INCLUSIVITY

No. 3, 2026

EDITURA UNIVERSITĂȚII DIN ORADEA

The present journal entitled "*Inclusivity*" was founded under the aegis of the Research Center *EuroINCLUS, Jean Monnet Center of Excellence*, with the support of the European Commission.
The present volume was financed by the European Commission through the Jean Monnet Center of Excellence project *„Identity, Security and Inclusivity in Border Areas of South East Europe" (101127601, EuroINCLUS).*
The contents of the present material and its annexes do not necessarily reflect the opinion or the position of the European Commission.

Cover: Gabriela Antonovici

Address of the editorial office
University of Oradea, EuroINCLUS Research Center, Jean Monnet Center of Excellence
1 Universitatii Street, Oradea, Romania. Tel. 0040 259 408167.
E-mail: inclusivity@uoradea.ro.
https://inclusivity.uoradea.ro/

p-ISSN: 3119 – 9380 **ISSN-L:** 3119 – 9380

e-ISSN: 3119 – 9410

https://inclusivity.uoradea.ro/archive/2026/no3/inclusivity-no3-2026.pdf

Identity • Integration • Inclusion

CONTENTS

https://www.doi.org/10.58603/KHHQ4624

Ethnic Classification Issues and Spatial Characteristics of the Roma Population by Recent Datasets – Evidences From Northeastern Hungary

János Pénzes[1] • Dóra Balázs[2] • István Zoltán Pásztor[3] • Gergely Gribovszky[4] • Dávid Kovács[5]

Abstract
The estimated number of the Roma population can vary significantly depending on the ethnic classification approach, with self-identified data typically being lower, while hetero-identification, i.e. external classification, typically results in higher values. In the study, the former is exemplified by censuses, and the latter – in part – by local government estimates collected by the authors. However, based on the various data sources, the trend seemed clear in Hungary; both the number and proportion of the Roma population have grown dynamically in recent decades. The study uses the example of Northeastern Hungary to explore the differences between the data from census and local government estimates, as well as the territorial pattern of the emerging changes. The different trends emerging from different data sources cause a dilemma, especially in the case of underdeveloped settlement groups, as the census data seem to be resolving the issue, while according to local government estimates, the segregation of Roma at the settlement level is further strengthening.

Keywords
backward areas, census, ethnic geography, identification, Roma population, segregation

Introduction and Methodology

Investigating of nationalities and different ethnic groups, and within this, the determination of the population size of the groups, is an important

[1] PhD habil, associate professor, University of Debrecen, Department of Social Geography and Regional Development Planning, Hungary, E-mail: penzes.janos@science.unideb.hu.
[2] MSc, PhD student, University of Debrecen, Department of Social Geography and Regional Development Planning, Hungary, E-mail: balazsdora94@gmail.com.
[3] PhD, teacher, Kossuth Lajos Teacher Training Secondary Grammar School and Elementary School, Hungary, E-mail: pasztor.istvan@science.unideb.hu.
[4] MSc, teacher, MSZC Budai Nagy Antal Technikum és Szakgimnázium, H-4320 Nagykálló, Hungary, E-mail: gribovszky.gergely@gmail.com.
[5] MA, PhD student, University of Debrecen, Department of Social Geography and Regional Development Planning, Hungary, E-mail: kovacs.david990327@gmail.com.

research issue for anthropology, ethnography, human geography and sociology. At the same time, there are several approaches to ethnic classification, which can lead to very different results.

Regarding the number of the Hungarian Roma population, quite different population data and estimates can be found in the relating sources. The uncertain nature of ethnic studies is not a new phenomenon, but in the case of the Roma population, the results of methods with a specific approach show a particularly large variance. At the same time, in Hungary – regardless of the methodological background and the classification approach – the long-term trend of the increasing number and proportion of the Roma population seemed clear. This trend was broken quite characteristically by the data on the Roma nationality in the 2022 census, which represented a serious significant compared to the total values of the previous 2011 census.

The studied region is of outstanding importance in terms of results based on self-identification (or auto-identification), assumption of origin, identity and language use (this includes the census data aggregated at the settlement level) and aggregates using external classification (or hetero-identification) (this includes the database collected by questioning local governments), as about half of the Hungarian Roma population lives in Northeastern Hungary (covers two NUTS-2 regions, namely Northern Hungary and Northern Great Plain regions. In our study, we try to explore the territorial characteristics of the number and proportion of the Roma population, and to compare the results provided by different classification approaches with settlement level details. In addition to census data and previous council/municipal surveys, this is based on the results of our recent survey.

Previous studies have shown that the proportion of Roma is higher in peripheral, more socio-economically disadvantaged settlements (this correlation is clearly visible in Northeastern Hungary). Therefore, in our study, we pay special attention to exploring the changes in the number and proportion of the Roma population in the underdeveloped settlement groups of the region.

The study uses the example of Northeastern Hungary to explore the differences between the data from census and local government estimates, as well as the territorial pattern of the emerging changes. The background for the local government estimates is provided by a recently completed database containing data from 999 settlements in the examined region. Based on the latter approach, the proportion of the Roma population in Northeastern Hungary increased by about one and a half percentage points, to 17.3%, while based on the census data, it decreased by two percentage points, to 4.6%. The extent of the difference between the two approaches

was basically expected, but the different trend was hardly foreseeable. According to the censuses, the number of settlements with a Roma population ratio of at least 50% has decreased to 14 by 2022, while according to local government estimates, their number has doubled, approaching 140. The different trends emerging from different data sources cause a dilemma, especially in the case of underdeveloped settlement groups, as the census data seem to be resolving the issue, while according to local government estimates, the segregation of Roma at the settlement level is further strengthening.

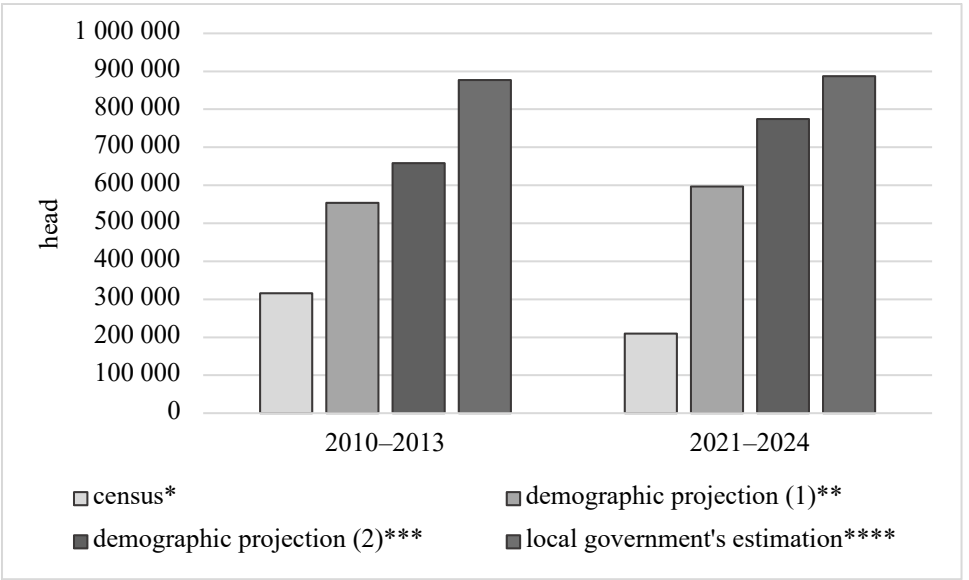
We primarily seek to answer the question of what kind of correlation the proportion of the Roma population and its changes show in the groups formed based on the underdevelopment of the settlements, and whether there are differences in this regard between the different classification methods.

Possibilities to Examine the Number of Roma Population

The markedly different data on the number of Roma population are due to differences in classification (Cserti Csapó, 2008: 101–103; Tátrai et al., 2017: 47–53). Out of the four different approaches – (1) statistical, sociological; (2) ethnographic; (3) anthropological; and (4) consideration of ethnic identity and commitment (Szuhay, 1993: 88–90) – the first and fourth are given greater emphasis in the analyses. In the case of related studies, the most significant differences are shown by the population data derived from auto-identification and hetero-identification. Censuses offer a good example of the former, while expert estimates and classifications by interviewers provide an approach for the latter (Ladányi, Szelényi, 2004: 126–135).

The variety in the total number of Roma population resulting from differing approaches are clearly illustrated in Figure 1, which, in addition to the censuses, includes the demographic estimates based on the sociological data survey of István Kemény (Hablicsek, 2007: 7–10) and its further calculation (Hablicsek et al., 2019: 50–52). In addition, the projected data (Obádovics 2022: 281–285) of the estimation carried out by the Population Research Institute of the Central Statistical Office (KSH NKI) (Kapitány et al., 2014; Szabó, 2022: 110–115) are also among the related estimates. The summary prepared based on the estimates of the local governments gave the highest values (Pénzes et al., 2018: 9). In light of all this, the 2011 census value of ~315,000 people and the local government estimate of ~876,000 people indicate a significant variance in determining the number of the Roma population in Hungary.

Figure 1: *Data and estimates about the number of Roma in Hungary for the periods 2010–2013 and 2021–2022, head*



(Source: authors' edition by the datasets from *HCSO census, 2011 and 2022; ** Kapitány et al., 2014 and Obádovics, 2022; ***Hablicsek, 2007 and Hablicsek et al., 2019; ****Pénzes et al., 2018 and UD 2022–2024)

In addition to the static population data, it is particularly interesting that the differences between the different approaches are increasing by the 2020s. Based on the 2022 census, there was a significant decrease in the self-reported data, while demographic estimates predicted a further significant increase. The former value decreased to 209,900 people, while according to demographic estimates, the number of Roma in Hungary increased to 597,000 and 774,000 people, respectively. Based on the local government estimates collected in 2022–2024, a Roma community of 887,000 people could be expected.

