*An Outside-in Perspective of EU Foreign and Security Policy*) and Chapter 4 (*The Strengths and Limits of Relational Power Europe*) deepen concretely the two dimensions constituting the concept of "Relational Power Europe". These are the richest chapters of the book in analyses and examples, explained in a very accessible way to both to experts and people unfamiliar with the subject.

Chapter 3 examines the EU's contextual dependence, focusing on multipolar competition, regional fragmentation, and internal contestation, that are seen as the EU's greatest "pressures," constraints, explained in details in the following three sections of the chapter (*The Pressure of Multipolar Competition*, *The Pressure of Regional Fragmentation* and *The Pressure of Internal Contestation*). The debate started from the predicament of the 2010s that European security has faced an escalating challenge: the rapid increase in both the number and intensity of crises and conflicts affecting its interests, directly and indirectly. Crisis and conflict management has become so central that nowadays it constitutes a core pillar of the EU's foreign and security policy. Economic interdependence did little to prevent conflict in the EU's dealings with Russia or the US's engagement with China; it was either weaponised, as in Ukraine, or failed to ease rising tensions, as seen over Taiwan and the South China Sea. Likewise, ideological and cultural differences both form and are formed by interstate rivalry and regional fragmentation. Russia's aggression in Ukraine, for instance, not only shifted Europe's power balance but turned EU-Russia relations from cooperation into systemic competition. Additional factors—such as economic interdependence, cultural diversity, and ideological rivalry—also influence the international environment and, in turn, the context in which EU foreign and security policy operates. As expected, arenas for multipolar competition multiply, interstate rivalries intensify. This dynamic was particularly visible in the Middle East, especially in Syria, where territorial fragmentation eventually reflected a fragile balance among competing powers: Russia and Iran backed Assad, Turkey supported the Islamist rebels in Idlib, and the United States, along with a few European countries, supported the Kurds. As noted by the two authors, this multipolar contest in a fragmented state exacerbated Europe's vulnerabilities, including limited military capabilities, reliance on the goodwill of conflict parties, and challenges in identifying reliable interlocutors. If referred to a phenomenon that created in the last years much interest for scholars the reader can discover that according to the present book, regional fragmentation is the result of impotent states, that cannot set and enforce laws, and conflict management is even "doubly complicated". The writers present many examples in this regard: Syria (and the no-contact policy of EU's states, that eventually transformed EUFSP into a factor contributing to Syria's internal fragmentation), Libya (that made many times the EU's states to reassess the engagement strategies with local actors), Kosovo (the refusal of some states to recognise unilateral declarations of independence), Venezuela (that involved the Latin American organisations efforts to restore stability), Ethiopia (where the EU did not foresee the outbreak of the civil war between the federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, caused by limited information about the internal situation). As a conclusion of Chapter 3, the three main factors discussed co-exist, are combined and interact to each other, this develops the environment in which European policymakers decide and engage in conflict-affected societies. The aim of the chapter is, as stated by Alcaro and Bargaúes, to focus on the process of managing constraints that originate outside the EU's institutional structure, and not on the capabilities and competences of EU institutions and member states.

Chapter 4 explores EUFSP resilience dimension, showing how the EU and member states mitigate or overcome the challenges showed in Chapter 3, emphasising how "the EU navigated the contextual constraints". The three subchapters are *Handling Multipolar Competition*, *Handling Regional Fragmentation* and *Handling Internal Contestation*. Against common perceptions of paralysis, weakness,

³¹⁹ p. 7.

and limited actorness in EU foreign and security policy, Riccardo Alcaro and Pol Bargués offer a vivid explanation to show how the EU pursues conflict management objectives in a really creative and distinctive manner, dealing with an increasingly complex global environment marked by interstate competition. In international security affairs, the EU's actorness is patterned by both the constraints arising from the interaction of contextual factors (the constitutive dependence aspect of EUFSP's relational nature) and the complex, non-linear processes through which the EU and its member states address and mitigate these constraints (the institutional resilience aspect of EUFSP's relational nature). The EU's relational power—multilateralist, Atlanticist, flexible, pragmatic, polymorphic, and collective—remains broadly stable yet continuously adapts to evolving contexts, as past transformations demonstrate and future ones will likely continue to do.

The final chapter, entitled *The Future(s) of Relational Power Europe*, projects the organisation into three scenarios for EUFSP evolution, that are supposed to take place at the mid-2030s, assessing how the EU's capacity to operate contextual pressures might develop and imagining how EU actorness can change in the near future. Between the mid-2000s and early 2020s, EU foreign and security policy structures remained largely stable. Post-Lisbon Treaty (2009) adjustments—covering defence, enlargement, and economic statecraft—did not fundamentally shift the balance between institutions and member states. Future structural change is likely, driven by growing calls for reform alongside stronger forces favouring a more intergovernmental EU. In the first scenario, EU member states undertake a comprehensive institutional overhaul, facilitated by low internal contestation, rising multipolar competition, and worsening regional fragmentation (the authors call this the “reform” scenario). In the second (the “adjustment” scenario), they implement targeted, sector-specific adjustments, enabled by moderate multipolar pressures and internal contestation alongside high regional fragmentation. In the third, EUFSP structures are weakened due to intense internal contestation and heightened multipolar competition, despite a reduction in regional fragmentation (the so-called “fracture” scenario). Chapter 5 is classified into four sections (plus the *Conclusion* of the chapter): *An Open Future For EU Foreign And Security Policy* (are examine the pressures for change in EU foreign and security policy that have emerged from various quarters in recent years, contrasting them with public opinion trends to provide an overview of the conditions under which reform or fracture might occur), *A Resilient Europe In A Competitive World*, *An adjusted Europe in a fragmented world*, and *A disjointed Europe in a contested world* (these three sections adopt the same two-part structure: each outlines a specific scenario for the evolution of EUFSP governance, followed by a discussion of how the EU's relational power would manifest in that scenario).

The *Conclusion* of the book synthesises the whole argument and reflects on the EU's future role as a relational power in international security. Rather than emphasising the EU's values or institutional design, the two authors focus on how its institutions and member states responded to contextual challenges. Limiting their analysis to crises from the mid-2000s to early 2020s—where the interplay of key factors was most evident—the book conceptualises the EU as a relational power, integrating outside-in and traditional inside-out perspectives. In managing multipolar pressures, it's easily noticed in the pages of the volume that the EU favoured multilateralism over geopolitics, emphasising inclusive coalitions and engagement with international regimes rather than direct power contests. A notable example exposed is the determination with which the E3 and the HRVP anchored the Iranian nuclear dispute to Tehran's international obligations, promoting a multilateral resolution that involved the United States of America and Russia and China. The EU also facilitated the International Contact Group on Venezuela, engaged with ASEAN countries to strengthen the legal configuration for resolving South China Sea disputes, supported initial UN-led efforts to manage the civil wars in Syria and Libya, and, through the Franco-German duo, sought to address the Donbas conflict by negotiating with Russia while leveraging the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. An interesting thing regarding the EU is that it always remained fastened in the Euro-Atlantic order centred on the United States of America. As a relational power, EU employed a variety of tactics, strategies, and practices to control deep, mutually reinforcing systemic constraints and their interaction with domestic politics. In conflict management, this produced an EU that is instinctively multilateralist, strategically Atlanticist, and structurally unable to

engage in prolonged geopolitical contests alone—an EU that is more flexible, prioritises inclusivity and secondary issues, and adopts a pragmatic approach.

