

The European Union's strategy for increasing the living conditions of the population in the member states

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Abstract. *In this article, the authors propose to analyze the European Union's Strategy for Improving Living Conditions on a total, as well as in each country part of the Community. The European Commission considers the need to ensure respect for fundamental human rights, aiming to implement a program to ensure economic well-being and social cohesion. This article will devote a space of social inclusion that can be expressed by monetary or non-monetary indicators that highlight the danger of poverty risk that is different from one country to another. A number of countries have made significant progress in improving living conditions, with others experiencing even more negative aspects. To highlight these elements, the authors analyzed income levels and their distribution across Member States, ranking hierarchically on the basis of these indicators a number of countries where immediate action is needed to ensure a level playing field. The study highlights the inequality of revenue distribution, suggesting the need for important measures, especially in those countries where there are lagging behind. Concretely, an analysis is made of the existence of adequate incomes as a fundamental requirement for housing in all EU countries. And here are hierarchies that highlight the situation of each state. In the final part, the authors focus on the social protection that needs to be ensured by each country. On this background, an analysis of Romania's situation was carried out resulting in vigorous measures being taken under the heading of Living Conditions of the Population.*

Keywords: social exclusion, at-risk-of-poverty rate, social protection, housing cost, criminality.

JEL Classification: H55, I38, R21.

Introduction

The European Strategy for 2020 foresees the need for sustained economic growth so as to ensure better living conditions for the entire population of the European Union. The European Union's Platform against Poverty is one that covers a number of issues that focus primarily on economic, social and territorial growth, as an element of European and national cohesion. The European Commission considers the need to ensure respect for fundamental rights of the population by trying to ensure economic well-being and social cohesion so that the whole community of the community lives in dignified conditions and takes an active part in social life. On the other hand, it is intended to mobilize the entire population to live in better living conditions, to ensure the conditions for a job and, in this way, the access of all people to the benefits that society offers. Against this background, it is intended to ensure that the fundamental objectives of the European Union's strategy are met in 2020 so as to alleviate, if not disappear, the different situations and circumstances that affect the population of a number of countries.

One of the directions that is intended to act and accomplish is that, ultimately, 20 million people will no longer be socially excluded. Economic integration and job creation have been agreed since 2008 and have been specified in 2010 as the framework within which action must be taken to ensure that the European Strategy for 2020 removes social concerns, secures social inclusion and ensures a cohabitation in reasonable social conditions.

Literature review

Alkire and Santos (2014) analyzes the scope, robustness and reliability of the Multidimensional Poverty Index as a measure of acute poverty. Anghelache, Anghel and Panait (2017) studied the main economic and financial developments of the EU Member States, insisting on the period after 2007, when Romania became a member of the European Union. Atkinson and Brandolini (2010) consider it necessary to re-examine the concept of well-being used to measure income inequality and the relationship between poverty and poverty. Anghelache (2016) undertook a comprehensive study on the economic situation in Romania, analyzed and interpreted the evolution of the main macroeconomic indicators from 1997 to the present, paying particular attention to socio-economic development as well as to the analysis of living standards. Shortall (2008) considers that EU rural development programs misapply social participation processes and categorizes some groups of people as socially excluded, although they are not, simply because the groups concerned do not participate in those programs. Anghelache (2008) draws up a treaty on the theoretical and practical notions of the statistical apparatus used in economic and financial analyzes. Pećiak and Tusińska (2015) show the common position of the EU Member States on social protection and analyze a series of statistical documents on the fight against poverty, doubting the effectiveness of EU policy on poverty and social exclusion. Anghelache et al. (2006) perform a synthesis of the specific indicators applied for measuring the level of poverty, which are used in the macroeconomic analysis and international comparisons. Saraceno (2015) believes that the