It is important to emphasize that we do not aim to classify any of the approaches. In our opinion, each study and survey has its relevance and conveys very important information, whether it is about the number of Roma people who have declared their identity or about the size of the community that an external informant considers to be Roma.

In the remainder of our study, we will examine the main characteristics of two different classification approaches – self-identified censuses and local government estimates as a method of hetero-identification – and conduct a detailed territorial examination of the results they provide, using the example of Northeastern Hungary.

Censuses

Censuses provide regular and detailed data on nationalities, but since they are based on self-identification, the results depend largely on identity and its acceptance. The number of national groups can be inferred based on declared nationality/ethnicity, cultural identity (latter one used only in the 2001 census), mother tongue, and language used in family and friends. In censuses, answering nationality and religious affiliation is not mandatory, so non-respondents cannot be classified as a national group (Tátrai, 2014: 507).

The Roma population in Hungary is extremely heterogeneous, and not all Roma subgroups can identify with the designation "Gypsy" or "Roma", the census category, or with other Roma subgroups (Szuhay 1993: 88–90; Tátrai et al. 2017: 48).

At the same time, language use does not determine belonging to the Roma population, since, according to the 2022 census, the proportion of Roma native speakers (Romani, Boyash, etc.) is barely more than 10% of those belonging to the Roma nationality. The majority of the Roma have a dual, Hungarian and Roma nationality affiliation (Kemény, Janky, 2003: 311).

The self-identification of the Roma population varies depending on the social conditions of the given period, as well as the degree of discrimination, stigmatization and racist public discourse (Csepeli, Simon, 2004: 135; Durst, 2010: 180; Fosztó, 1997: 27; Ladányi, Virág, 2009: 5; Szuhay, 2007: 98–99; Tátrai et al., 2017: 48). It is certainly also important whether the census is preceded by a local or wider campaign aimed at popularizing or rejecting the assumption of origin. The option of completing the questionnaire online appeared in the 2011 census, which gained even more ground in our country by 2022. The number of those who do not wish to answer the question shows a growing trend, to which online completion clearly contributes. It is also worth pointing out that the increasing awareness of personal and data protection rights also reduces the willingness of Roma to respond (Cserti Csapó, 2024: 233).

Due to the listed factors, the number of people who identify themselves as Roma during censuses is significantly lower than the number of people perceived as Roma by the outside world and their environment, generally 30-40% of the latter (Kemény, Janky, 2003: 310).

Local Governments' Estimations

In this study, we pay special attention to the approach that qualifies as hetero-identification, since the leaders, representatives and local

government experts of the settlements are interviewed. The assumption behind the method is that the leaders of the settlements and local government respondents, as people who know the local community, can provide adequate information about the Roma population. This approach is not new, as already in the mid-1980s, the staff of the Institute of Earth Sciences of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, with the help of CIKOBI (County Roma Coordination Committees), collected estimated data on the local Roma population from the councils (Bassa et al., 1989: 115; Kertesi, Kézdi, 1998: 93–99; Kocsis, Kovács, 1991: 78–85).

The inclusion of estimated data from local governments is also of increasing importance in studies of the Roma population in neighboring countries (Horváth, Kiss, 2017: 11–49; Kocsis, Tátrai 2021: 75; Mušinka et al. 2014: 11–13). The departmental survey of the University of Debrecen was based on surveys of local governments, which took place in several waves between 2010 and 2013. As a result, estimated data were available for every settlement in the country.

The referenced survey was conducted through telephone and e-mail inquiries of local and minority local governments (partly refined by a field survey) (Pásztor, Pénzes, 2018: 156–158; Pénzes et al., 2018: 5–11). During the repeated survey in 2022–2023, we separated the information received from local governments from the responses of Roma minority local governments. The incoming estimates typically represented an interval, so we were able to separate minimum and maximum values, but the analyses included the mean values, which we compared to the 2021 population.

In our experience, local government responses are somewhat overestimated, as subjectivity is inevitable, and it seems clear that in settlements with larger populations there is a greater discrepancy between self-identified values and settlement responses (Pénzes et al., 2018: 15; Tátrai et al., 2017: 56–57). This is partly because the respondent (e.g. the mayor) may have less complete knowledge of the communities in larger settlements, and in several cases the categories of ethnicity and poverty were blurred (it is typical that the population living in a segregated area or the disadvantaged population was basically classified as Roma, regardless of their origin), and the descendants of Roma-non-Roma marriages were also predominantly considered Roma. This peculiarity emerges based on the aggregated data, as this estimate gave significantly higher values than the referenced census data, sociological surveys, and demographic projections.

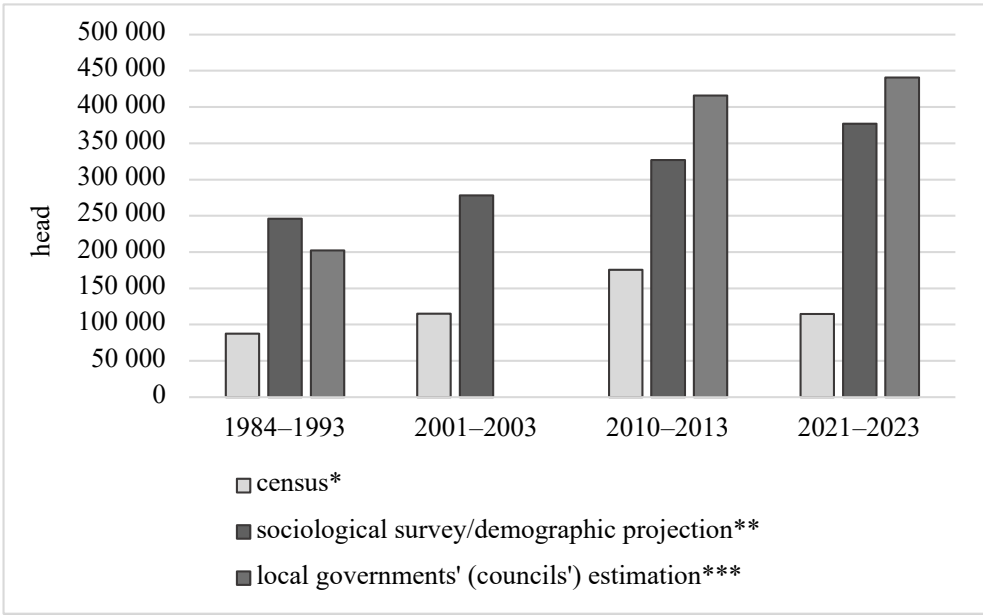
Despite all this, this approach can be considered particularly suitable for territorial studies, as it allows for analyses to be carried out at the settlement level.

The Size of the Roma Population in Northeastern Hungary

Our study of 999 settlements in the six counties of Northeastern Hungary – Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Hajdú-Bihar, Heves, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, Nógrád and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg – concerns more than 30% of the Hungarian settlement population. At the same time, almost half of the Hungarian Roma population – 45–55% depending on the data sources – live in Northeastern Hungary (Pásztor, Pénzes, 2012: 356–358).

The change in the number of Roma population in Northeastern Hungary also showed a similar trend – i.e. basically an increase – to the national trends, while the population ratio and the rate of increase also exceeded the national average (Pénzes et al., 2018: 10–11). Estimates of the local governments (councils before the change of regime in 1989) typically provided the highest population figures among the data sources (in relation to the 1984–1993 period, it is worth mentioning that the council estimates come from the beginning of the period, while the sociological survey comes from the end of the period) (Figure 2). In the 2010–2013 period, based on the three different data sources, the number of the Roma population ranged between 175,700 and 416,000, which shrank even more in the 2020s to an interval between 114,500 and 440,600 people.

Figure 2: *Data and estimates about the number of Roma population in Northeastern Hungary, head*



(Source: authors' edition by the datasets from *HCSO census, 1990, 2001, 2011 and 2022; ** Kemény, Janky, 2003 and Hablicsek, 2007; *** Kocsis, Kovács 1991; Pénzes et al., 2018 and UD 2022–2024)

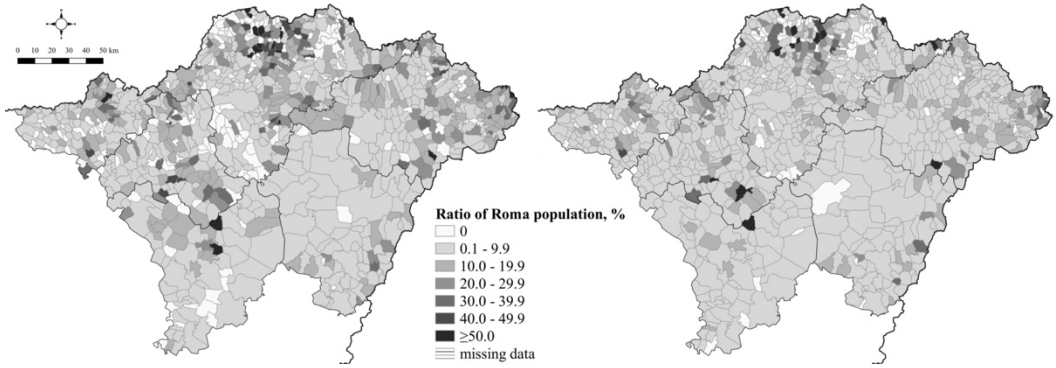
Table 1: *Ratio of Roma population in the observed regions calculated by the census data and the local governments' estimates*