Conflict Management and the Future of EU Foreign and Security Policy. Relational Power Europe by Riccardo Alcaro and Pol Bargués is an easy to read and understand book, essential for anyone seeking to understand Europe's role in international security, that leaves the reader with thoughts about future scenarios and with wonders about what globally, EU and personal security is and should look like. The framework of the volume highlights the EU's conditional effectiveness: capable of influence in certain contexts, yet limited by internal divisions and structural fragilities. While it convincingly demonstrates the EU's adaptability in conflict management, it leaves open questions about the long-term strategic endurance of EU foreign and security policy in an increasingly multipolar world. The authors move beyond narrow institutional or normative debates, offering instead the innovative lens of relational power to explain how the EU adapts to crises in a world of competition and regional instability. Rich in both theoretical insight and empirical case studies, the book not only captures the EU's strengths and weaknesses but also raises critics about its future resilience. For students, scholars, and practitioners alike, it provides a timely and thought-provoking contribution to debates on Europe's global actorness.

Law, Migration, and the Construction of Whiteness: Mobility Within the European Union
Ioana Lucia BORDEIANU³²⁰

Review of: Dagmar Rita Myslinska, *Law, Migration, and the Construction of Whiteness: Mobility Within the European Union*. London and New York: Routledge, 2024. ISBN 9781032007373

Whiteness is a modern, colonial invention which was devised in the 17th century for being used to provide some logic for acts like genocide and slavery. *Whiteness* refers to the construction of the white race, white culture, and the system of privileges and advantages afforded to white people across the globe. “Across studies of racialized modernity, critical scholars since W. E. B. Du Bois have recognized that no analysis of racism is complete without studying the social dynamics surrounding whiteness.”³²¹ Many research articles underline the fact that the theme of *whiteness* has persisted even as the boundaries of whiteness have shifted. Dagmar Rita Myslinska’s book³²² offers a thought-provoking analysis at the crossroads of law, migration, and racial identity, with a straight accent on whiteness. The author underlines the way legal frameworks³²³ shape and are shaped by the dynamics of race and migration,

³²⁰ PhD. Lecturer, University of Oradea, Department of International Relations and European Studies. E-mail: ioanabordeianu@hotmail.com.

³²¹ Cara Cancelmo and Jennifer C. Mueller, “Whiteness,” accessed November 21, 2024, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0231.xml>.

³²² Dagmar Rita Myslinska, *Law, Migration and the Construction of Whiteness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2024).

³²³ Council Directive 2009/50/EC of 25 May 2009 on the Conditions of Entry and Residence of Third-Country Nationals for the Purposes of Highly Qualified Employment, *Official Journal of the European Union* L 155/17, accessed November 30, 2024, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2009/50/oj/eng>; Council Directive 2003/109/EC of 25 November 2003 Concerning the Status of Third-Country Nationals Who Are Long-Term Residents, *Official Journal* L 016, accessed November 18, 2024, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2003/109/oj/eng>; Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on Common Procedures for Granting and Withdrawing International Protection (recast), *Official Journal of the European Union* L180/60, accessed November 27, 2024, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2013/32/oj/eng>; Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 Laying Down Standards for the Reception of Applicants for International Protection (recast), *Official Journal of the European Union* L180/96, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2013/33/oj/eng>; Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on Standards for the Qualification of Third-Country Nationals or Stateless Persons as Beneficiaries of International Protection, for a Uniform Status for Refugees or for Persons Eligible for Subsidiary Protection, and for the Content of the Protection Granted (recast), *Official Journal of the European Union* L337/9, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2011/95/oj/eng>; Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on Common Standards and Procedures in Member States for Returning Illegally Staying Third-Country Nationals, *Official Journal of the European Union* L348/98, accessed November 08, 2024, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2008/115/oj/eng>; Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the Right of Citizens of the Union and Their Family Members to Move and Reside Freely within the Territory of the Member States Amending Regulation (EEC) No 1612/68 and Repealing Directives 64/221/EEC, 68/360/EEC, 72/194/EEC, 73/148/EEC, 75/34/EEC, 75/35/EEC, 90/364/EEC, 90/365/EEC and 93/96/EEC (Text with EEA relevance), *Official Journal of the European Union* L158/77, accessed November 30, 2024, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2004/38/oj/eng>; European Commission. Migration and Home Affairs, “Pact on Migration and Asylum,” accessed October 25, 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en; Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 Establishing the Criteria and Mechanisms for Determining the Member State Responsible for Examining an Application for International Protection Lodged in One of the Member States by a Third-Country National or a Stateless Person (recast), *Official Journal of the European Union* L180/31, accessed December 04, 2024, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/604/oj/eng>; Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on a Union Code on the

offering a critical overview of whiteness within the mentioned systems. This review seeks to assess the book's contributions to migration studies, legal theory, and race studies, and to evaluate its theoretical and empirical insights.

Myslinska examines the relationship between migration, law, and the socio-political concept of whiteness, arguing that legal structures governing immigration often function to support racial hierarchies, privileging whiteness as a norm. She mentioned that immigration law is not just a neutral set of rules but rather a tool in the racial construction of social and political identities. The book emphasises that migration law, in many countries, is built on a racialised foundation that privileges white migrants while marginalising others. The author questions the statement that migration laws are purely about economic needs, security concerns, or humanitarian responsibilities, and she asserts that these laws are deeply connected with racial inequalities and colonial legacies. Her work is far beyond the simple study of migration law and incorporates a critical racial theory framework, drawing on scholarship in whiteness studies, critical race theory, and postcolonial theory.

This book's approach is interdisciplinary, drawing from critical legal studies, migration studies, and critical race theory. The author uses a variety of methodological tools, including historical analysis, case studies, and theoretical frameworks, to analyse the relationship between law, race, and migration. The historical and comparative approach is particularly effective in tracing the evolution of migration laws and how racial categories have been constructed and maintained over time. The book offers a comprehensive analysis of migration law's racial implications. This approach is mostly effective in highlighting how legal systems not only regulate migration but also participate in the racialisation of migrant populations. Furthermore, the theoretical density of the book may focus on some challenges for readers unfamiliar with critical race theory. One of the strengths of Myslinska's work is her engagement with both theoretical and empirical material. By connecting her analysis to real-world legal structures, she can show how the abstract concepts of race and whiteness function in tangible ways in the field of migration law. Published amidst ongoing contestations over Brexit, EU cohesion, and globalisation, the book is also mostly provocative. D.R. Myslinska, an Associate Professor at Creighton University School of Law, draws on her interdisciplinary expertise in law, migration studies, and critical race theory to unpack how EU laws and policies perpetuate racialised inequalities.

The book is structured across five chapters, each building on the central thesis that CEE nationals' status within the EU is circumscribed by historical and legal biases favouring Western Europe: **Chapter 1**, "On the Peripheries of the EU and of Whiteness," introduces the theoretical framework, situating CEE migrants at the edges of both European identity and whiteness; **Chapter 2**, "Margins of the EU Project," examines the rhetoric and policies regarding Eastern enlargement, underlining about how accession treaties reinforced East-West disparities; **Chapter 3**, "Inequalities in the Experience of East-to-West Mobility," analyses equality rights and legal restrictions on free movement for CEE nationals; **Chapter 4** shows a case study of CEE movers in pre-Brexit Britain; **Chapter 5** finishes with thoughts on the persistence of these issues and their future implications. Myslinska's argument is based on an in-depth analysis of legal texts, policy omissions, and discourses, supported by both qualitative and quantitative data. The book engages with legal, economic, political, and moral issues, making it a multidisciplinary contribution to EU law, migration studies and critical whiteness studies.