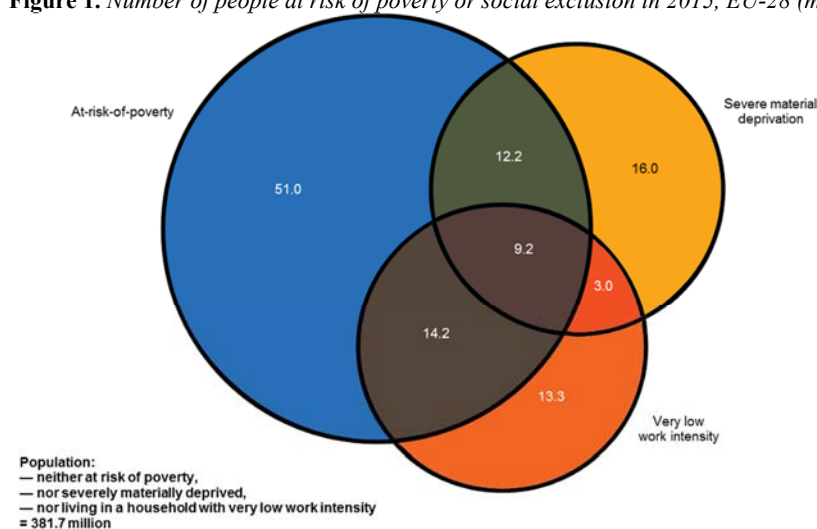
objective of reducing poverty and social exclusion found in the 2020 European Strategy seems to be more distant than its foundation, due to the long-standing financial crisis and the austerity measures taken to deal with this crisis. Marlier and Atkinson (2010) analyze a set of indicators for measuring poverty and social exclusion applicable at multinational level. Anghelache and Anghel (2016) make a relevant synthesis of the concepts, theories and calculus relations specific to the statistical and mathematical instrumentation, applicable in complex analyzes of socio-economic phenomena. Nolan and Whelan (2010) investigate the contribution of non-monetary indicators to improving the identification of those experiencing poverty and the prospect offered by the application of material deprivation indicators in comparative country analyzes. Saraceno and Keck (2010) studies models to identify intergenerational obligations regarding financial support and care for certain categories of people - children, the elderly, as well as sharing social responsibility between family and state intergenerations. Hall and Jones (2007) have made a model showing that by the middle of the century the optimal share of health spending will exceed 30%, showing that health concerns are rising as revenue increases. Hervey (2008) analyzes whether the European Union's health governance through the "Open Method of Coordination" is advancing a neoliberal agenda for the modernization of health care. Hermann (2017) notes that rising poverty and inequality are seen in crisis countries, and believes that switching from the open method of coordination to economic governance could increase the pressure on other countries to introduce similar reforms, further weakening the European social model. Faist (2009) tries to identify and clarify the theoretical notions on the transnational social issue and analyzes the implications of social rights policy and social standards. Kvist (2015) demonstrates that transnational models indicate a positive relationship between social investment policies and returns. Besley and Persson (2010) performs an analytical structure in which state capacity is modeled as government-oriented investment for the future, closely linked to growth and growth patterns. Bar and Leukhina (2010) studied aspects of economic and demographic transformations and their links, taking into account the historical changes in youth mortality and sector-specific productivity. Jorgenson and Timmer (2011) highlight the important role of the service sector in the economic activity of the European Union, insisting on the substantial heterogeneity of this. Akbulut (2011) develops an economic model that can explain the simultaneous growth of women's employment and the growth of the service sector. Gibler and Tyvimaa (2014) assessed the context of the housing market in Finland from the perspective of consumer segmentation-related potential. Norris and Shiels (2007) analyze variations in the quality and accessibility of housing in the European Union and propose a typology of international variations in living conditions. Wonka et al. (2010) focus on the size and scope of the EU interest group population. Gruszczyńska and Heiskanen (2012) develop a 10-year analysis in Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, where there have been significant socio-political changes related to some crimes committed such as homicide, assault, rape, etc., but some less frequent offenses in police statistics such as corruption or money laundering are also addressed.

Research methodology, data, results and discussions

▪ Social inclusion

There are several concepts about poverty and social exclusion that can not be measured only statistically. As a result of monetary and non- monetary indicators we find that the risk of poverty is quite severe in a number of countries that tackle the social aspects trails. A number of indicators are relevant to social inclusion analysis. Measuring progress in terms of strategy implementation by 2020 makes it possible to highlight situations that reflect different situations and circumstances in which Member States of the European Union population live. In 2014 there were 122 million people in the European Union, about 24.5% of the entire population, living in delicate material or socially excluded. Comparing the situation in the year 2013 we find that the number of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion has decreased by 564 000, equivalent to a 0.1%, which means very little. The results for the European Union of 28 states, we also consider the UK after Brexit, calculated as a national average, result in a series of differentiations. In Bulgaria, in 2012, very close to half of the population is considered to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion, i.e. 49.3%. In 2014, 40.3% in Romania, while in Greece 36% of the population is in this situation. More than one third of the population is at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 10 other EU Member States. These are Lithuania, Hungary, Croatia, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Ireland, Cyprus, Latvia and Estonia. Some of the EU Member States with the lowest proportion of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2014 were the Czech Republic with 14.8%, the Netherlands 16.5%, Sweden 16.9%, Finland 7.3%, Iceland 11.2%, Norway 13.5% and Switzerland 16.4%. Data comparing in 2014 with those recorded in 2013, however, show a slight improvement in the situation, but this is not significant in the long run. In the years 2015 and 2016, light steps have been taken, but it remains a delicate situation to be taken into account by the European Commission.