	Census				Local governments' (councils') estimation		
	1990	2001	2011	2022	1984–1987	2010–2013	2022–2023
Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén	4.18	6.26	8.50	6.08	9.38	20.23	21.72
Hajdú-Bihar	1.38	2.12	3.39	2.49	4.12	8.98	10.78
Heves	2.44	3.87	6.30	4.85	5.57	12.05	14.41
Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok	2.14	2.96	4.94	3.26	5.20	14.13	16.26
Nógrád	2.60	4.52	7.65	5.94	8.30	19.36	18.75
Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg	4.36	4.57	8.00	5.21	7.68	18.42	20.18
Northeastern Hungary	3.05	4.22	6.53	4.59	6.91	15.70	17.29

(Source: authors' edition by the datasets from HCSO census, 1990, 2001, 2011 and 2022; Pénzes et al., 2018 and UD 2022–2024)

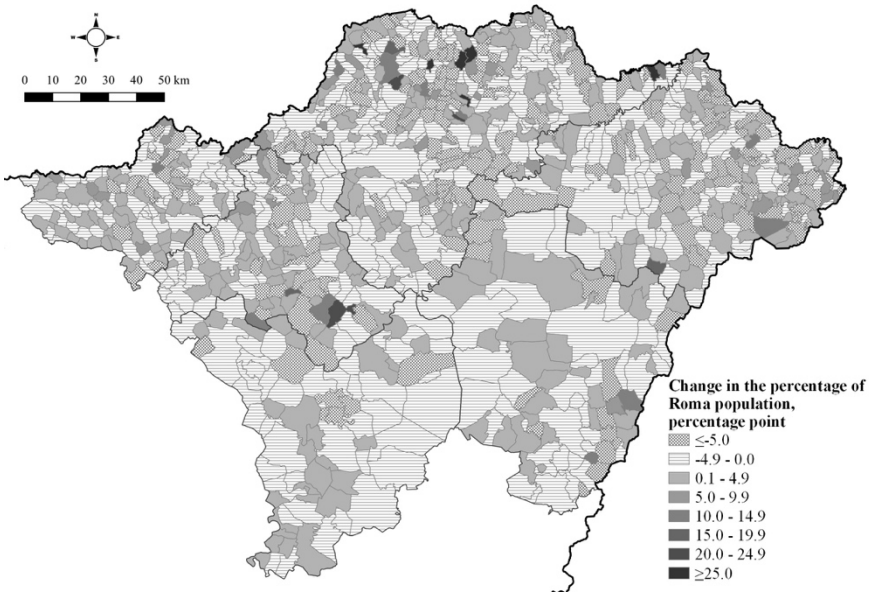
In the light of the 2022 census, the self-identified number and proportion of the Roma population in the region (as in Hungary) decreased. The decrease was 34.8% in the case of Northeastern Hungary, which is almost the same as the national rate. The direction and extent of the change contradict previous trends and the tendencies expected from other sources (Table 1). An adequate investigation of the reasons would require a separated study, but based on the rather diverse settlement and regional pattern, the combined effect of several factors is reflected in the 2022 data (Figures 3 and 4). Of course, it is not inconceivable that the proportion of the Roma population is decreasing in some settlements, but such a decline, aggregated for the entire region, does not reflect real demographic processes, but can be traced back to a significant erosion of the assumption of identity. The picture is further colored by the fact that the proportion of those who did not answer the nationality question in the studied region was far below the national average, amounting to only 4.6% in 2022. The decrease in the Roma population ratio shows a specific difference depending on the size of the settlement – it is well below the average among settlements with under 500 inhabitants, and it also lags behind the national value among villages with under 1,000 inhabitants. In more populated settlements – although far from being a function – the decrease in the ratio was greater, but it is important to emphasize that demographic processes (i.e. the natural population movement of the local Roma population) cannot be concluded from these ratios and their changes.

Figure 3: *The ratio of Roma in settlements of Northeastern-Hungary by the census 2011 and 2022, %*



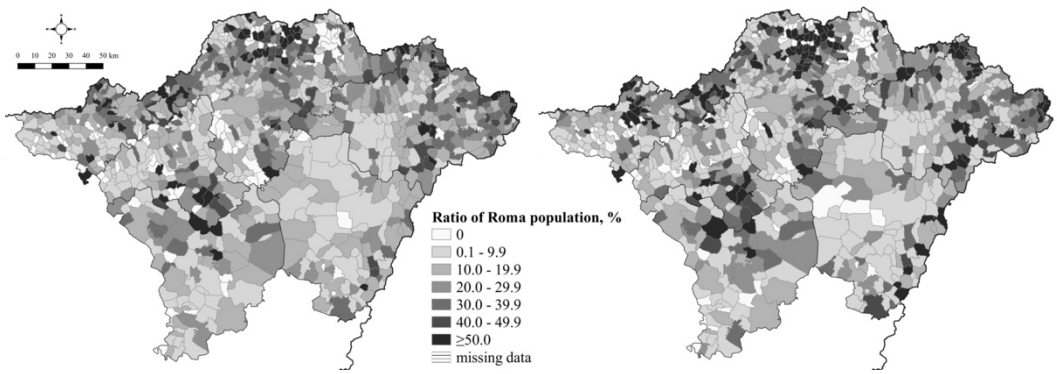
(Source: authors' edition by the datasets from HCSO census, 2011 and 2022)

Figure 4: *Change of ratio of Roma in Northeastern-Hungary between census 2011 and 2022, percentage point*



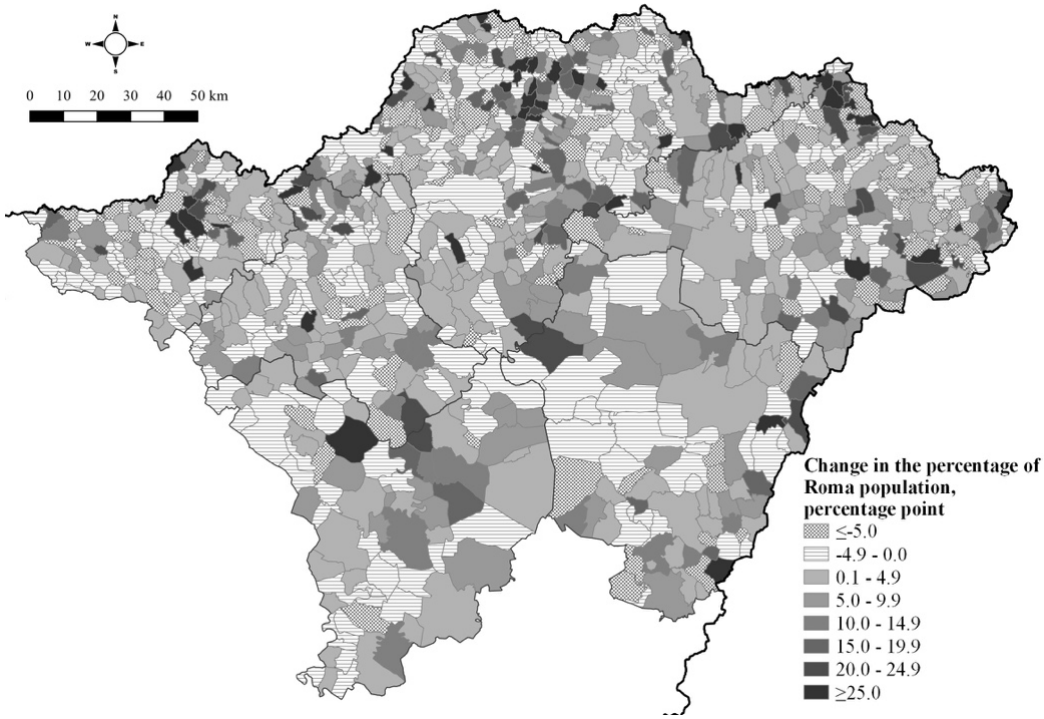
(Source: authors' edition by the datasets from HCSO census, 2011 and 2022)

Figure 5: *The ratio of Roma in the settlements of Northeastern-Hungary by the local governments' estimates from 2010-2013 and 2022-2023, %*



(Source: authors' edition by the datasets from Pénzes et al., 2018 and UD 2022–2024)

Figure 6: *Change of ratio of Roma in Northeastern-Hungary between the estimates of local governments in 2010-2013 and 2022-2023, percentage point*



(Source: authors' edition by the datasets from Pénzes et al., 2018 and UD 2022–2024)

It is particularly striking that, based on the local government estimates – with the exception of Nógrád County, where a modest decrease in proportion can be detected – we observed consistently increasing values. The share of Roma population of Northeastern Hungary increased to 17.3% based on the local governments' estimated data, while the value decreased

to 4.6% according to the census, so the approximately two and a half times difference between the shares calculated using the two approaches in the early 2010s increased to almost four times.

However, the change in self-identified data does not mean a decrease for all settlements in the region, as the Roma population share values showed an increase in 368 settlements, stagnation in 75 settlements, and a decrease in the remaining 566 settlements between the 2011 and 2022 censuses. The largest drop – exceeding more than 30 percentage points – occurred precisely in those settlements that were also Roma-majority villages according to the self-identified data of the 2011 census (Csenyéte, Kiscsécs, Tiszabő, Lak, Abaújszolnok, Nyírpilis, Karancsság). In the case of the former four, the proportion of Roma people decreased to below 10% based on the 2022 census.

Compared to the census data, the maps based on local government estimates show a completely different spatial pattern (Figure 5), as do their changes between the periods 2010–2013 and 2022–2023 (Figure 6).

Based on local governments' estimates, the proportion of the Roma population decreased in 416 settlements (on several occasions, respondents considered the previous data to be overestimated, but in many cases the changes could be justified by population movements – the relocation of Roma families and larger-scale immigration also reduced the proportion of the Roma population). In 72 settlements, stagnation could be demonstrated by comparing the two surveys, while according to respondents in 511 settlements, the proportion of the local Roma population increased. In Northeastern Hungary, the proportion of the Roma population increased by 1.59 percentage points overall.

