

THE PHENOMENON OF POVERTY IN THE WORLD

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Poverty remains a topical issue and a significant global problem. Even though there has been a global decline in extreme poverty in recent decades, many communities and regions continue to experience high levels of deprivation. In today's world, poverty is emerging as a persistent global problem, profoundly affecting societies worldwide. In this context, Romania is currently facing significant challenges with regard to this phenomenon, and recent statistical data highlight a worrying reality. At the same time, the North-South gap, both globally and regionally, including the European Union space, accentuates the complexity and scale of this societal concern. It is critical to recognize and comprehend how poverty essentially impacts human rights, including those that relate to housing, food, health care, and education. Understanding this phenomenon develops our empathy and makes us more aware with regard to other people's suffering. Poverty can be an obstacle to sustainable development worldwide, and knowing the factors that contribute to it allows us to identify effective and sustainable solutions to improve the quality of life for all people. Poverty can also contribute to instability and conflict, and by knowing and understanding its causes, we can help prevent these conflicts and create a more stable and secure environment. One of the main objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [1] set forth by the United Nations is to reduce poverty. Raising awareness of the issue and making efforts to combat it will help to achieve these objectives and enhance living conditions all over the world.

Assumptions:

1. Areas affected by conflict and political instability often encounter difficulties in attracting foreign investment, developing infrastructure and maintaining a stable economic environment, which can contribute to the perpetuation of poverty.
2. When access to health and education services is restricted, poverty can spiral out of control. The likelihood that the poor will be able to escape their

circumstances may be diminished if they do not have access to high-quality healthcare and education.

Although we deal with the visible and actual phenomenon of poverty on a daily basis, the definition of poverty continues to represent a challenge. The question, "What is poverty?" has been raised by many authors, and several definitions have been provided by specialised literature, all attempting to define a comprehensive idea that is both straightforward and complex [2, p. 3]. A multidimensional definition of poverty has been outlined by personalities such as the Indian economist Amartya Sen, winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize in economics, who considers poverty as the lack of individual freedom and absence of possibility to take part to social life, bringing it closer to the concept of a standard of living. After investigating various disasters in India, Bangladesh and the Sahara in the 1940s, Amartya Sen found that famine occurred even when food supplies were not significantly different from those of previous years, and that in some famine-stricken regions food was exported. He argues that the phenomenon involves a combination of social and economic factors that affect different social groups and influence people's choices [3].

In 1997, Maria Moldoveanu introduced elements such as spiritual poverty, poverty of ideas, moral poverty and poverty of the soul, uniting them in a concept of cumulative poverty. Furthermore, in 1969, Mollie Orshanski wrote in an article that "poverty, like beauty, lies in the eyes of the beholder" [4] i.e. poverty is a subjective and relative issue [5].

People with extremely low incomes, who are unable to attain an acceptable standard of living in society, are said to be in a state of poverty. Numerous drawbacks, including low income, inadequate health care, inadequate housing, unemployment, and lack of education are some of its defining characteristics.

In the 1990s, a prevalent phrase in analyses of poverty suggested that an impoverished American would be regarded as wealthy in India by drawing a comparison between perceptions of poverty in India and America. Over time, the gap between the two scenarios has closed, to the point where an impoverished American living in a place like Nomad might not even be regarded as wealthy in India, and most definitely not in Romania [6].

As regards the history of the North-South Divide [7], it can be argued that the Cold War is largely responsible for the division of countries into North and South. During this period, countries were classified mainly according to their location, i.e. between eastern Russia and western America. Eastern bloc countries, such as the Soviet Union and China, were classified as Second World countries, while in the West, the United States and its allies were classified as First World countries, and poor countries were eventually classified as Third World countries. This classification was later replaced, after Second World countries joined the First World countries. A new criterion for classifying nations was established, called the North-South divide. First World countries are known as the North, and Third World countries include the South [8].

The United Nations Organization (UN) plays a significant role in tackling the problem of global poverty. Combating poverty and promoting sustainable development are key objectives of the UN, reflected in its actions and numerous specialised programmes and agencies.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [9].

In 2015, United Nations member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes 17 goals known as the Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 1 is dedicated to eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions by 2030 [10].

Several other goals are also closely related to the first one. For example, the second goal is dedicated to eradicating hunger, ensuring food security, promoting sustainable agriculture and improving nutrition [11]. Ensuring and promoting a healthy life and well-being at all ages is the third goal [12]. The 4th objective is aimed at ensuring adequate education and promoting learning for all [13]. The 6th one is also related to poverty and is aimed at ensuring clean water and sanitation for all people [14]. The 7th relates to affordable prices and clean energy by building resilient infrastructure and promoting sustainable industry [15].

The European Union (EU) is addressing poverty and fosters social and economic unity among its member states through a variety of programs and policies. There are several approaches that the European Union employs in its fight against poverty. For example, the European Social Fund (ESF) is one of the EU's main financial instruments for fighting unemployment and poverty. The fund supports projects that improve access to education, training and labour market integration [16].

The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion (EAPN) is a European network working to promote social rights and citizens' participation, with the aim of reducing poverty and social exclusion [17]; Europe 2020 objectives: this strategy, adopted in 2010, aims to promote smart, sustainable and socially inclusive growth. One of the key objectives is to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion [18, p. 1]; Minimum Income Directive: The EU has adopted a directive encouraging Member States to establish minimum income schemes to ensure that all citizens have a minimum standard of living. However, the implementation of this directive remains largely a national responsibility [19]; and the Temporary Support Instrument for the Mitigation of Unemployment Risks in Emergency Situations (SURE): It was created in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic to provide financial support to Member States affected by the economic crisis and to protect jobs and workers; the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted and accentuated social and economic inequalities in Europe. Poverty became a major concern among public opinion and political leaders, and discussions on social protection and economic support became central [20, p. 4–8]. These initiatives reflect the EU's commitment to fighting poverty and promoting social inclusion.

However, it is important to know that the impact of these policies also depends on proper implementation at national and local level in EU Member States.

With 34.4% of its population at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Romania ranks first within the European Union in this regard, according to data released by Eurostat in 2023. The next highest rates are in Bulgaria (32.2%), Greece (26%) and Latvia (26%) [21]. Romania has the highest poverty rate among the working population in the EU, reaching 14.5%, well above the EU average (8.5%) and the values recorded by Bulgaria (9.7%), Hungary (7%), Poland (9.1%) and Spain (11.7%) [22]. Countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia and Hungary show much lower levels of at-risk-of-poverty, indicating the concern of these countries for a social policy that encourages national income redistribution and ensures a standard of living above the poverty line [23].

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