Figure 1. Number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2015, EU-28 (million)



Note: the sum of the data for the seven groups at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion differs slightly from the total (published elsewhere) due to rounding.
 Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_pees01)

Source: Eurostat.

Table 1. People at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Evolution in 2010-2015

	Number of persons (thousand)				Proportion of the total population (%)			
	2010	2012	2014	2015	2010	2012	2014	2015
EU-28	117678	123614	121897	118820	23.7	24.7	24.4	23.7
EA-19 (Euro Area)	72723	77373	77825	76665	22.0	23.3	23.5	23.1
Belgium	2235	2356	2339	2336	20.8	21.6	21.2	21.1
Bulgaria	3719	3621	2909	2982	49.2	49.3	40.1	41.3
Czech Republic	1495	1580	1532	1444	14.4	15.4	14.8	14.0
Denmark	1007	965	1006	999	18.3	17.5	17.9	17.7
Germany	15962	15909	16508	16083	19.7	19.6	20.6	20.0
Estonia	289	311	338	315	21.7	23.4	26.0	24.2
Ireland	1220	1392	1267	1204	27.3	30.3	27.5	25.9
Greece	3031	3795	3885	3829	27.7	34.6	36.0	35.7
Spain	12029	12628	13402	13175	26.1	27.2	29.2	28.6
France	11712	11760	11540	11048	19.2	19.1	18.5	17.7
Croatia	1322	1384	1243	1216	31.1	32.6	29.3	29.1
Italy	14891	17975	17146	17469	25.0	29.9	28.3	28.7
Cyprus	202	234	234	244	24.6	27.1	27.4	28.9
Latvia	798	731	645	606	38.2	36.2	32.7	30.9
Lithuania	1068	975	804	857	34.0	32.5	27.3	29.3
Luxembourg	83	95	96	95	17.1	18.4	19.0	18.5
Hungary	2948	3272	3097	2735	29.9	33.5	31.8	28.2
Malta	86	94	99	94	21.2	23.1	23.8	22.4
Netherlands	2483	2492	2751	2744	15.1	15.0	16.5	16.4
Austria	1566	1542	1609	1551	18.9	18.5	19.2	18.3
Poland	10409	101128	9337	8761	27.8	26.7	24.7	23.4
Portugal	2693	2667	2863	2765	25.3	25.3	27.5	26.6
Romania	8425	8673	8043	7435	41.5	43.2	40.3	37.4
Slovenia	366	392	410	385	18.3	19.6	20.4	19.2
Slovakia	1118	1109	960	963	20.6	20.5	18.4	18.4
Finland	890	916	927	904	16.9	17.2	17.3	16.8
Sweden	1419	1519	1636	1555	15.0	15.6	16.9	16.0
United Kingdom	14211	15099	15271	15028	23.2	24.1	24.1	23.5

Source: Eurostat; data processed by the authors.

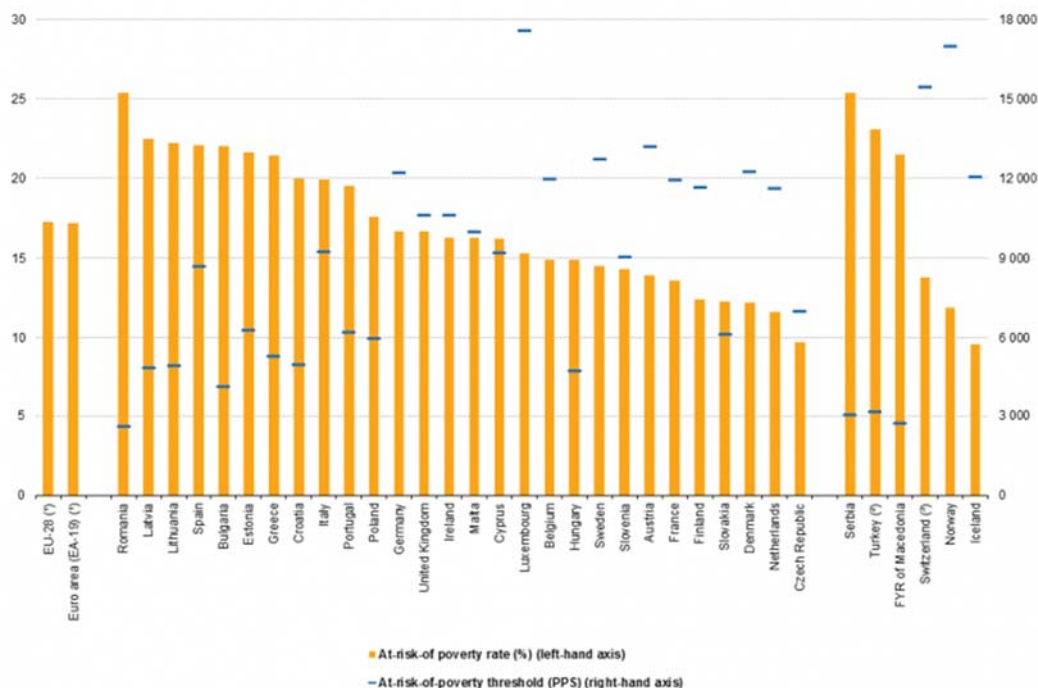
There are presented the average data recorded in the European Union 28 states as in the first 18 states. It is noted that in some countries such as Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, even Germany or France the share of the population stagnated or increased somewhat. Romania, from 2010 to 2015, saw a decrease in the percentage of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion from 41.5% in 2010 to 40.3% in 2014 and 37.4% in 2015. Countries with a special economic potential, for example the United Kingdom, saw an increase in the proportion of the population at risk of poverty from 22.7% in 2011 to 24.1% in 2014 and almost the same level in 2015 (23.5%). Other countries, such as Malta or the Netherlands, have experienced an impact on the percentage of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