Based on the last two censuses, the proportion of settlements in Northeastern Hungary where the ratio of the Roma population reaches or exceeds 50% decreased from 17 to 14. In contrast, according to local governments' estimates, the number of 69 Roma-majority settlements measured during the 2010-2013 survey had just doubled by 2022-2023, rising to 138.

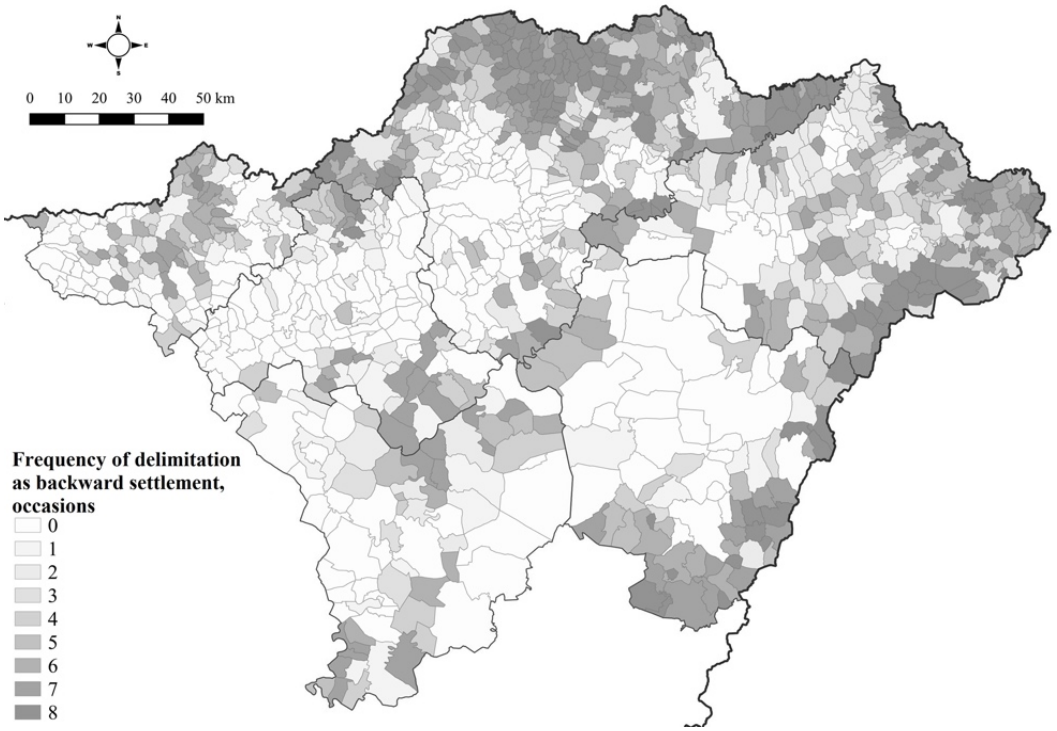
The Roma Population from the Aspects of Territorial Segregation and Peripheralization

We paid special attention to examining the processes that characterized the underdeveloped (backward) settlement groups in terms of the number and proportion of the Roma population. Previous studies have clearly shown that the proportion of Roma is typically higher in underdeveloped regions and that regional-settlement-scale segregation results in a further increase in the proportion. As a result of this process,

a part of the Roma population is displaced to underdeveloped settlements, while the more mobile part of the population – mainly of non-Roma origin – leaves disadvantaged regions (Pénzes, 2016; Pénzes–Demeter, 2021; Váradi–Virág, 2014; Virág, 2006).

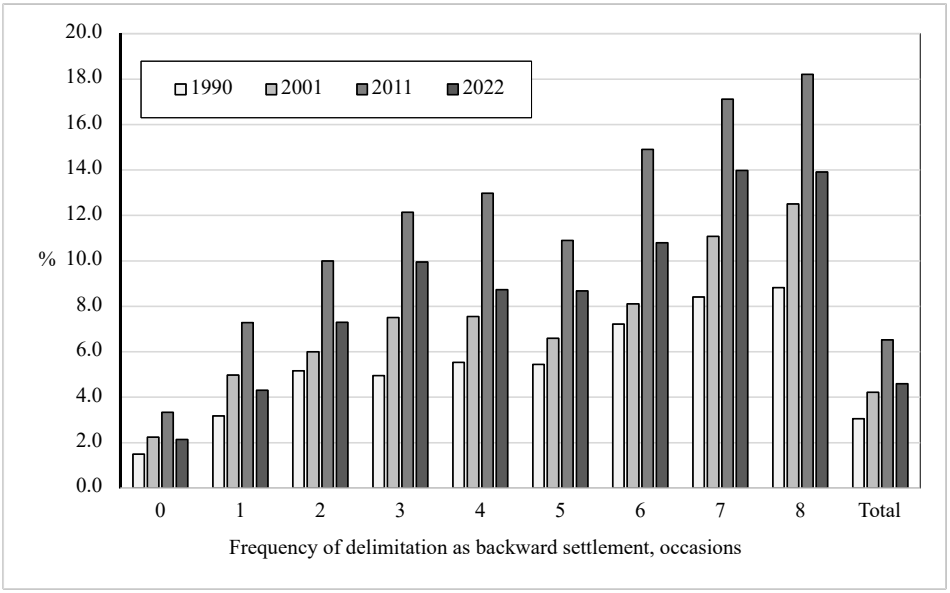
To express the underdevelopment of settlements, we used – among many other options – the results of the delimitations set out in the regional development legislation. Since the change of regime, settlements benefiting from regional development policy have been designated eight times in total. Although the methodology has changed several times and some of the procedures can be criticized (Pénzes, 2015), overall, covering a longer time period, it adequately indicates the relationship between development and underdevelopment – in our opinion. Of the settlements in Northeastern Hungary, 259 were not included in the underdeveloped category at any time, while 165 settlements were on the list all eight times (Figure 7).

Figure 7: *Backward settlements of regional development policy according to the frequency of delimitation (1991–2015)*



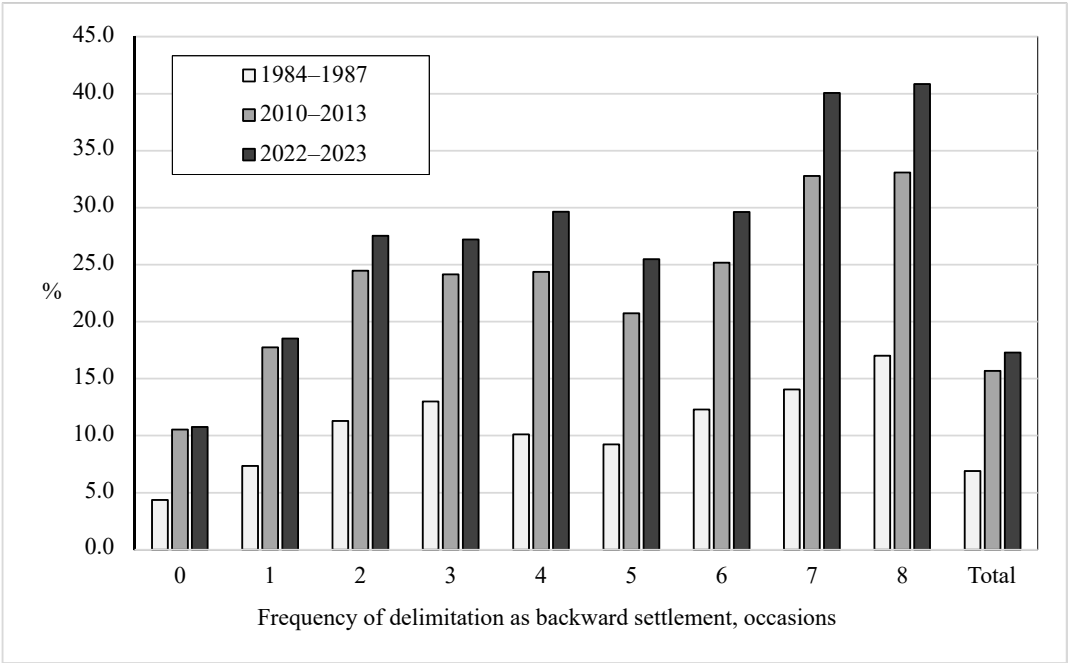
(Source: authors' edition by the governmental decrees and documents)

Figure 8: *Change of ratio of Roma in Northeastern-Hungary by the census data according to the categories of settlements according to the occasions of delimitation as backward, %*



(Source: authors' edition by the datasets from HCSO census 2011 and 2022)

Figure 9: *Change of ratio of Roma in Northeastern-Hungary by the census data according to the categories of settlements according to the occasions of delimitation as backward, %*



(Source: authors' edition by the datasets from Pénzes et al., 2018 and UD 2022–2024)

The categories established on the basis of backwardness clearly reflect the relationship between the rising proportion of the Roma population and the growing backwardness (Figure 8). According to our study, in the aggregate data of the most developed settlements – i.e. those that were never included in the delimitations – the proportion of Roma people measured in the 2022 census barely exceeded 2%, while the value exceeded 10% based on local governments' estimates. However, this is far below the regional average in both data sources and especially the values of the most backward group. In the latter group of settlements, the proportion of the Roma population is approximately three times the regional average according to the census, while it is nearly two and a half times the regional average according to local governments' estimates. Based on council/local government estimates, the proportion of the Roma population in the most backward group crept above 40% by 2022-2023. Based on both data sources, it is clear that over the course of a few decades, the difference between settlement categories has grown increasingly larger.