Myslinska's work is also grounded in critical race theory and postcolonial frameworks, extending these paradigms to the European context. She underlines the fact that "whiteness" is not a monolithic category within the EU but is stratified by both geography and ethnicity. This type of approach is built on the work of scholars like Alastair Bonnett, who has explored whiteness as a contested and historically framed construct. Bonnett has written about social and cultural geography, such as in his book *"The Geography of Nostalgia,"* where he explores how places, memories, and emotions interact in geographical terms: For many white individuals, nostalgia is closely linked to a yearning for the past, not just as a time of perceived personal security or stability, but also as an era when racial hierarchies were

more explicit and white dominance went largely unchallenged. This form of ‘racial memory’ endures even in multicultural environments where racial power structures are being increasingly contested. Myslinska argues that CEE nationals, despite their nominal inclusion in the EU’s free movement regime, are positioned as “*lesser whites*” due to entrenched Western biases—a phenomenon she links to colonial legacies and Cold War divisions.

One of the key arguments on this is that EU laws and policies, such as the transitional arrangements following the 2007 enlargements, were designed to limit CEE mobility and mostly reinforce Western dominance. For instance, the author critiques the Citizens’ Rights Directive (2004/38/EC) for its uneven application, which often excludes economically inactive CEE movers from social benefits. This aligns with prior research by Favell,³²⁴ who noted the “second-class citizenship” experienced by Eastern Europeans in Western states. Myslinska’s originality consists in linking these legal mechanisms to the broader construction of whiteness, a perspective that challenges the EU’s self-image into a difficult approach to be acknowledged as a post-racial entity.

D.R. Myslinska uses a mixed-methods approach, combining legal analysis with socio-historical critique and her systematic content analysis of EU treaties, directives, and Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) rulings provides mostly empirical rigor. Author’s qualitative exploration of migrant experiences adds depth and we can add here the example of case study of CEE movers in pre-Brexit Britain which draws on secondary data, such as Eurobarometer surveys and UK Employment Tribunal records, mainly for illustrating discrimination patterns. But this methodology shares both a strength and a potential limitation and the legal focus offers precision, but nevertheless the reliance on secondary sources for migrant voices may leave some experiential gaps. So therefore, comparing it to ethnographic studies like those of Ryan (2010) on Polish migrants in the UK, author’s approach put a lot of emphasis on structural analysis over lived narratives. Nonetheless, her interdisciplinary lens bridges law and social science effectively, making the book accessible to a wide audience with medium knowledge on the subject.

The book’s primary strength is its theoretical innovation, but even more, applying critical whiteness studies to EU migration, the author fills a gap in the literature, which has traditionally focused on non-European migrants as firstly did J. Solomos in 2001, in *Race and Racism in Britain*. Myslinska’s analysis of Brexit as a symptom of broader European racial dynamics is particularly compelling because she proves how anti-CEE sentiment in the UK reflects longstanding prejudices, supported by evidence of hate crimes and media rhetoric post year 2016. Another strength of the utmost importance is its policy relevance. Myslinska’s critique of EU equality discourse, and settles a map for reforming mobility laws. Her emphasis on intersectionality, addressing how class and ethnicity compound CEE disadvantage, connects with current calls mostly for more inclusive frameworks. “In the legal context, race and gender are often treated as separate categories, leaving women of color with no remedy for discrimination that cannot be classified as either racism or sexism.”³²⁵

Despite its contributions, the book has limitations. Even if the focus on CEE migrants’ risks overgeneralises, because of the experiences which is different in countries like Poland, Romania, and even Hungary. Complementary, a comparative analysis of Southern European migrants, who also face discrimination, could have been broadened the scope. On the other hand, while Myslinska has many critics against Western hegemony, also the discussion of agency about CEE migrants is underdeveloped. Scholars like Morawska have underlined the way Eastern Europeans navigate and resist marginalisation, and this is an important aspect that could enrich her narrative.

But regarding all the above, the book’s tone focusing on legal matters, limits its access to non-specialists. Meanwhile the historical context is well underlined, and we can see more attention to

³²⁴ Adrian Favell, “The New Face of East-West Migration in Europe,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34, no. 5 (2008): 701–716.

³²⁵ Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, no. 1 (1989).

contemporary political developments, such as populism. Even more, the reliance on pre-Brexit data is enhancing the questions about post 2020 dynamics, which remained with no answers, though this reflects the publication timeline. As said before, Myslinska's work includes with and extends several academic fields such as migration, racial and whiteness studies. Thus, in migration studies, it complements research on EU mobility. "The growing mobility of EU citizens across borders is not just a result of economic necessity but is increasingly shaped by the idea of European citizenship, which allows individuals to move freely and access opportunities in other EU member states, reshaping the social and cultural fabric of the Union"³²⁶. In critical whiteness studies, it builds on transnational approach, applying it to a European postcolonial space. For EU law scholars, it challenges the neutrality of legal frameworks, aligning with critiques by Shaw (2019) of the CJEU's conservative tendencies.

The book also contributes to debates on Brexit and globalisation and is also framing anti-CEE sentiment mentioning it as being part of a continuum process, furthermore she offers a counterpoint to exceptionalist narratives. Mainly for policymakers, the book underlines the need to address structural inequalities within the EU's free movement regime. Also, while revising transitional arrangements and ensuring equitable access to social rights the work could emphasise the nominated disparities the author identifies. For scholars, it opens the process for research on how whiteness functions in different regional contexts, we can mention here the Global South, or we can focus on EU Member States.

The book *Law, Migration, and the Construction of Whiteness* is a groundbreaking contribution to a better understanding of the racialised underpinnings of EU mobility. The author of the book, D.R. Myslinska's thoroughly analysis, theoretical sophistication, and timely focus making it an important reading for scholars on migration, race, whiteness and European legislation on the above concepts. While not without limitations, the book's provocative insights challenge the assumptions about EU equality and whiteness, and is offering both critique and hope for a more union based on justice and equality among its citizens. As European Union tries to handle its postcolonial present, this book remains an important intervention, forcing us to rethink the intersections and the limits of identity, legislation and power.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bonnett, Alastair. *White Identities: Historical and International Introduction*. Routledge, 2000.
- Cancelmo, Cara, and Jennifer C. Mueller. "Whiteness." Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0231.xml>.
- Council Directive 2003/109/EC of 25 November 2003 Concerning the Status of Third-Country Nationals Who Are Long-Term Residents. *Official Journal* L 016. Accessed November 18, 2024. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2003/109/oj/eng>.
- Council Directive 2009/50/EC of 25 May 2009 on the Conditions of Entry and Residence of Third-Country Nationals for the Purposes of Highly Qualified Employment. *Official Journal of the European Union* L 155/17. Accessed November 30, 2024. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2009/50/oj/eng>.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, no. 1 (1989): 139–167.
- Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the Right of Citizens of the Union and Their Family Members to Move and Reside Freely within the Territory of the Member States Amending Regulation (EEC) No 1612/68 and Repealing Directives 64/221/EEC, 68/360/EEC, 72/194/EEC, 73/148/EEC, 75/34/EEC, 75/35/EEC, 90/364/EEC, 90/365/EEC and 93/96/EEC (Text with EEA relevance). *Official Journal of the European Union* L158/77. Accessed November 30, 2024. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2004/38/oj/eng>.

³²⁶ Ettore Recchi and Adrian Favell, *Pioneers of European Integration. Citizenship and Mobility in the EU* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2009).

- Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on Common Standards and Procedures in Member States for Returning Illegally Staying Third-Country Nationals. *Official Journal of the European Union* L348/98. Accessed November 08, 2024. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2008/115/oj/eng>.
- Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on Standards for the Qualification of Third-Country Nationals or Stateless Persons as Beneficiaries of International Protection, for a Uniform Status for Refugees or for Persons Eligible for Subsidiary Protection, and for the Content of the Protection Granted (recast). *Official Journal of the European Union* L337/9. Accessed December 12, 2024. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2011/95/oj/eng>.
- Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on Common Procedures for Granting and Withdrawing International Protection (recast). *Official Journal of the European Union* L180/60. Accessed November 27, 2024. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2013/32/oj/eng>.
- Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 Laying Down Standards for the Reception of Applicants for International Protection (recast). *Official Journal of the European Union* L180/96. Accessed December 12, 2024. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2013/33/oj/eng>.
- European Commission. Migration and Home Affairs. “Pact on Migration and Asylum.” Accessed October 25, 2024. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en.
- Favell, Adrian. “The New Face of East-West Migration in Europe.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34, no. 5 (2008): 701–716.
- Myslinska, Dagmar Rita. *Law, Migration, and the Construction of Whiteness: Mobility within the European Union*. London and New York: Routledge, 2024.
- Recchi, Ettore, and Adrian Favell. *Pioneers of European Integration. Citizenship and Mobility in the EU*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2009.
- Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 Establishing the Criteria and Mechanisms for Determining the Member State Responsible for Examining an Application for International Protection Lodged in One of the Member States by a Third-Country National or a Stateless Person (recast). *Official Journal of the European Union* L180/31. Accessed December 04, 2024. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/604/oj/eng>.
- Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on a Union Code on the Rules Governing the Movement of Persons across Borders (Schengen Borders Code) (codification). Accessed December 02, 2024. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/399/oj/eng>.

The New International Challenges, some Inflection Points

Cristina-Maria DOGOT³²⁷

Book review of: Carp. Radu. *Punctul de cotitură. Ruptură, continuitate și transformarea democrațiilor* [The turning point. Break, continuity and the transformation of democracies]. Târgoviște: Ed. Cetatea de Scaun, 2024. ISBN 978-606-537-695-3; ebook 978-606-537-696-0.

The war affecting Ukraine since February 2022 has already generated a great deal of debate among analysts and politicians, as well as studies by specialists in various fields (war, security, international relations, local, regional, and international impact, international and regional institutions, migration policies, humanitarian aid, and various others). Thus, specialists drew attention quite early on to the various aspects generated by this conflict, from migration to potential geopolitical changes, even though the potential for these to materialise was always questioned and remains questionable.³²⁸ Although it may sometimes seem that the conflict in Ukraine no longer arouses the same interest (especially for traditional media—television channels, mainstream press), technology means that the amount of information about the conflict in Ukraine can be considered impressive on the one hand, but also quite volatile on the other. Beyond what can be found through technology (which is, of course, used to obtain information in real time), there are also traditional books, with rankings³²⁹ even being compiled of the most relevant books on the war in Ukraine.

The work now under scrutiny, written by Professor Radu Carp of the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Bucharest, does not refer strictly to the war in Ukraine, but takes up various moments and realities of this conflict to offer micro-analyses that focus on various international and/or regional actors, including the European Union and European states. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the author uses in the title of the volume a statement by the leader of one of the most powerful European democracies (and economies), Olaf Scholz, who considered, at the time of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, that his country, Germany, was at a "turning point" (*zeitenwende*), which, incidentally, materialised both

³²⁷ Associate Professor, Faculty of History, International Relations, Political Science and Sciences of Communication, University of Oradea. **E-mail:** cdogot@uoradea.ro.

³²⁸ There are already numerous types of written and/or audio-visual materials on the war in Ukraine: press articles, scientific articles, blogs, interactive platforms and websites, research reports, documentaries, etc. A brief assessment of these reveals conclusive research reports (i.e., Nikita Gurcov, "War in Ukraine One Year On, Nowhere Safe" (Report on Ukraine war's impact, regional conflicts, civilian toll, and international repercussions), ACLED, 1 March 2023, accessed May 29, 2025, <https://acleddata.com/report/war-ukraine-one-year-nowhere-safe>; Nikita Gurcov and Olha Polishchuk, "Still under Fire: The Evolving Fate of Civilians in Ukraine" (ACLED reports persistent threats to Ukrainian civilians amid ongoing conflict with Russia), ACLED, 22 February 2024, accessed May 29, 2025, <https://acleddata.com/report/still-under-fire-evolving-fate-civilians-ukraine>), monitoring platforms ("Ukraine Conflict Monitor," accessed October 03, 2025, <https://acleddata.com/monitor/ukraine-conflict-monitor>; liveuamap, accessed October 03, 2025, <https://liveuamap.com/en>; DeepState, accessed October 03, 2025, <https://deepstatemap.live/>), blogs of prestigious media outlets or educational institutions (BBC, The Guardian, Radio Free Europe, European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, Global Investigative Journalism Network, London School of Economics) or international or local journalists and opinion leaders (Dmitry Muratov, Yaroslav Trofimov, Ian Bremmer, George Friedman, Loren Wanderlust, Radu Hossu) who have shown constant concern for the situation on the political scene and on the front lines in Ukraine.

³²⁹ Stuart Anderson, "5 Must-Read Books to Understand Russia and the War in Ukraine," *Forbes*, 13 February 2025, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2025/02/13/5-must-read-books-to-understand-russia-and-the-war-in-ukraine/>.

politically and, above all, economically.³³⁰ Radu Carp takes this expression with its broad connotations and applies it, explicitly or implicitly, to various events that have taken place in recent years at the international level, whether they are open conflicts, such as the one in Ukraine, or a series of crises preceding them. In fact, although the war in Ukraine occupies an important place in the book, it is not the only conflict that concerns the author and is used to explain the major changes in direction that the system of international relations, international organisations, states, and communities have undergone in recent years. Throughout the volume, the author invokes various tensions and crises that have reopened at moments that were generally perceived as unexpected and then crucial for the evolution of international relations. Thus, it is no coincidence that the author starts from the way in which contemporary world problems (the war in Ukraine, the Israel-Hamas war, the problems between China and Taiwan, the conflicts in Sudan, Mali, or Myanmar) involve the great powers and change the relations between them,³³¹ which could mark “a new stage in the transition from a bipolar to a multipolar world,”³³² but a stage that is taking place with many disturbances to democratic regimes³³³.