▪ Income distribution

Another aspect of the prospect of poverty and social exclusion is the European Union's revenue and the way it is distributed. Between 2011 and 2015, there were no spectacular leaps. It is also somewhat difficult because resources are scarce and the ability of Member States to create additional revenue and increase the primary incomes of the population are limited. Romania, also this time, is in a more delicate situation in which the proportion of

the low-income population is much higher than in the other Member States. A number of social categories are vulnerable and at risk of poverty. First, the unemployed are the most vulnerable group, of which 47.2% are people who were unemployed at risk of poverty in 2014. In 2015 and 2016, this situation improved very little.

Figure 2. *At risk of poverty rate and threshold, during 2015*



(*) At-risk-of-poverty threshold (PPS): not available.

(*) 2013.

(*) 2014.

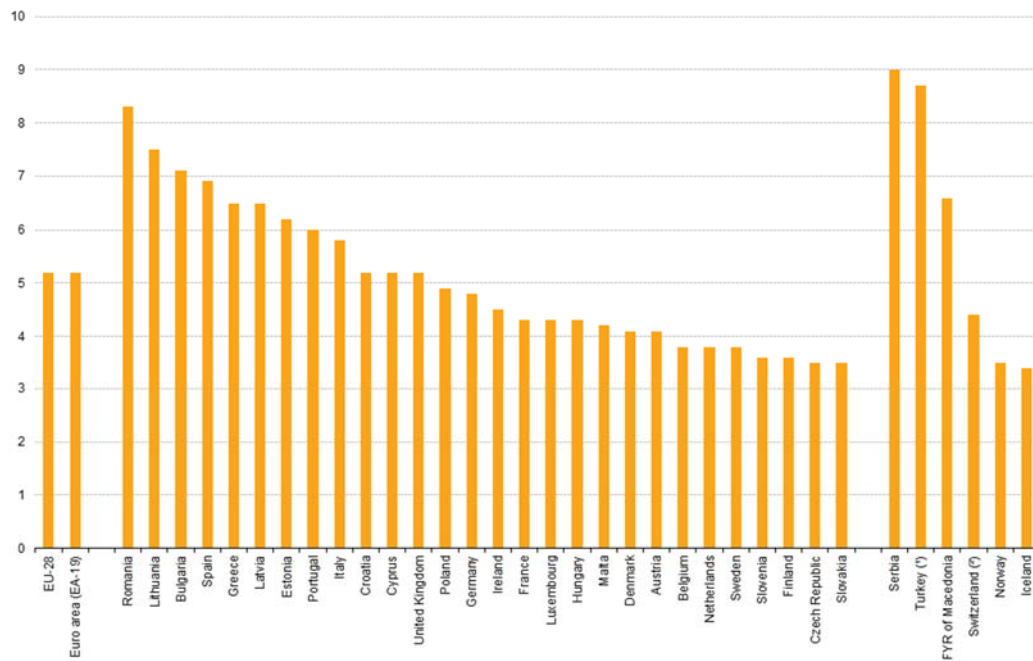
Source: Eurostat (online data codes: ilc_i101 and ilc_i102)

Source: Eurostat.

This graph presents the situation of the population in each country of the EU member states at the risk of poverty and the percentages as well as the absolute number. Because in the figure we have the percentages of the population at risk, and on the right side the absolute value of the population at risk, it shows that a number of countries are still facing particularly serious problems. Unfortunately, Romania is at the forefront of the poverty risk rate of 25.3%. Data on economic inequality becomes particularly important in expressing relative poverty because the distribution of economic resources has a precise focus and can not cover the prospect of poverty. There are a number of inequalities in the distribution of population incomes, data specific to each EU member country, shows that on average 20% of the population receives 5.2 times more income while the share of the population with insufficient or limited income is sufficient. Concerning the median of personal incomes compared to the risk of poverty in the 28 Member States, we find that 24.6% are below the level recorded in 2014 and 60% of the

members of the society live on low income. The relative median in Romania in relation to the poverty risk is the highest 31.2% and this is quite alarming if we compare it with the lowest recorded by Finland 13.9%.