It is worth drawing special attention to the fact that according to the censuses, the proportion of the Roma population in the group of the most disadvantaged settlements decreased by 4 percentage points by 2022 – the largest decrease. An opposite process can be observed based on the estimated data from local governments (Figure 9), in which the proportion of the Roma population clearly increased – the largest decrease, by more than 7 percentage points. Therefore, in light of the latter data source, the segregation of the Roma population in the most disadvantaged regions is further – and possibly dynamically – strengthening. The contradiction is difficult to resolve, however, the decline presented in the self-identified data of the census is reflected in this phenomenon, which cannot be explained by demographic processes, but may be justified by the marked decrease in the assumption of origin and identity (adequate exploration of the issue requires further research).

Conclusions

The number of Roma population can be examined using several classification methods with different approaches. Until the last census in Hungary, it seemed clear that despite the significant variance, the number and proportion of the Roma population is also increasing in the country based on measurements with different methodologies – based on self-identification and hetero-identification. However, the data based on the 2022 census showed a significant decrease.

In Northeastern Hungary – in line with national changes – the number and proportion of the Roma population decreased by 2022 according to the census data based on self-identification. However, based on our survey

summarizing local governments' estimates conducted in 2022–2023, the estimated Roma population data indicated a fundamentally opposite, i.e. clearly increasing value in the region as a whole – although they show significant differences regionally. According to estimates, the Roma population ratio increased by approximately 1.5 percentage points in the nearly 1,000 settlements of the six counties, approaching a share of 17.3%. Following 2 percentage point decrease according to the census, the Roma population ratio fell below 4.6% by 2022. The increasingly different results and different trends of change of the two classification methods raise several questions, primarily in connection with the census, which shows anomalies compared to previous trends.

It is particularly striking that the data series derived from the two classification methods indicate completely different changes in the most backward settlement groups. Based on the census, we could assume a decrease in the territorial and spatial segregation of the Roma population, however, local governments' estimates indicate a significant increase. In the case of the latter, the Roma population ratio of the most backward settlement group has already reached 40%. It is clear that almost all of the settlements with a Roma population ratio of 50% or more are among the most backward settlements. According to the censuses, it decreased to 14, while according to local government estimates, the number of these settlements doubled (reaching 138 settlements) over the past decade (i.e. during the years between the two censuses and two surveys). Based on the estimated Roma population proportions by local governments, a continuing and increasing segregation at the settlement and regional levels is outlined.

The aim of our study was primarily to explore the differences between the two different classification approaches, without qualifying them. Both methods carry very important information about ethnic processes, but the results obtained can be the starting point for further studies, in which the issue of territorial segregation is particularly important, even in terms of preparing further policy decisions.

Bibliography

Bassa L., Beluszky P., Dövényi Z., Tóth J. (1989): X. Népesség, települések, lakás- és közműellátottság. In: Pécsi M. (főszerk.): Magyarország Nemzeti Atlasza. Kartográfiai Vállalat, Budapest, 103–144.

Csepeli, G., Simon, D. (2004): Construction of Roma Identity in Eastern and Central Europe: Perception and Self-identification. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 1., 129–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183032000170204

Cserti Csapó T. (2008): Területi-szociológiai jellemzés a magyarországi cigány népesség körében. In: Forray R. K. (szerk.): Society and

Lifestyles – hungarian Roma and Gypsy communities; Magyarországi cigány/roma közösségek. PTE BTK Romológia és Nevelésszociológia Tanszék, Pécs (Gypsy Studies, 21.), 75–109.

Durst J. (2010): „Gondolom, hogy cigányok … ennyi gyerekkel…": etnicitás és reprodukció két északmagyarországi romungro közösség példáján. In: Feischmidt M. (szerk.): *Etnicitás. Különbségteremtő társadalom.* Gondolat – MTA Kisebbségkutató Intézet, Budapest, 173–194.

Fosztó L. (1997): Ki a cigány? Az etnikai identitásokról. *Keresztény Szó,* 4., 26–29.

Hablicsek L. (2007): Kísérleti számítások a roma lakosság területi jellemzőinek alakulására és 2021-ig történő előrebecslésére. *Demográfia,* 1., 7–54.

Hablicsek L., Hablicsekné Richter M., Lángi T. (2019): A magyarországi romák népességszámának prognózisa regionális szinten 2061-ig. *Competitio,* 1–2., 39–74. https://doi.org/10.21845/comp/2019/1-2/2

Horváth, I., Kiss, T. (2017): Ancheta experţilor locali privind situaţia romilor pe unităţi administrativ teritoriale. In: Horváth, I. (ed.): *Raport de Cercetare SocioRoMap – O cartografiere a comunităţilor de romi din România.* Editura ISPMN, Cluj-Napoca, 13–189.

Kapitány B., Bálint L., Murinkó L., Őri P., Pakot L., Várnainé Anek Á. (2014): *Becslések a „roma kötődésű" népesség számáról és területi elhelyezkedéséről a 2011. évi népszámlálás adatai alapján II: „roma kötődésű" népesség becslése, adatsorok.* A KSH Népességtudományi Kutatóintézet elemzései az Emberi Erőforrások Minisztériuma részére. KSH NKI, Budapest

Kemény I., Janky B. (2003): A cigány nemzetiségi adatokról. *Kisebbségkutatás,* 2., 309-315.

Kertesi G., Kézdi G. (1998): *A cigány népesség Magyarországon.* Socio typo, Budapest

Kocsis K., Kovács Z. (1991): A magyarországi cigánynépesség társadalomföldrajza. In: Utasi Á., Mészáros Á. (szerk.): *Cigánylét.* MTA Politikai Tudományok Intézete, Budapest, 78–105.

Kocsis K., Tátrai P. (2021): Etnikum, nyelv. In: Kocsis K. (főszerk.)*: Magyarország Nemzeti Atlasza – Társadalom.* CSFK Földrajztudományi Intézet, Budapest, 70–77.

Ladányi J., Szelényi I. (2004): *A kirekesztettség változó formái.* Napvilág Kiadó, Budapest

Ladányi J., Virág T. (2009): A szociális és etnikai alapú lakóhelyi szegregáció változó formái Magyarországon a piacgazdaság átmeneti időszakában. *Kritika,* 7–8., 2–8.

Mušinka, A., Škobla, D., Hurrle, J., Matlovičová, K., Kling, J. (2014): *Atlas rómskych komunít na Slovensku 2013.* UNDP, Bratislava

Obádovics Cs. (2022): A magyarországi, "roma kötődésű" népesség előreszámítása 2050-ig. *Demográfia,* 2-3., 279–309. https://doi.org/10.21543/Dem.65.2-3.7

Pásztor I. Z., Pénzes J. (2012): Foglalkoztatási krízis és jövedelmi periferizálódás Északkelet-Magyarországon a roma népességi arányok tükrében. *Területi Statisztika,* 4., 353–371.

Pásztor I. Z., Pénzes J. (2018): A cigányság lélekszáma és helyzete egy északkelet-magyarországi felmérés tükrében. *Földrajzi Közlemények,* 2., 154–169.

Pénzes J. (2015): A kedvezményezett térségek lehatárolásának aktuális kérdései. *Területi Statisztika,* 3., 206–232.

Pénzes J. (2016): A cigányság területi-települési viszonyai Hajdú-Bihar és Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg megyékben. In: Szilágyi F., Pénzes J. (szerk.): *Roma népesség Magyarország északkeleti határtérségében.* Partium Kiadó, Nagyvárad, 9–47.

Pénzes, J., Demeter, G. (2021): Peripheral areas and their distinctive characteristics: The case of Hungary. *Moravian Geographical Reports,* 3., 217–230. https://doi.org/10.2478/mgr-2021-0016

Pénzes J., Tátrai P., Pásztor I. Z. (2018): A roma népesség területi megoszlásának változása Magyarországon az elmúlt évtizedekben. *Területi Statisztika,* 1., 3–26. https://doi.org/10.15196/TS580101

Szabó L. (2022): Előszó a „Roma népesedési viszonyok, 1990–2011" tematikus különszámhoz. *Demográfia,* 2–3., 101–114. https://doi.org/10.21543/Dem.65.2-3.1

Szuhay P. (1993): Utószó: ami túl van a képeken. In: Szuhay P., Barati A. (szerk.): *Képek a magyarországi cigányság 20. századi történetéből.* Magyar Néprajzi Múzeum, Budapest, 339–354.

Szuhay P. (2007): Romakutatások. In: Kovács É. (szerk.): *Közösségtanulmány.* Néprajzi Múzeum – PTE-BTK Kommunikáció- és Médiatudományi Tanszék, Pécs, 88–103.

Tátrai P. (2014): Etnikai folyamatok Magyarországon az ezredforduló után. *Területi Statisztika,* 5., 506–523.

Tátrai P., Pálóczi Á., Pásztor I. Z., Pénzes J. (2017): Etnikai besorolási gyakorlatok. A cigányság külső kategorizálását befolyásoló tényezők. *Socio.hu,* 2., 45–65. https://doi.org/10.18030/socio.hu.2017.2.45

https://www.doi.org/10.58603/OMIV9368

Geopolitical Choice in Relation to Ethnic Identity. The Case of the Gagauz and Bulgarian Communities in the Republic of Moldova

Mircea Brie[1] • Victoria Goreainov[2]

Abstract
The deliberate choice regarding the Republic of Moldova's strategic orientation toward future European integration has been neither a straightforward process nor one that achieved irreversibility during the subsequent decades. Republic of Moldova is situated on the border periphery of both the EU and NATO, while simultaneously remaining within a contested space of persistent Russian influence. The purpose of the research is to analyze a possible connection between the antagonistic dimension (East-West) of geopolitical options and public perceptions related to the identity dimension. This leads to a dimension of the evolution of public perception, seen both antagonistically by positioning itself in the proximity of a geopolitical fault that runs through Moldovan society and the diametrically opposite geopolitical positioning in relation to identity. In particular, through the specific objective we aim to verify whether the Gagauz and Bulgarian communities manifest distinct geopolitical preferences that diverge from the state's dominant external orientation. Furthermore, we investigate the potential development of discernible patterns in the shaping of public perceptions within the Republic of Moldova that are fundamentally linked to specific identity constructs.