The volume is nonlinear in nature, and we can even consider that the author presents us, sometimes in a raw and eclectic form, with events and concepts that are not always linked to each other or to the effects they have generated or may generate. Thus, we are provided with details that preceded certain crises, namely: Belarus’ involvement in the hybrid war against the EU, which preceded the military intervention in Ukraine;³³⁴ Russia’s internal actions against civil society organisations, organisations and institutions concerned with the crimes of the communist regime and dissidents,³³⁵ how the (Ukrainian) Orthodox Church was involved in realising Vladimir Putin’s political ambitions³³⁶ and the political and security effects of the schism caused by Putin both within the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and within Orthodox countries,³³⁷ in an attempt to implement the so-called theory of the “Russian world” (*russkiy mir*), which was supposed to oppose the “decadent West” and its various fads (globalisation, liberalism, sexual minority rights, militant secularism, and the like). Extensive discussions are devoted to Georgia and Moldova, as states that have a fairly similar history in terms of Russian influence on the one hand and orientation towards European integration on the other. Thus, in the case of Georgia, the problems caused by the election of a party that, although it does not seem to reject the country’s accession to the EU, also wants a “pragmatic relationship” with Russia are mentioned. The author analyses in detail Georgia’s ambiguous situation regarding its European and Euro-Atlantic future, despite pressure from Georgian civil society.³³⁸ With regard to the Republic of Moldova, the author analyses the challenges posed by both Russia and the political formations and internal leaders who have promoted Russia’s games in the small republic, making it more vulnerable at many moments in its independent existence.³³⁹ The analysis also contains references to the political situation in various EU member states (Germany, Austria, Italy, the Czech Republic, Hungary),³⁴⁰ as well as in the US. The emphasis is on the role (that may be played) both at the regional level and in tense international geopolitical situations (in relations between Australia and China, China and Taiwan, China and the US) and certain agreements between some major

³³⁰ Radu Carp, *Punctul de cotitură. Ruptură, continuitate și transformarea democrațiilor* [The turning point. Break, continuity and the transformation of democracies] (Târgoviște: Ed. Cetatea de Scaun, 2024), 15–16.

³³¹ Ibid., 11–12.

³³² Ibid., 13.

³³³ Ibid., 14–15.

³³⁴ Ibid., 17–21.

³³⁵ Ibid., 25–27.

³³⁶ Ibid., 28–31. It also presents the internal problems of Ukrainian Orthodoxy penetrated by Russia and takes a duplicitous approach to both the problems generated by Russian propaganda and war, and the problems of minorities, especially Romanian ones. Ibid., 85–93.

³³⁷ Ibid., 41–56.

³³⁸ Ibid., 97–104.

³³⁹ Ibid., 105–111.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 166–167, 180, 184–189.

powers (AUKUS, QUAD) and their impact on the situation in Ukraine.³⁴¹ The potential impact of populist parties and leaders in the new geopolitical context is also analysed, as well as the role of AI and social media in election campaigns³⁴² (without, however, suspecting what was to happen in Romania in the fall of 2024). Radu Carp also pays attention to how other crises (i.e., Israel-Palestine) influence the system of international relations (relations between states close to the conflict, but also between them and the main international actors), with an emphasis on the new axes of power (e.g., Tehran-Beijing-Moscow, but also that between Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, and Singapore) and their international influence, drawing a parallel between the needs of other states in conflict (Israel) to be supported against the dangers and threats they face.³⁴³ Another aspect analysed is the behaviour of international organisations, with harsh criticism of the UN,³⁴⁴ due to the position of the organisation's secretary-general, Antonio Guterres, in the case of the war in Ukraine.

With regard strictly to the war in Ukraine, the article analyses Ukraine's political and strategic decisions regarding the various fronts (Bahmut, Soledar),³⁴⁵ the issue of mobilisation,³⁴⁶ the various security plans (Yermak-Rasmussen),³⁴⁷ including a parallel between World War II and the war in Ukraine (similarities – the lack of involvement of the allies and its role in prolonging the hostilities)³⁴⁸. The author appreciates the paradigm shift in European security, through the involvement of European states and the EU in helping Ukraine, even if this aid did not have the capacity to bring about the end of the war and a possible victory for Ukraine.³⁴⁹ Likewise, Radu Carp reviews the numerous questions that plagued European states in the first months of the war, both regarding Russia's geopolitical intentions and economic and military capabilities, analysing the different directions that the war in Ukraine could determine/open up and emphasising that the prolongation of the conflict over a long period of time could lead to the erosion of European values. The relations of the two belligerent countries with other economic and military powers, both in Asia (China, Iran, Israel) and in the West (EU, US, UK, etc.), are also considered very important, as is the possible impact of the war on various regional and international alliances (EU, NATO), as well as the post-war future of the two belligerent states.³⁵⁰

As regards Russia's internal analysis of the war in Ukraine, the focus is on military decisions, internal power struggles (the Prigozhin case) and how Putin has managed to maintain his dominant position and eliminate not only his declared opponents,³⁵¹ but also those who at one point questioned his strategies³⁵². Russia is also interesting from another point of view, that of the ideology practiced by its leader, Vladimir Putin. Thus, Radu Carp, using the writings of authors such as Bernard Henry Levy, Mihail Iampolski Alexander Motyl, Marcel van Harpen, Vasyl Cherepanin, Larysa Yakubobam, Timothy Snyder, and Vladimir Tismăneanu, and the ideas promoted by Alexandr Dughin ("Eurasianism"), analyses Vladimir Putin's policies and "Putinism" by drawing parallels with the characteristics of fascism,³⁵³ concluding that "we are facing a new phenomenon, an ideological bricolage specific to today's Russia, resulting from the symbiosis between nationalism, fascism, and ideas specific to the extreme left, to which is added a form of messianism that transcends all political regimes and ideologies in Russia," but on which no definitive judgments or assessments can yet be made³⁵⁴. Another dimension of the

³⁴¹ Ibid., 180–184, 197–206.

³⁴² Ibid., 190–196.

³⁴³ Ibid., 215–228.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 134–139.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 93–97.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 96.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 97.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 51–55.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 62–69.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 77–85.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 111–117,

³⁵² Ibid., 149–151, 153–154.

³⁵³ Ibid., 248–256.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 256–257.

volume analysed is provided by the analyses of publications that focused on the military and domination strategies of the great powers, such as those signed by Edward Lutwach, which the author uses to analyse³⁵⁵ the strategic vision of Russia and Ukraine in the face of NATO expansion and the war tactics used in the war in Ukraine and those of Ukraine in the military confrontation with Russia. The role of military innovations is also analysed (the fact that Ukraine adapted drones to the conditions of war, just as Russia had to adapt certain military instruments), but also the sometimes problematic uselessness of the weapons provided by Western countries and Ukraine's need to receive money to invest in its own arms industries (which contradicted the West's need to use its financial resources to invest in its own arms industries).³⁵⁶

Based on existing scenarios and what technology has to offer, for better or worse, at this point in time, the author also makes some projections/predictions for the future, developing a set of fifteen scenarios regarding the forms of future conflicts (both those involving Russia and those that Western states or states whose historical relations have been tense and can no longer remain frozen (e.g., the US and China) will face³⁵⁷.

As we have seen, Professor Radu Carp's book is a continuous assessment, from various perspectives, of the war in Ukraine and its effects at the regional, European, and international levels. The author deconstructs and examines, in real time, the events that threaten European security. The work can be likened to a critical and specialised journal of events experienced by contemporary society, representing an important contribution to the analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian war, a war that no one needed, not even Russia. Through this article, we have attempted to draw a common thread between the different perspectives addressed in the volume, to offer an integrative view of the heterogeneous but complementary topics within the volume, and to trace some paths and build some bridges between the different events and concepts that the author presents to us and invites us to look at introspectively. However, the complexity of the work and the diversity of the topics addressed leave room for other interpretations, in-depth perspectives on each of them, and even the establishment of new perspectives for analysis and integration of the topics addressed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Stuart. "5 Must-Read Books to Understand Russia and the War in Ukraine." *Forbes*, 13 February 2025. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2025/02/13/5-must-read-books-to-understand-russia-and-the-war-in-ukraine/>.
- DeepState. Accessed October 03, 2025. <https://deepstatemap.live/>.
- Gurcov, Nikita. "War in Ukraine One Year On, Nowhere Safe." Report on Ukraine war's impact, regional conflicts, civilian toll, and international repercussions. ACLED, 1 March 2023. Accessed May 29, 2025. <https://acleddata.com/report/war-ukraine-one-year-nowhere-safe;>
- Liveuamap. Accessed October 03, 2025. <https://liveuamap.com/en>.
- Nikita Gurcov and Olha Polishchuk, "Still under Fire: The Evolving Fate of Civilians in Ukraine." ACLED reports persistent threats to Ukrainian civilians amid ongoing conflict with Russia. ACLED, 22 February 2024. Accessed May 29, 2025. <https://acleddata.com/report/still-under-fire-evolving-fate-civilians-ukraine>.
- "Ukraine Conflict Monitor." Accessed October 03, 2025. <https://acleddata.com/monitor/ukraine-conflict-monitor>.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 117, 158, 206–209.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 156–159.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 210–214.