Figure 3. *Inequality of revenue distribution, 2015*



(*) 2013.

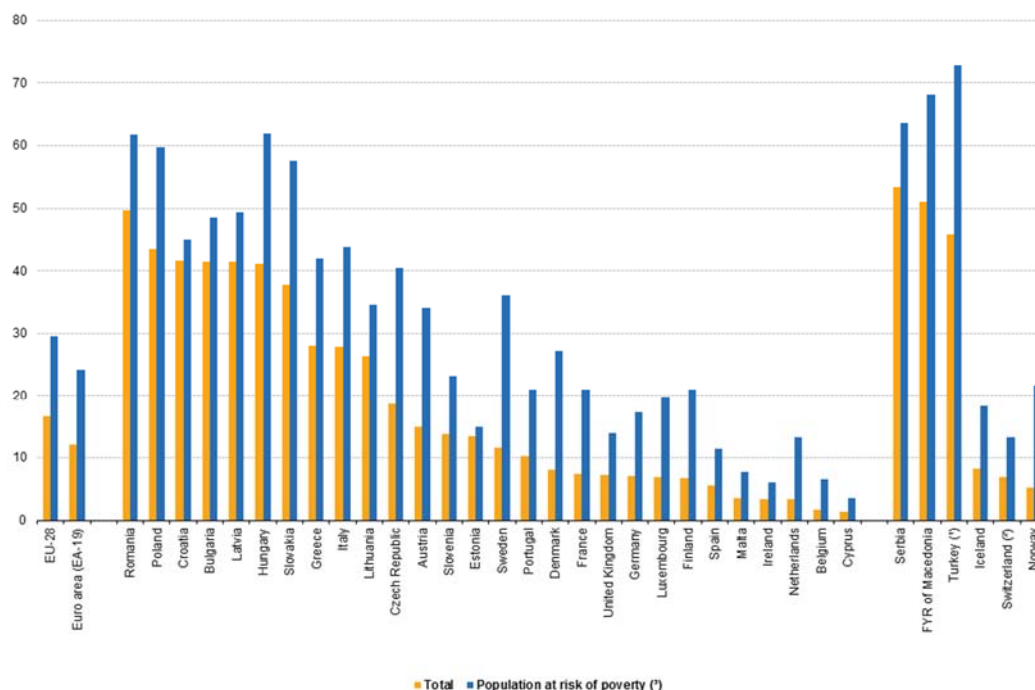
(*) 2014.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_di11)

Source: Eurostat.

▪ Housing

The existence of adequate revenues is a fundamental requirement that the European Union must vigorously pursue. In 2014, 4 out of 10 people in all EU countries lived in apartments 25.6%, lived in semi-detached houses, and 3.7% lived in proper homes. An element that expresses the dimension of the quality of housing is the size of the space that a dwelling offers for an average family. 17.1% of the population of the 28 countries live in highly agglomerated housing. In 2015, 2015 and 2016, 11.4% of the population of the EU Member States lived in homes where they invested or spent about 40% of the income they earned. It is an element that shows that, on the one hand, the income situation, the living conditions and, on the other hand, the high costs they imply. Countries such as Malta and Cyprus have very good living conditions, while most of the eastern and even central European countries, which later joined the European Union, are in a delicate situation, spending more than 40% of their income on housing.

Figure 4. Overcrowding rate, 2015 (% of specified population)

(*) 2013.
 (*) 2014.
 (*) Population below 60 % of median equivalised income.
 Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_lvho05a)

Source: Eurostat.

This table shows a ranking of countries with the most delicate living conditions. Note that the overall living conditions and the population at risk of poverty are compared. Of course, in all Member States the share of the population at risk of poverty is higher, and Romania is also the first to be followed by Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Slovakia, Lithuania and even Greece.