Keywords
Republic of Moldova, ATU Gagauzia, Taraclia, identity; UE, Russia

1. Introduction and Methodology

Following the restoration of state independence in 1991, the Republic of Moldova has frequently experienced a pendular geopolitical trajectory oscillating between Eastern and Western spheres of influence. The deliberate choice regarding the country's strategic orientation toward future European integration has been neither a straightforward process

[1] PhD Professor at the University of Oradea, Department of International Relations and European Studies. PhD supervisor in the field of International Relations and European Studies, Babeş-Bolyai University. Romania. E-mail: mbrie@uoradea.ro.
[2] First Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova. PhD in the field of International Relations and European Studies, Babeş-Bolyai University. E-mail: victoriagoreainov@gmail.com

nor one that achieved irreversibility during the subsequent decades. This specific geopolitical contextualization has engendered a distinct security reality: geographically, Republic of Moldova is situated on the border periphery of both the EU and NATO, while simultaneously remaining within a contested space of persistent Russian influence. The Russian Federation arguably exercises a de facto 'right of claim' over this territory by virtue of the Soviet legacy and historical spheres of interest.

Applying a historical analysis method to the evolution of public perceptions regarding the Republic of Moldova's geopolitical choices highlights a fundamental dual and antagonistic dynamic: these options emerge as existential dilemmas for a society situated on the geopolitical frontiers of the West and the East. The thematic and methodological framework employed in this study is grounded in the Realist paradigm of international relations theory. Republic of Moldova is conceptualized as positioned on the periphery of the Occident while concurrently existing within a contested sphere of Russian influence, over which the Russian Federation exerts control via both soft and hard power mechanisms. The inherent complexity of this analysis stems from the necessity of correlating these geopolitical preferences with specific identity affiliations and cleavages within Moldovan society.

The ***purpose*** of the research is to analyze a possible connection between the antagonistic dimension (East-West) of geopolitical options and public perceptions related to the identity dimension. This leads to a dimension of the evolution of public perception, seen both antagonistically by positioning itself in the proximity of a geopolitical fault that runs through Moldovan society and the diametrically opposite geopolitical positioning in relation to identity. Our ***hypothesis*** is that in the Republic of Moldova the choice of geopolitical preference was made in relation to the ethno-national, linguistic, cultural or religious identity group. Therefore, in this space we identify a geopolitical polarization and fragmentation generating border constructions in relation to identity. The validation of such a working hypothesis would suggest the existence of a profound identity cleavage that directly correlates with a divergence in geopolitical orientation. Specifically, a case study analysis of the evolution of public perceptions regarding external alignment preferences—including the potential for EU accession—within the Autonomous Territorial Unit (ATU) of Gagauzia and the Taraclia district can illustrate a rejection of European integration predicated primarily on identity considerations. This is evidenced by the predominant geopolitical preference among the Gagauz and Bulgarian populations in these regions for closer ties with the Russian Federation, largely irrespective of, or minimally influenced by, the tangible benefits derived from the broader EU rapprochement process.

In particular, through the ***specific objective*** we aim to verify whether the Gagauz and Bulgarian communities manifest distinct geopolitical preferences that diverge from the state's dominant external orientation. Furthermore, we investigate the potential development of discernible patterns in the shaping of public perceptions within the Republic of Moldova that are fundamentally linked to specific identity constructs. In this paper, the ***research question*** formulated is: *how did the identity cleavage influence the geopolitical choices of Gagauzians and Bulgarians in the Republic of Moldova*?

The analysis aims, under this report, to shape public perceptions regarding geopolitical options in relation to belonging to an identity community.

Methodologically, this analysis is instrumental not only for examining international relations and Republic of Moldova's geopolitical trajectory but also for elucidating the underlying sources of *societal insecurity*. This insecurity is manifest in a landscape where identity-based communities adopt divergent stances on matters of fundamental national interest, most notably the state's geopolitical orientation. The resulting *cleavage* is so pronounced that it constitutes a latent source of conflict, fostering diametrically opposed and uncompromising positions. Such a framework often precludes constructive dialogue, as the availability of reconciliatory discourse remains severely constrained by entrenched ideological and identity-driven antagonisms.

2. Conceptual Mapping and Problem Statement. Literature Review

The European Union's restrained commitment to the integration of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) states was discernible from the program's inception. Prior to late 2023, the EU consistently refrained from extending an explicit accession perspective to the six partner nations. Despite frequent high-level political rhetoric of support, these declarations lacked binding guarantees, institutional commitments, or definitive timelines (Brie, 2025). The constraints of this engagement were particularly evident during the 2011 Warsaw Summit. Although the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine had demonstrated substantial reform progress, the summit's outcome underscored the presence of significant geopolitical and political thresholds. This stance was articulated by the then Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who noted that while these states harbored legitimate European aspirations, the necessary conditions for a clear membership outlook had yet to be consolidated, thereby deferring further integrationist advancements (EaP Summit, 2011).

In the post-2014 geopolitical landscape, it has become increasingly evident that the conventional model of sectoral reform—predicated solely on the implementation of EU policies and the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*—is no longer a sufficient catalyst for enlargement. The shifting security paradigm suggests that technical alignment must now be inextricably linked with broader geopolitical imperatives and the stabilization of the Eastern flank, transcending the traditional framework of external governance. The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), as it was conceived, no longer corresponds to geopolitical realities. It suffices to recall that the ENP had long been seen as a kind of "*antechamber*" for the enlargement of the European Union. Forced to take into account a complex combination of factors, the EU is not taking any chances/nor can it afford to promise accession to the EaP states. This situation is conditioned by a confluence of external geopolitical pressures and internal European Union dynamics. Regarding the latter, the momentum for further integration has significantly eroded following the successive enlargement waves of 2004, 2007, and 2013, giving way to a period of pronounced *enlargement fatigue*. Consequently, many member states have exhibited increasing reluctance toward further expansion. This cautious stance was exacerbated by the global financial and economic crises, which compelled the Union to prioritize *internal consolidation* and domestic policy challenges over the strategic imperative of territorial growth. „The need for institutional reform, but also the increasingly complicated geopolitical context (the conflict in Ukraine; the situation in the Middle East and North Africa; the refugee/immigrant crisis; trade tensions and the paradigm shifts in US foreign and security policy that marked Donald Trump's presidency, etc.) are likely to further complicate this picture. Last but not least, another vulnerability of the EU common policies regarding the neighborhood, visible also in the period after the Riga Summit, is given by the security dimension in the ENP approach" (Brie, 2025: 89-90). This proves to be insufficiently clear and not correlated with the current geopolitical situation, security thus proving to be a "weak point" (Gogolashvili, 2015: 18) on the agenda of the European neighborhood (Bărbulescu *et al.*, 2016: 110-111). The Russian invasion of Ukraine that began in February 2022 confirmed the blockages and shortcomings of the EaP, but also the limits of the guarantees that the EU could have given to the EaP states (Brie, 2022; Brie, Costea, and Toderaș, 2025).

The general geopolitical context and Russia's opposition to Euro-Atlantic expansion to the East, in particular, have shaped the policies of the Eastern Partnership member states since the beginning of this EU initiative. Systemic Russian interventions—manifested through the 2008 conflict in Georgia and the protracted aggression against Ukraine,

beginning with the 2014 annexation of Crimea and escalating into the full-scale military invasion of February 24, 2022—have fundamentally reshaped the regional security architecture. These actions were inextricably linked to the strategic co-option of the Lukashenko regime in Belarus and the deliberate maintenance of a protracted instability within the Transnistrian region. Collectively, these maneuvers illustrate a broader strategy of maintaining contested sovereignties across the post-Soviet space to impede Western integration.

The Republic of Moldova's pro-European trajectory is formalised through its application for EU membership, the subsequent attainment of candidate status, and the landmark official opening of accession negotiations on June 25, 2024, during the first intergovernmental conference (European Council, 2024). This process, however, remains profoundly complex, as Chișinău must navigate a volatile regional security landscape shaped by the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war. Furthermore, Republic of Moldova's European path is complicated by Moscow's multifaceted support for the Transnistrian region and the ATU Gagauzia, factors that continue to serve as instruments of geopolitical pressure.

At a conceptual level, *identity constructions*—while often positioned on the same analytical plane—carry distinct and multifaceted connotations. Regardless of the scale of reference (*European*, *national*, or *sub-national*), identity persists as a primary mode of expression within the public sphere, often operating in tension with universalist trends of globalization and value homogenization. In this globalized landscape, *ethno-religious identity markers* are not merely preserved but are actively amplified through digital and transnational channels. Consequently, we observe a dual phenomenon: the multiplication of global norms is met by an equally potent resurgence of the particular and the specific (Brie, 2016: 380). A fundamental characteristic of the state constructions of the nation-state type in Eastern Europe is their permanent lack of *legitimacy* or, rather, their incomplete legitimacy. By identifying the state with a single national identity, the other national communities inevitably found themselves outside of this legitimation process, which constituted *a fundamental source of inter-ethnic tension*. This reality led to the sacralization of state territory considered *national territory* (Gabor 2011: 118-128) (the rightful property of a single nation/nationality!), and the cultural-historical philosophy is to delegitimize as much as possible the contribution of other national communities (Brie and Blaga, 2015: 255-273; Brie and Solcan, 2025).