The voice of students

Peace. EU and Peace. Between Aspiration and Reality

Interview with Professor **Gökhan SEVIM**, Ege University, Izmir, Turkey

Recorded by **Tamás KÁDÁR**, Erasmus student at Ege University, Izmir, Turkey;
MA Student, Faculty of History, International Relations, Political Science and Sciences
of Communication, University of Oradea

About Authors

George Anglițoiu is professor of International Relations at the National School for Political Studies and Public Administration, Department of International Relations and European Integration, Bucharest, Romania; visiting professor at the University of Münster (WWU), Institute for Political Studies, Münster, Germany; secretary of the Romanian Investment Screening Commission. Has authored, coauthored and coordinated several books, chapters, studies and articles on foreign policy and European/global security. Most recent publication - first author of *Pedagogical Themes of International Relations*, Bucharest: Comunicare.ro, December 2025. **E-mail:** george@anglitoiu.ro.

Csaba Lajos BEKESI is executive director of Bihor County Agency for Employment. Recent publications: **Bekesi, Csaba**, Lioara Coturbaș, and Delia Bekesi. “The Dynamics of Unemployment during the Pandemic. Case Study in Bihor County.” *The Annals of the University of Oradea. Economic Sciences* 31, no. 2 (2022): 39–49; Ștefănescu, Florica, Melania Pop, Olimpia Ban, Delia Bekesi, and **Csaba Bekesi**. “Cluster Development in Romania in a European Context.” In *Business Excellence and Innovation Management: A 2025 Vision to Sustain Economic Development in the Era of Pandemic*. Proceedings of the 39th International Business Information Management Association (IBIMA), 30-31 May 2022. Granada, Spain, edited by Khalid S. Soliman, 2509–2527. <https://u.pcloud.link/publink/show?code=kZXQSVVZAgQIAgJUYN78hBIFq5R1DfonrXOk#folder=12507147031&tpl=publicfoldergrid>. **E-mail:** csaba_bekesi@yahoo.com.

Delia Georgeta BEKESI is a lecturer at the Faculty of Social-Humanistic Sciences within the University of Oradea, PhD in Sociology. Recent publications: Bekesi, Delia-Georgeta, and Zsolt-Botond Bottyan. “Bridging the Gap: Human Resource Management Strategies in Romania’s Evolving Labor Market within the European Union Framework. Study Case in Bihor County, Romania.” *Analele Universității din Oradea, Relații internaționale și studii europene* (2024): 181–197. <https://doi.org/10.58603/KLQT5180>; Cărciumaru, Răzvan, and Delia Bekesi. “Assessing the Economic Impact of Integrating International Protection Beneficiaries in Romania.” *The Annals of the University of Oradea. Economic Sciences* TOM XXXII, no. 2 (December 2023). University of Oradea Publishing [https://doi.org/10.47535/1991AUOES32\(2\)018](https://doi.org/10.47535/1991AUOES32(2)018); Săveanu, Sorana, Raluca Buhaș, Delia Bekesi, Smaranda Cioban-Kudelca, and Claudia Bacter. “Academic and Career Paths for PhD Graduates.” In *Education, Reflection, Development – ERD 6, European Proceedings of Educational Sciences*, edited by Ion Albușescu and Cristian Stan, 487–498. London: European Publisher, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epes.23056.44>. **E-mail:** g.bekesi@uoradea.ro.

Botond-Zsolt BOTTYAN is a lecturer at the University of Oradea, PhD in sociology. Recent publications: Bekesi, Delia Georgeta, Botond-Zsolt Bottyan. “Bridging the Gap: Human Resource Management Strategies in Romania’s Evolving Labor Market within the European Union Framework. Study Case in Bihor County, Romania.” *The Annals of University of Oradea. International and European Studies* (2024): 181–197. <https://doi.org/10.58603/KLQT5180>; Bottyan, Botond-Zsolt. “Democracy and Identity. The Future of Democracy in the Context of the European Integration.” In *The Legitimacy of New Regionalism in the European Integration Process*, Supplement of the *Annals University of Oradea. International Relations and European Studies*, edited by Mircea Brie and István-József Polgár, 401–418, Debrecen: Debrecen University Press; Oradea: Editura Universității din Oradea, 2023. **E-mail:** bottyan.zsolt@gmail.com.

Alexandra COLȚA is a PhD student at USM and the dean of the didactic department at “Alexei Mateevici” College in Chișinău. Her current research focuses on the importance of involving young people in decision-making to improve democratic institutions. She is interested in learning how young people might become more involved and informed in political processes, contributing to more substantial democratic growth. Her research examines how civic education and youth participation might help build a more engaged and responsible society. She has participated in national and international programs that aided professional development and the establishment of a comprehensive approach to education, democratic principles, and community development. These projects have provided an opportunity to work in diverse teams and contribute to the growth of society in significant ways. Amongst her last articles: “The Role of Young People in Building Participatory Democracy – Alignment with the Development Trends Assumed by the European Union.” In *Human and Social Security in the Democratic State*, 131–148. Chișinău. Chișinău: “Print-Caro” SRL, 2023; “Youth Sector Reforms in the Context of European Integration.” In *Mechanisms and Models of Decision-Making at the Local/Regional/Central Level*. Activity from the Jean Monnet Project “Centre of Excellence: Strengthening the Sustainability of Democracy through Civic Education.” 1 September 2024, 208–230. Chișinău. Chișinău: “Print-Caro”, 2024; “Cooperation between Youth Organizations and State Institutions for Sustainable Development and National Unity.” In *Cooperation of State Institutions in Ensuring National Unity*, 28–29 March 2025, 209–223. Chișinău. Chișinău: “Print-Caro,” 2025. **E-mail:** aalecsandra@mail.ru.

Yaroslav DROZDOVSKYY is Candidate of Economic Sciences, Associate Professor, Deputy Dean for international activities, Uzhhorod National University, Faculty of International Economic Relations. Completed internships in Great Britain and the USA. Worked as deputy head of the State Tax Administration of Ukraine in Zakarpattia Oblast for regulatory reform and informatization. Lecturer in the following disciplines: “Theory of money and monetary circulation,” “World financial environment,” “Project management,” etc. Main publications include research on economic resilience, regional development and international economic relations. Amongst last publications: Yaroslav Petrovych Drozdovsky, V.A. Kohutych, A.G. Dobey. Using Artificial Intelligence in International Business. Helvetica Publishing House, 2024, DOI:https://doi.org/10.32782/2413-9971/2024-52-7; Yaroslav Petrovych Drozdovsky, M.M. Fedynets, Venture Investment in Modern Conditions of Global Economic Development. Helvetica Publishing House, 2022, DOI:https://doi.org/10.32782/2413-9971/2022-43-8, Yaroslav Petrovych Drozdovsky, Alina Ivanivna Zhmachenko. “Assessment of the Role of Innovation and Intellectual Capital in the System of Factors Forming the Knowledge Economy.” In Modern challenges and topical problems of science, education and production: interdisciplinary disputes [Collection of scientific works]: materials of the XXIII International, 2021, Yaroslav Petrovych Drozdovsky, VV Yurosh, Problems of forming and developing the Ukrainian brand in the international arena, Publishing house of Uzhhorod National University "Hoverla", 2018. **E-mail:** Yaroslav.drozdovskyy@uzhnu.edu.ua.