Table 2. Housing cost overburden rate by tenure status in 2015

	Total population	Owner occupied with mortgage or loan	Owner occupied, no outstanding mortgage or housing loan	Tenant – rent at market price	Tenant – rent at reduced price or free
EU-28	11.3	6.7	6.8	27.0	12.4
EA-19 (Euro area)	11.2	7.2	5.6	25.5	11.4
Belgium	9.4	2.4	1.8	33.7	14.2
Bulgaria	14.8	10.4	14.1	30.8	16.6
Czech Republic	10.4	6.0	6.0	31.0	10.7
Denmark	15.1	5.3	4.3	31.9	:
Germany	15.6	10.7	9.2	22.8	16.1
Estonia	6.8	4.3	4.5	42.3	11.0
Ireland	4.6	2.7	1.5	18.0	3.7
Greece	40.9	31.5	37.9	54.4	49.8
Spain	10.3	8.7	2.7	43.3	9.9
France	5.7	1.9	1.7	14.9	9.7

	Total population	Owner occupied with mortgage or loan	Owner occupied, no outstanding mortgage or housing loan	Tenant – rent at market price	Tenant – rent at reduced price or free
Croatia	7.2	3.4	6.3	36.4	11.6
Italy	8.6	4.8	2.8	32.7	9.9
Cyprus	3.9	4.7	0.4	19.7	1.1
Latvia	8.1	15.5	6.2	13.6	9.4
Lithuania	9.1	7.7	8.3	30.3	13.4
Luxembourg	6.0	1.4	0.7	23.2	4.0
Hungary	8.5	11.9	5.4	32.4	12.7
Malta	1.1	1.0	0.5	14.2	1.5
Netherlands	14.9	11.3	2.2	25.0	13.0
Austria	6.4	1.4	1.6	15.3	6.8
Poland	8.7	12.6	7.1	26.3	10.9
Portugal	9.1	6.6	3.2	35.4	7.6
Romania	15.9	21.7	15.5	45.7	:
Slovenia	6.1	11.5	3.2	25.9	8.2
Slovakia	9.1	30.9	6.0	8.4	9.1
Finland	4.9	1.6	2.0	16.7	10.6
Sweden	7.5	2.5	5.5	18.3	53.9
United Kingdom	12.5	5.0	3.9	37.3	15.4

Source: Eurostat; data processed by the authors.

In this table is presented a ranking of the member countries of the European Union taking into account a number of essential elements namely: total population, owner-occupied dwelling, share of dwellings with good living conditions. This table expresses in a ranking of countries in somewhat alphabetical order the situation from this point of view of the cost of housing.

▪ Social protection

The issues presented to date reveal the difficulties encountered by the population of most of the Member States of the European Union that have joined in Stages 2 and 3 and the rest of which are a number of countries.

It is taken into account that in the conditions of low incomes that bring a significant percentage of the population in the risk area, the limited income, the living conditions, it is a problem for the Member States to pay attention to social protection. Since 2007, when Romania joined the European Union until 2016, social protection has increased by 3.8%. In 2012, there was a negative evolution in the sense that the losses increased by 3.3% on average compared to the GDP growth of 1.9% on average, resulting in a slight improvement of the social protection.

Among the Member States with reduced social protection we meet the countries that have accessed the European Union in good conditions for social protection, we meet France, Denmark, which provides about 33% of social protection, quite consistent. Expenditure incurred by Member States in ensuring the living conditions of the third generation population, especially pensioners, shows that attention is paid to them, but the costs are sufficiently low.

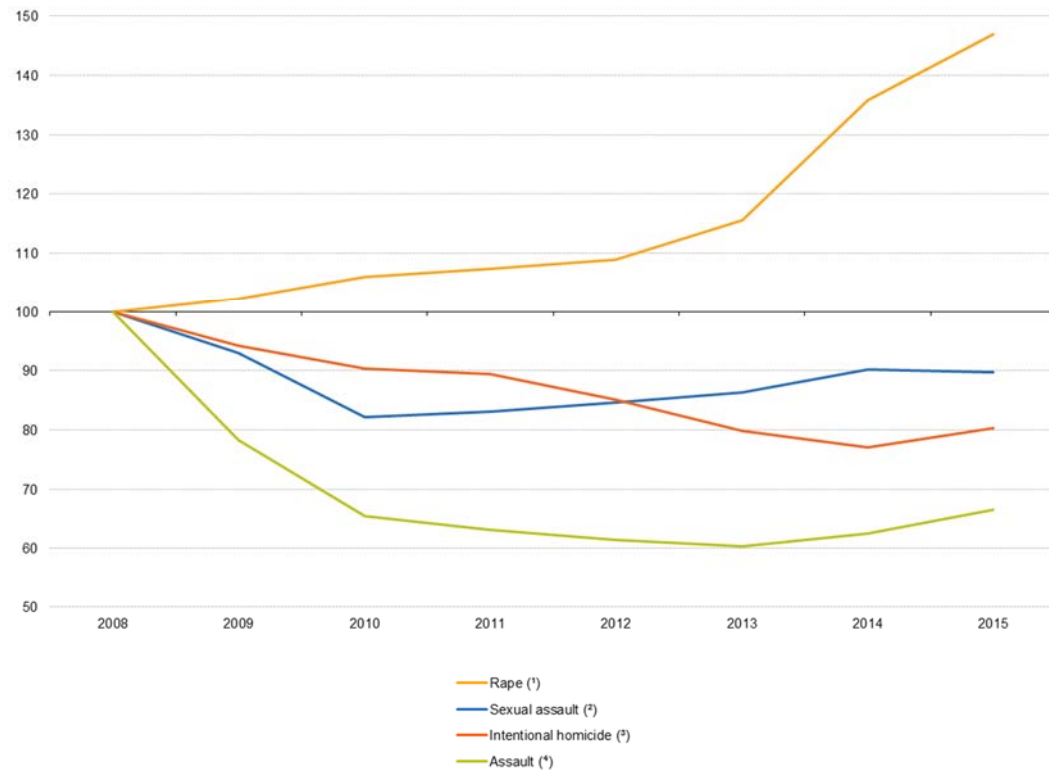
Table 3 shows the evolution of social protection spending over the period 2004-2014, which in most Member States has grown, if not significant, at least important. As far as Romania is concerned, it is estimated that in 2004 expenditures represented almost 13%, increased to 14.1% in 2008, 16.9% in 2009, 17.3% in 2010, after which it decreased in the next four years to 16.4% in 2011, 15.4% in 2012, 14.9% in 2013, 14.8% in 2014.