On the other hand, in the Republic of Moldova, „religious affiliation is deeply intertwined with politics, national identity, and collective belonging, not just individual spirituality. Orthodoxy functions as a symbolic public

good that political actors and parties use to anchor broader socio-political projects" (Putină, 2011b; Putină: 2025; Sprînceană, 2013). The public relevance of religious institutions is deeply embedded within the country's *fragmented national identity*. This landscape, marked by historical and geopolitical fault lines, generates antagonistic discourses regarding national orientation and the very nature of *sovereign identity* (Baar and Jakubek, 2017). These particularisms, which occasionally manifest as *radical nationalism* or *ethno-religious frictions*, gain traction across vast geographic distances. Concurrently, the nation-state, traditionally anchored to a defined territory, has not only withstood the pressures of a 'global society' but has demonstrated a resilient capacity to serve as a primary locus of affiliation. While *identity globalization* appears more pervasive in urban-industrial centers, rural environments—characterized by rich intangible heritage and cultural traditions—often exhibit significant resistance to homogenization. Thus, *local and national-cultural identities* remain most robustly preserved within agrarian contexts and in spatial proximity to significant cultural and historical sites (Brie, 2021).

Amidst a complex international landscape marked by external pressures, the Republic of Moldova—a candidate for EU accession—is actively pursuing political, economic, and institutional reforms to harmonize national standards with European benchmarks (Orjuhovschi and Brie, 2025; Brie, 2025). Simultaneously, the strategic influence of the Russian Federation within the post-Soviet space remains a decisive factor for the country's domestic security and stability. The geopolitical landscape presents significant complexities, further exacerbated by the internal socio-political climates. Specifically, the Republic of Moldova must navigate not only the aspirations of the majority but also the profound *identity cleavages* embedded within its society. These realities carry substantial political weight, having been historically shaped by *Russian malign influence* and interference. Such involvement manifests through the orchestration of certain political factions, the instrumentalization of sections of the *Orthodox Church*, and the enduring direct or indirect control exerted over a significant portion of the *media landscape* over recent decades.

The evolution of the situation in the ATU Gagauzia is very complex, particularly in political and identity-related terms. The construction of Gagauz identity is inherently embedded within the post-Soviet geopolitical landscape, a space where the Russian Federation instrumentalizes cultural, religious, and linguistic markers as levers of strategic influence (Vintilă, 2025: 144). The Gagauz community has consistently functioned as a borderland community. This reality stems

largely from its often-contested positioning between Bulgarian, Turkish, and, more recently, Russian identities claimed by members of the community. Religion constitutes a fundamental pillar in the articulation of Gagauz identity, functioning concurrently as an expression of spiritual devotion and a pivotal geopolitical marker. As a Turkic-speaking yet Eastern Orthodox population, the Gagauz represent a singular synthesis within the Eurasian continuum, effectively merging an Eastern cultural heritage with Byzantine spiritual traditions (Vintilă, 2025: 146). Beyond the debates surrounding their origins, the identity of the Gagauz people has undergone significant shifts across various historical stages that have shaped their existence. Over time, this community has increasingly transformed into a Russophile one, systematically supported by Moscow. „The influence of the Russian Federation on Gagauzia is structural, multidimensional, and enduring. It operates through symbolic, informational, religious, economic, and political mechanisms that together sustain a coherent system of identity-based dependence" (Vintilă, 2025: 148). From Moscow's perspective, ATU Gagauzia is a strategic vector of influence, used to counterbalance the increasingly active presence of Western actors in the Republic of Moldova. Through soft power instruments—such as economic incentives, cultural programs, and direct political support—the Russian Federation seeks to strengthen the region's loyalty. Consequently, ATU Gagauzia transcends its strictly cultural significance, becoming a focal point of geopolitical competition between East and West in a regional context marked by strategic reconfigurations (Brie, Costea, and Toderaș, 2025). The Russian Federation is identified as the main external actor exerting influence in the region through soft power instruments such as the media, economic support, identity discourse, and memory policies. These mechanisms contribute to the consolidation of a distinct political identity among the Gagauz population, characterized by a predominantly Eurosceptic attitude and a critical stance towards the integration policies promoted by the central authorities (Nantoi et al., 2016). According to Goltsov (2020), Russia's projection of power is mediated by historical narratives rather than conventional military presence. Consequently, the post-Soviet landscape is redefined: it ceases to be a collection of lost provinces and instead functions as a network of identity-based enclaves where Russian cultural and historical consciousness remains a primary vector of influence.

Although not very numerous (according to the 2004 census, it had 147,500 members, of whom 127,835 lived in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia), this community stands out for the importance it had in the history of Bessarabia (NBSRM , 2024a). According to the 2014 census, 134,535 inhabitants lived in the ATUG, of which 112,387 were Gagauz (NBSRM , 2024b).

ATU Gagauzia and the Taraclia district, as sub-national entities with distinct ethno-cultural identities, constitute pivotal determinants of Republic of Moldova's internal dynamics. These regions significantly modulate both social cohesion and political stability (Putină, 2011a). Critical variables, such as the degree of societal integration, prevailing public perceptions, and entrenched external affiliations—particularly long-standing path-dependent economic and historical ties with the Russian Federation—collectively influence the trajectory of state consolidation and the country's strategic alignment with the European Union (Goreainov and Brie, 2018). „The Gagauz community is one of the most significant expressions of ethnocultural diversity in the Republic of Moldova, benefiting from a special status of autonomy, which gives it both political visibility and a decisive role in the dynamics of relations between state and regional authorities. The level of integration of this community is shaped by the interaction between its cultural identity, linguistic particularities, collective perceptions of the Moldovan state, and external influences that shape the social and political behaviors of its members. In a context marked by prolonged political transitions, internal polarization, and geopolitical pressures, ATU Gagauzia is emerging as a space that reflects tensions between traditionally pro-Russian orientations and those oriented toward other external centers of influence, particularly Turkey" (Putină, 2012; Orjuhovschi and Brie, 2025: 54).

The Republic of Moldova exhibits a profound geopolitical polarization and fragmentation, which catalyze the emergence of *identity-based symbolic borders* (Brie, 2016; Brie, 2021). Within this framework, geopolitical preferences are systematically correlated with ethno-national, linguistic, cultural, or religious affiliations. This reality—serving as a pivotal working hypothesis—portrays Republic of Moldova as a society characterized by chronic societal insecurity, wherein identity-defined communities adopt divergent and often antagonistic stances. The depth of this cleavage is such that it constitutes a latent source of conflict and irreconcilable positioning.

Consequently, a distinct pattern emerges: ethnic Russians or Russophone identifiers (categories between which a rigorous analytical distinction must be maintained) predominantly favor a geopolitical orientation toward the Russian Federation and its institutional alternatives. Conversely, citizens who increasingly embrace a Romanian identity (defined through both ethnic lineage and, more significantly, linguistic affinity) demonstrate an escalating commitment to the country's European integration trajectory (Brie, 2023). Mirroring the broader post-Soviet experience, the Republic of Moldova has undergone a complex process of dual identity-building, encompassing both ethno-

national and civic-national dimensions. This trajectory, however, has been consistently impeded by deep-seated identity particularities that have fostered significant institutional and social resistance (Brie and Solcan, 2025: 159).

Further scholarly attention is required to identify specific behavioral patterns arising from the *identity fragmentation* inherent in Moldovan society. Such an analysis may reveal profound societal ruptures, particularly when these cleavages transcend socio-political or educational spheres to acquire distinct *communitarian-identity dimensions*. Consequently, this study examines whether Russophone (both ethno-national and linguistic), Bulgarian, and Gagauz communities prioritize an exclusive alignment with the Russian Federation, perceiving European integration as an *existential threat*. Such a reality would not only jeopardize Republic of Moldova's European trajectory but could also constitute a significant challenge to *national security*, extending beyond social equilibrium to affect the state's fundamental stability.

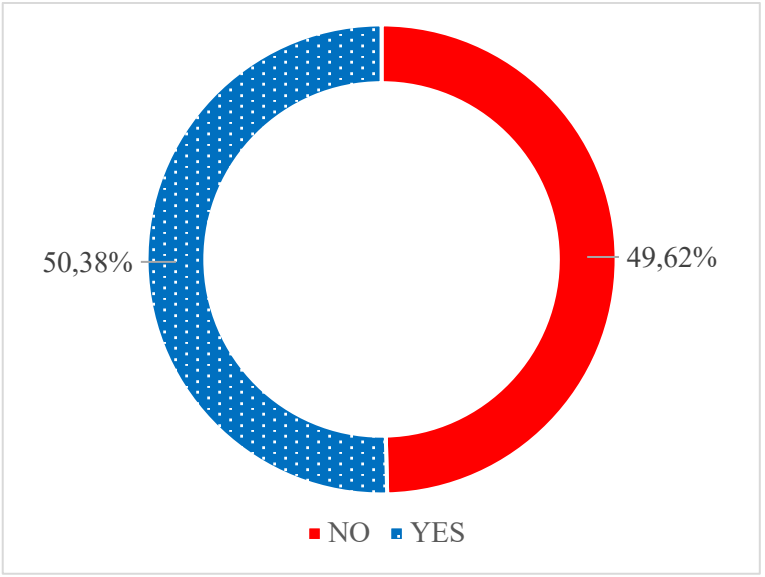
3. Shaping the Perception Regarding the Geopolitical Choice of the Republic of Moldova Among the Gagauz and Bulgarian Community

Our previous research led to the conclusion that in Moldovan society there is not only a political fragmentation, but also an identity-based one regarding preferences about the geopolitical orientation of the state's foreign policy.