Johanna FARKAS is an Associate Professor at the Ludovika University of Public Service (Budapest, Hungary), and a clinical psychologist at Heim Pál National Pediatric Institute. Her academic background includes a PhD and habilitation in Law and Social Sciences. She is integrative therapist with extensive postgraduate training in emergency psychology, radicalisation prevention, and victim protection. Her research interests lie in the intersection of psychology and law enforcement, particularly child victimology, radicalisation, organisational psychology in policing, and trauma. She has participated in numerous international and national research

projects (e.g., ERASMUS+, CEEPUS, Internal Security Fund, KÖFOP), focusing on juvenile justice, cross-border cooperation, and the psychological aspects of crime and policing. She has coordinated international Law Enforcement, Security and Psychology CEEPUS network (HU-1803-03-2526) and led specialised summer and research schools on law enforcement, security and psychology. She has served as an editorial board member of several journals (*Journal of Security and Criminal Sciences*, *Magyar Drogfigyelő*). In addition to her academic and clinical work, she regularly lectures at international conferences and universities, and frequently holds workshops and trainings for law enforcement professionals. Her work has been recognised with numerous awards, including the 'Excellent Lecturer Award' from the Ludovika, and multiple scholarships and distinctions for research. **E-mail:** farkas.johanna@uni-nke.hu; johanna.farkas@heimpalkorhaz.hu.

Simona Camelia FER is Associate professor PhD, Faculty of History, International Relations, Political Sciences and Communication Sciences, Department of Political Sciences and Communication Sciences, University of Oradea. Her main activities and responsibilities are related to Communication, as an occupational field within the Department of Political Sciences and Communication Sciences, where I have been working and lecturing since 2002. Personal curricular activities focus on: Media language, News agencies, Media and current affairs, English language seminars (for several specializations), Academic writing, Basic, Social and Institutional Communication. I also share research interests, such as publications, book reviews or participation to different academically structured courses and conferences. As concerns extracurricular activities, I organize and co-ordinate students practical training in local media institutions and I am also committed to administrative tasks and involved in building positive relationships with and among our students. **E-mail:** simonag_1976@yahoo.com.

Aurora-Elena GAVRIȘ is a PhD lecturer at the University of Oradea, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences. She defended her doctoral thesis entitled Psychosocial and legal aspects regarding human trafficking, in the Sociology Domain, at the University of Bucharest, in 2009. A graduate of the Faculty of Legal Sciences, Law Specialisation, with a master's degree in Public Administration and Community Development, her field of interest and research is interdisciplinary, addressing topics in the socio-human sphere such as: deviant human behaviour and antisocial aspects, public administration especially that exercised in the sphere of social services, labour legislation specific to HR activities and aspects related to the legislation and regulation of numerous fields or categories of social assistance beneficiaries, such as: children, the elderly, people with disabilities or other categories of vulnerable groups. Aurora-Elena Gavriș in her concerns addresses concrete aspects of the functioning or, on the contrary, observes the impediments that can lead to the deficient functioning of various social mechanisms, in areas such as the administration of social services, the application of labour legislation; the author also shows interest in the study and observation of deviant social phenomena, current in Romanian society such as bullying, the consumption of prohibited substances or human trafficking. Amongst last publications: Gavriș, Aurora Elena. "Labor through a Romanian Temporary Employment Agent in Opposition to Illegal Migration." *Analele Universității din Oradea. Relații Internaționale și Studii Europene*, Supplement *From Exclusive Borders to Inclusive Frontiers in the Western Balkans*, edited by István Polgár and Mircea Brie, 97–105. Oradea: Editura Universității din Oradea, 2024. Gavriș, Aurora Elena. "Socialization – Way of Preventing or Generating Deviant Behavior." *International Journal of Legal and Social Order*, no. 1 (2022): 140–145. <https://ijlso.ccdsara.ro/international-journal-of-legal-a/article/view/72/57>, Web of Science ResearcherID: AAC-9052-2022; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5921-2222>. **E-mail:** auroragavris@yahoo.com.

Claudia-Ana MOARCĂȘ is a university professor and PhD coordinator in social law (labour law, social security law, European labour law, and European social law) at the Faculty of Law of the University of Bucharest. He has held various positions in government structures (among others, Deputy Ombudsman, 2001–2002, Minister of Labor, November 2015–April 2016) and in international organizations and institutions (UN consultant, 2002–2008). Author of numerous monographs and specialist articles. Among his latest publications: Claudia Ana Moarcăș. “Dreptul muncii și securității sociale în lumea IA: provocări reale și soluții posibile” [Labor and social security law in the world of AI: real challenges and possible solutions]. *Analele Universității București–Seria Drept (AUB)* (2024): 28–49; Claudia Ana Moarcăș. “Mission et objectifs des universités/facultés de droits et des institutions de stage et de formation professionnelle.” In *L’efficacite du titre judiciaire et son execution*, 336–349. Paris : Bruylant, 2024. E-mail: claudia.ana.moarcas@drept.unibuc.ro.

Kund REGÉNYI is an Associate Professor and HUMINT expert at the Department of Civilian National Security, Ludovika University of Public Service, Budapest. He obtained his MA in History and German Studies at the University of Szeged and completed doctoral studies at the University of Heidelberg with DAAD scholarship support. His PhD was later recognised in Hungary by the University of Szeged. He also holds a degree in defence and security policy from the National University of Public Service. He has long been involved in officer training and academic teaching, covering HUMINT, security policy, and intelligence methodology. He regularly contributes to curriculum development and has initiated the concept of a HUMINT laboratory in higher education. Regényi has taught across BA, MA, and doctoral levels, including English-language courses and training for senior military and police officials. He is active in international academic collaboration, conference participation, and doctoral supervision. His publications focus on intelligence history, operational practice, and civil-military cooperation. **E-mail:** regenyi.kund@uni-nke.hu.

Ludmila ROȘCA is Doctor of Philosophy, Senior Researcher, School of Public Administration, Moldova State University. She is the coordinator of Jean Monnet “Center of Excellence. Strengthening Democratic Sustainability through Civic Education,” Project 101085234 — SDSCE and “Civic Education for Resilient Democracy,” ERASMUS-JMO-2025-COE CERD - 101239922 - GAP-101239922, pentru perioada 2026-2028, <https://cecivicedu.eu/>, and is the author of over 250 scientific works, including: 2 monographs, 6 chapters in monographs, 8 textbooks, university courses, and course materials. Scientific interests: European Studies, Professional Ethics, Human and Social Ontology, Political Philosophy. Over the past six years, he has edited six volumes of international scientific conferences, two scientific-practical seminars, and a collective monograph. He is a doctoral supervisor in the field of 561.01 Theory and Methodology of Political Science, Political Institutions and Processes. For supplementary information, see: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0339-7157>. **E-mail:** ludmilarosca.com@gmail.com.