Table 3. *Expenditure on social protection, 2004-2014 (% of GDP)*

	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014
EU-28	:	:	25.9	28.6	28.7	28.7
EA-19 (Euro area)	26.5	26.2	26.5	29.2	29.3	29.7
Belgium	26.9	26.6	27.7	29.4	29.6	30.3
Bulgaria	:	13.8	14.7	17.0	16.6	18.5
Czech Republic	17.8	17.6	17.9	20.1	20.4	19.7
Denmark	29.9	28.4	28.9	32.4	32.0	32.9
Germany	29.0	27.8	27.1	29.8	28.7	29.1
Estonia	13.0	12.0	14.7	17.6	15.0	15.1
Ireland	16.5	16.7	19.9	24.0	23.2	20.6
Greece	18.9	20.6	22.8	26.2	28.2	26.0
Spain	19.9	20.0	21.4	24.6	25.5	25.4
France	30.5	30.4	30.4	32.9	33.5	34.3
Croatia	:	:	18.6	20.8	21.1	21.6
Italy	25.0	25.6	26.7	28.9	29.3	29.9
Cyprus	16.4	16.7	17.6	19.9	22.3	23.0
Latvia	12.6	11.9	12.1	18.3	14.4	14.5
Lithuania	13.4	13.3	15.9	18.9	16.3	14.7
Luxembourg	22.1	20.8	21.2	22.7	22.8	22.7
Hungary	20.4	22.0	22.4	22.6	21.4	19.9
Malta	17.8	17.8	18.1	19.3	19.1	18.2
Netherlands	23.2	26.5	26.4	29.7	31.0	30.9
Austria	28.5	27.7	27.8	29.8	29.3	30.0
Poland	20.3	19.7	19.3	19.7	18.9	19.1
Portugal	23.4	23.7	23.4	25.8	26.4	26.9
Romania	12.8	12.8	14.1	17.3	15.4	14.8
Slovenia	22.8	22.3	21.0	24.4	24.9	24.1
Slovakia	16.9	16.0	15.7	18.2	18.0	18.5
Finland	25.6	25.4	25.1	29.3	30.1	31.9
Sweden	29.8	28.6	27.7	28.6	29.3	29.6
United Kingdom	24.6	25.3	25.9	29.1	29.2	27.4

Source: Eurostat; data processed by the authors.

It is noted that countries with a balanced economy, with a population not as big as Romania, have increased their social protection spending. For example, in the UK, they were 24.6% in 2004, reaching 29.1% in 2010, and then kept at this constant level in the coming years. Germany maintained a constant rate of 29.0% in 2004, 30.5% in 2009, 29.0% in 2013, and 29.1% in 2014. We can give other examples, but it follows that the European Union Regarding the increase of the social protection expenditures. The most vulnerable are the younger generations who are usually unemployed, a large number of them, the third-age population and, last but not least, the unemployed themselves who, on the basis of somewhat approximate conversions, do not find a job.

Figure 5. Police-recorded rape, sexual assault, intentional homicide and assault

(*) Italy and UK Scotland not available for all years.

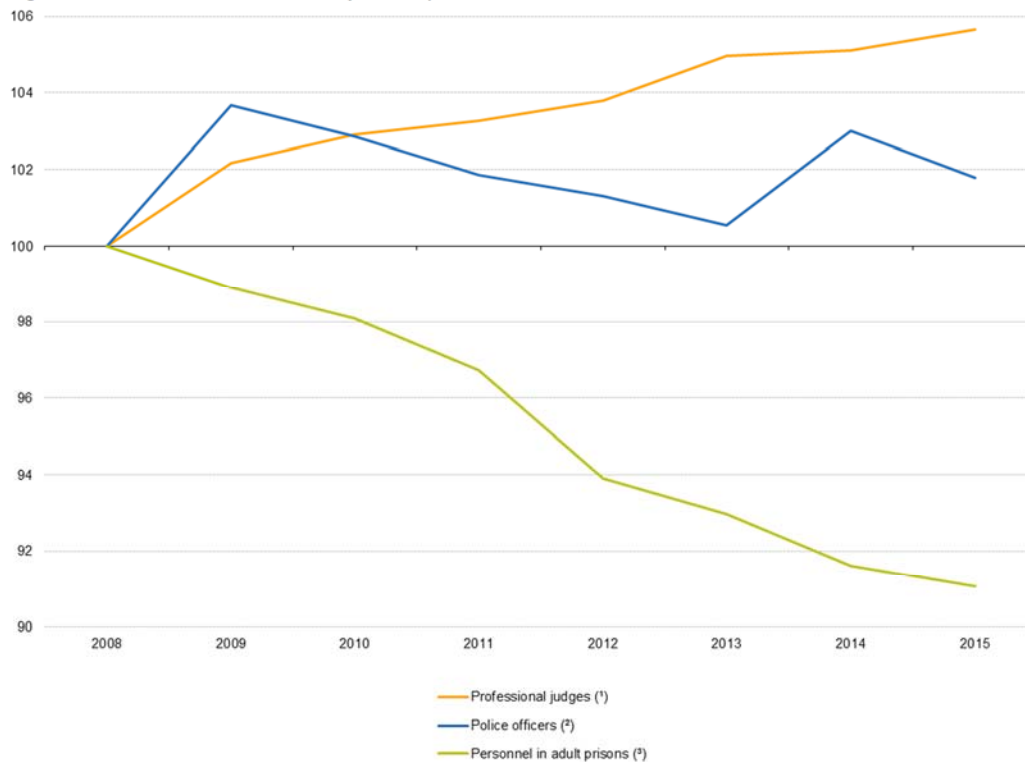
(†) Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovakia and UK England and Wales not available for all years.

(‡) The Netherlands, UK England and Wales and UK Scotland not available for all years.

(§) Poland and UK Scotland not available for all years.

Source: Eurostat.

We should also refer to criminality in the Member States. Regarding this, it is noted that despite the efforts made, the level of criminality remains high. There have been many abuses, acts of violence, especially against those who are called upon to ensure public order. Among the main aspects of crime, we encounter abductions, abuses, homicide or assault on peaceful people. Of course, as these anti-social violence acts become more frequent, the problem is raised by the staff in the crime protection system, but this has only occurred in the field of justice, and the police staff and penitentiary staff have although criminality has been steadily rising.

Figure 6. Personnel in the criminal justice system, EU-28, 2008-2015

(¹) Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, UK England and Wales and UK Northern Ireland not available for all years.

(²) Germany, Italy, Ireland and Latvia not available for all years.

(³) Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Greece, France, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden not available for all years.

Source: Eurostat.

Conclusions

From this authors' study on the living conditions of the population of the EU member states, theoretical and practical conclusions are drawn. Theoretically, it starts from the European Union's Strategy, which stipulates that in 2020 it will be ensured that the fundamental objectives of the European Union's policy are fulfilled so as to alleviate and even eliminate the various situations and circumstances that affect the population of some countries. In particular, the authors analyzed the situation of social inclusion, the income situation and the distribution of these incomes, revealed the inequality of the distribution of these incomes, and ultimately made an insight into the social protection situation in the EU Member States. Concretely, it was concluded that there is a large discrepancy between the EU member countries, with a number of countries with outstanding results in this area of living conditions, with other countries still lagging behind where the gap between high incomes and Small is special. Another conclusion is that in the remaining member states from the point of view of ensuring the fundamental conditions of life, additional measures are taken to reduce the gaps separating them from the states with a particular situation. From a practical point of view, on the basis of the data provided by

Eurostat, the authors made classifications on each indicator to accurately suggest the state of each Member State. In this context, the need to implement the European Strategy has been permanently addressed so that by 2020 economic growth will ensure the improvement of living conditions for the entire population of the European Union. Another conclusion is that the study is somewhat limited, but it can be extended by using statistical and econometric models and methods that highlight the existing concrete situation and indicators, as well as the prospect of anticipating a future evolution ensure the approximation of living standards between the Member States of the European Union.

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