Ionuț Petre STOICA is a PhD candidate at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Romania. His research focuses on digital government and e-governance in the European Union. The exploration of the multiple ways in which e-government intersects with governance, citizen–authority interaction, and even governmental transparency as an almost fundamental right has led him to focus on its multi-level nature and on the manner in which it contributes to cross-border cooperation between regions, thereby fostering increased cohesion among regions belonging to different countries. For supplementary information see: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0712-3217> **E-mail:** info@istoica.ro.

Reza TAVALLA is a PhD candidate at the University of A Coruña, Spain, in the Doctoral Program *New Perspectives in Documentation, Communication and Humanities*. His research focuses on

algorithmic nationalism, platform governance, and digital populism in Europe. He obtained his Master's degree in Intercultural Communication (2022) and his Bachelor's degree in American Studies (2020) from Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania. He is an INDITEX–UDC Predoctoral Fellow and participated in a research stay at the University of Oradea. He recently published the article “Digital Walls and Global Bridges: The Paradox of China's Internet Censorship and Its International Cultural Exchange.” *Technium Social Sciences Journal* 62 (2024): 83–96, previously presented at XIX International Conference on Interdisciplinary Social Sciences (Jagiellonian University, 2024) and XIV International Electronic Symposium on Chinese Politics (2024). He was visiting researcher at University of Oradea (2025). Certifications in Digital Humanities (HarvardX) and digital research methodologies. **E-mail:** reza.tavalla@udc.es.

Has published

- Vol. 1/2006 *Europe and Its Borders: Historical Perspective*
- Vol. 2/2006 *From Smaller to Greater Europe: Border Identitary Testimonies*
- Vol. 3/2007 *Media, Intercultural Dialogue and the New Frontiers of Europe*
- Vol. 4/2007 *Europe from Exclusive Borders to Inclusive Frontiers*
- Vol. 5/2008 *Religious Frontiers of Europe*
- Vol. 6/2008 *The Intercultural Dialogue and the European Frontiers*
- Vol. 7/2009 *Europe and the Neighbourhood*
- Vol. 8/2009 *Europe and Its Economic Frontiers*
- Vol. 9/2010 *The Cultural Frontiers of Europe*
- Vol. 10/2010 *The Geopolitics of European Frontiers*
- Vol. 11/2011 *Leaders of the Borders, Borders of the Leaders*
- Vol. 12/2011 *Communication and European Frontiers*
- Vol. 13/2012 *Permeability and the Impermeability of Socio-economic Frontiers within European Union*
- Vol. 14/2012 *Enlargements, Borders and the Changes of EU Political Priorities*
- Vol. 15/2013 *A Security Dimension as Trigger and Result of Frontiers Modifications*
- Vol. 16/2013 *Cross-Border Governance and the Borders Evolutions*
- Vol. 17/2014 *The Social Frontiers of Europe*
- Vol. 18/2014 *The Security Dimension of European Frontier vs. the Legitimacy of Political Priorities of EU and EU Members States National Preferences*
- Vol. 19/2015 *Border Cities in Europe*
- Vol. 20/2015 *Eurolimes: Theoretical Approaches and Borders' Assessment*
- Vol. 21/2016 *Cross-Border Cooperation in Europe between Successes and Limits*
- Vol. 22/2016 *Minorities and European Frontiers*
- Vol. 23-24/2017 *Migration at the European Borders*
- Vol. 25/2018 *Territorial Marketing at the European Borders*
- Vol. 26/2018 *The European Borders at Hundred Years after the First World War*
- Vol. 27-28/2019 *Cross-Border Cooperation in EU Member States: Theoretical Studies and Best Practices*
- Vol. 29/2020 *Regional Development at the European Union Borders*
- Vol. 30/2021 *15 Years of Eurolimes. Studying and Researching the European Union at its Borders*
- Vol. 31-32/2022 *The Eastern Border of the European Union: From Peace to Conflict*
- Vol. 33-34/2023 *Neighbourhood, Cross-Border Cooperation and New Challenges for the European Union*
- Vol. 35-36/2024 *Cooperation, Diplomacy and War at the Eastern Border of the European Union*
- Vol. 37/2025 *Socio-Cultural Challenges Within and at the Borders of the European Union*
- Vol. 38/2025 *Cross-Border Cooperation – A Tool for Increasing Social Cohesion*

Will publish

- Vol. 39/2026 *Cohesive society and regional development*

Eurolimes
Journal of the Institute for Euroregional Studies
“Jean Monnet” European Centre of Excellence

Eurolimes is indexed in Ebscohost database, <http://www.ebscohost.com/titleLists/a9h-journals.htm>
Eurolimes is indexed in ProQuest database, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?RQT=317&PageNum=1&TS=1279534972&clientId=134590&SQ=Eurolimes>
Eurolimes is indexed in CEEOL database, <http://www.ceeol.com/aspx/publicationdetails.aspx?publicationID=bf079f2b-b0bc-4dd2-8115-4bbd36d344b0>
Eurolimes is indexed in Index Copernicus database, IC value 3.95, <http://journals.indexcopernicus.com/karta.php?action=masterlist&id=4293>
Eurolimes is indexed in Gesis Socioguide database (sowiport.de), <http://www.sowiport.de/en/>
Eurolimes is accredited by CNCIS, code 537, B + Category, http://www.cncis.ro/userfiles/file/CENAPOSS/B+iunie_2010.pdf

Cuprins ♦ Contents ♦ Sommaire ♦ Inhalt ♦ Tartalom

Constantin-Vasile ȚOCA, Mihai MARIAN, Klára CZIMRE ⇔ Cross-Border Cooperation – A Tool for Increasing Social Cohesion – Introduction	7
I. Cohesive society and regional development	19
Claudia-Ana MOARCĂȘ ⇔ The European Social Model: Social Cohesion and Inclusion	21
Stoica Ionuț PETRE ⇔ Evaluating the Impact of E-Government on Social Cohesion in EU Border Regions	37
Zsolt-Botond BOTTYAN, Delia-Georgeta BEKESI, Csaba-Lajos BEKESI ⇔ Economic Growth, Demographic Decline and EU Cohesion: Employers’ Perspective on Labour Shortages in Bihor County, Romania	59
II. Cross-Border Cooperation – tool for increasing social cohesion	75
Alexandra COLȚA, Ludmila ROȘCA ⇔ The Role of Youth in the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in a Democratic Society	77
Yaroslav DROZDOVSKYY ⇔ Ukraine – EU Integration: Cross-Border Cooperation During Wartime	83
Simona FER ⇔ When European Identity Speaks English: Multilingualism and Social Cohesion in the European Space	89
III. Investigating the social support network	103
Aurora-Elena GAVRIȘ ⇔ Volunteering as a Quick Way to Achieve Social Solidarity	105
Reza TAVALLA ⇔ Beyond Harm: Exploring the Paradoxical Benefits of Health Misinformation on Instagram During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Iran	117
Johanna FARKAS, Kund REGÉNYI ⇔ Adolf Eichmann’s Psychological Examination Findings	135
Focus	143
George ANGLIȚOIU ⇔ Weimarisation of the European Public Space	145
Book Reviews	155
Carmen UNGUR-BREHOI ⇔ Conflict Management and the Future of EU Foreign and Security Policy	157
Ioana BORDEIANU ⇔ Law, Migration, and the Construction of Whiteness: Mobility Within the European Union	163
Cristina-Maria Dogot ⇔ The New International Challenges, some Inflection Points	169
The Voice of Students	173
Tamás Kádár ⇔ Peace. EU and Peace. Between Aspiration and Reality – Interview	175
ABOUT AUTHORS	179

ISSN-L: 1841-9259
ISSN 2247 / 8450