In the process of European integration of the Republic of Moldova, public perceptions in ATU Gagauzia are an important element for understanding internal political and social dynamics. The region has distinct identity, linguistic, and cultural characteristics that influence how the population relates to both the central authorities and the European Union. An analysis of these perceptions is necessary to understand why attitudes towards European integration differ significantly from those in other regions of the country (Orjuhovschi and Brie, 2025: 69).

In the referendum held on October 20, 2024, regarding the inclusion of the objective of the Republic of Moldova's accession to the EU in the Constitution, 50.35% voted in favor (Brie, Costea, and Toderaș, 2025: 68). This confirms the polarization and geopolitical fragmentation at the national level. This reality may have other explanations than those related to the community-identity dimension. This fragmentation is social, economic, political, but from our point of view it is also identity-related.

Figure 1: *Do you support amending the Constitution in order to join the Republic of Moldova to the European Union?*



(Source: author's elaboration based on data CEC RM, 2026)

The central focus of this research transcends the mere quantitative division of the vote regarding EU integration. Our findings suggest that the recent electoral outcomes represent more than a political preference; they signify a profound geopolitical realignment. Within Moldovan society, we identify a persistent geopolitical fault line, wherein the citizenry is bifurcated between Western and Eastern orientations.

Of particular analytical interest is the established correlation between these geopolitical preferences and the identity profiles of the electorate. Our core premise posits that specific identity-based communities resist EU accession not merely on policy grounds, but as a direct manifestation of their communitarian affiliation. In this context, geopolitical choice becomes an extension of an entrenched ethno-cultural and linguistic identity.

This chapter analyzes the main perceptions of the Gagauz population regarding European integration and the role of external actors in shaping these opinions. It examines issues such as identity, geopolitical orientation, media influence, relations with the Russian Federation, and the level of trust in the European Union. The analysis is based on opinion poll data collected in ATU Gagauzia and highlights how external influence contributes to maintaining a predominantly skeptical attitude towards the European project.

Starting from the premise that the Gagauz people have almost unanimously rejected the idea of joining the EU (expressing a preference for geopolitical rapprochement with the Russian Federation), we propose to conduct an analysis using the database of the Institute for Public Policy (IPP), which has carried out complex surveys in ATU Gagauzia (inhabited mainly by Gagauz people) and Taraclia (a district inhabited mainly by Bulgarians and Gagauz people). The IPP has conducted three surveys on this topic (2011, 2015, and 2021).

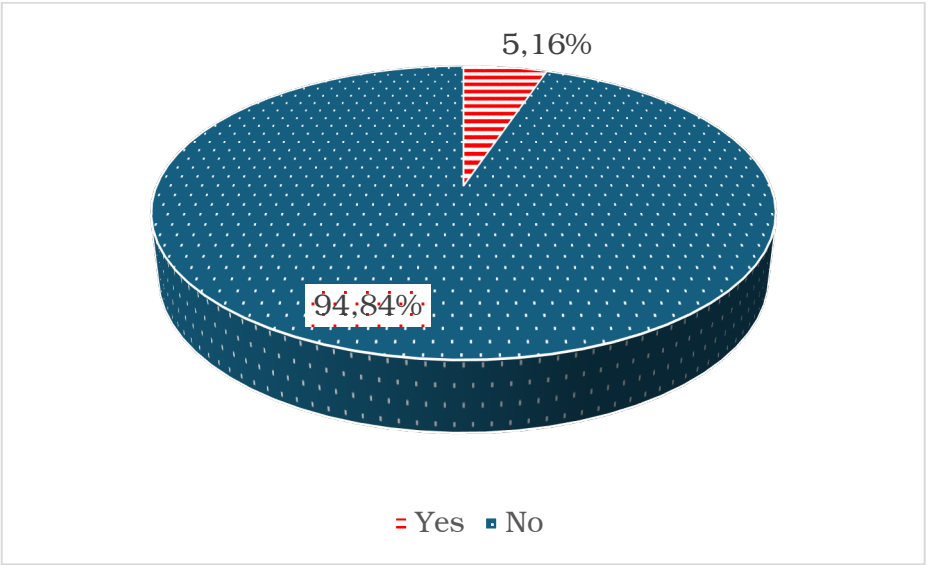
Based on the complexity of the analysis conducted by the IPP as part of the project "Moldova between East and West: views from ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia," we would like to analyze the options for internal and external integration, as well as their attitude towards various international partners.

Within the logic of the announced methodology, given the identification of diametrically opposed perceptions regarding geopolitical options as strategic directions of the state, namely a major East-West geopolitical cleavage that involves substantial segments of the population, it becomes necessary to deepen the analysis toward identifying models and behavioral patterns related to the identity-based fragmentation of society in the Republic of Moldova. Such an analysis may reveal, at the societal level in the Republic of Moldova, the existence of cleavages and fractures in geopolitical options determined by a societal dimension. This reality is confirmed insofar as this cleavage acquires identity-communitarian nuances, not merely political-social or cultural-educational ones. As previously stated, we therefore seek to examine whether Russian, Bulgarian, and Gagauz communities have primarily expressed an interest in exclusive rapprochement with the Russian Federation and perceive rapprochement with the European Union as an existential threat. A comprehensive analysis that includes the behavior and geopolitical perceptions of ethnic Russians and of Gagauz or Bulgarians is difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, answers may be obtained through direct references or databases/research focusing primarily on regions in which these groups constitute the majority of the population.

In our research, we aim to conduct an analysis of the voting behavior of residents of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia in the referendum on the constitutional amendment held on 20 October 2024. Subsequently, at a secondary level, we conduct a case study drawing on the IPP database, which conducted complex sociological studies of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia, territories predominantly inhabited by Gagauz and Bulgarians. The case study will help us identify possible patterns in the public perceptions of the identity-based community groups of ethnic Gagauz and Bulgarians. The purpose is to confirm the premise that certain

ethnic groups (the Gagauz and Bulgarians, in our case) choose the geopolitical option of rapprochement with the Russian Federation and reject rapprochement with the European Union based on reasons stemming from identity-based communal behavior. Confirmation of this hypothesis would point to the image of an identity-fragmented society in the Republic of Moldova, in which ethno-national and linguistic groups hold different, indeed, diametrically opposed geopolitical options.

Figure 2: *Vote in the referendum to amend the Constitution in view of EU accession in the Gagauz Autonomous Region (October 20, 2024)*

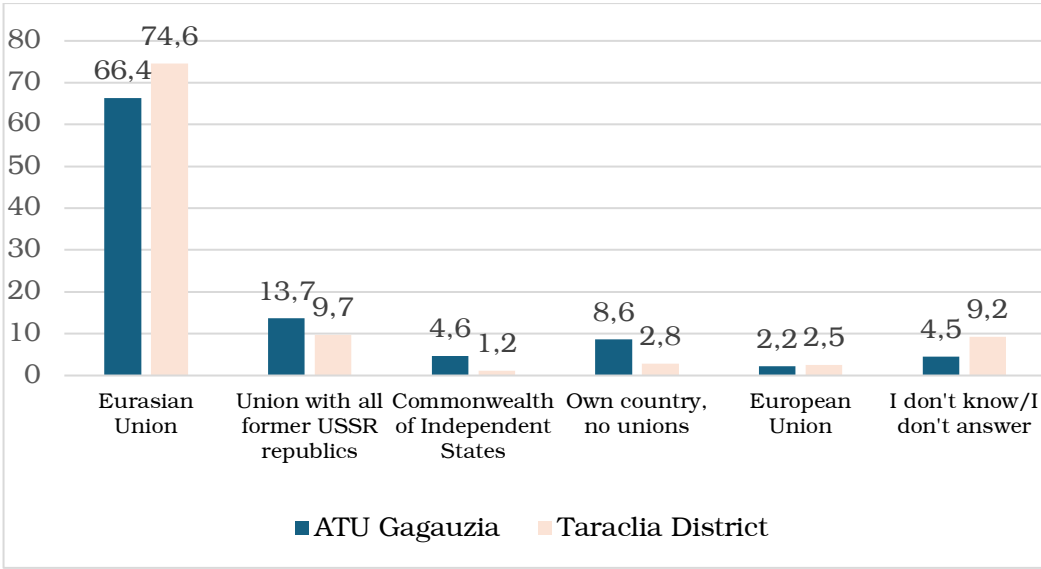


(Source: author's elaboration based on data CEC RM, 2026)

From a methodological perspective, our hypothesis can be tested more clearly within the compact Gagauz communities of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia. In this case, the identity boundary revealed through the expression of geopolitical preferences becomes even more pronounced: in ATU Gagauzia, only 5.16% of voters supported accession to the European Union. Thus, out of a total of 57,847 valid votes cast, only 2,985 were in favor of amending the Constitution to enable EU accession, while 54,862 voters opposed this initiative (CEC RM, 2026).

The conclusion is unequivocal: the Gagauz population overwhelmingly rejects the idea of accession to the European Union, a stance accompanied by a strong preference for geopolitical rapprochement with the Russian Federation.

Figure 3: *Preferences of residents of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia District regarding a possible union (%) (2015)*



(Source: author's elaboration based on data IPP, 2015; Nantoi et al., 2016: 35)

The data from the sociological research conducted by IPP in 2015 indicate, as can be observed in the preceding chart, an overwhelming inclination among ethnic Gagauz in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, as well as among Bulgarians and Gagauz in Taraclia District. Regardless of the name of the union or organization, support for a geopolitical alignment centered around the Russian Federation is very high reaching approximately 85% in both regional administrative units (with the difference that Bulgarians in Taraclia show a higher share of "don't know/no answer" responses). The option of belonging to the European Union is extremely limited in both communities, a fact that once again demonstrates the very strong ties with Russia inherited from the Soviet period.

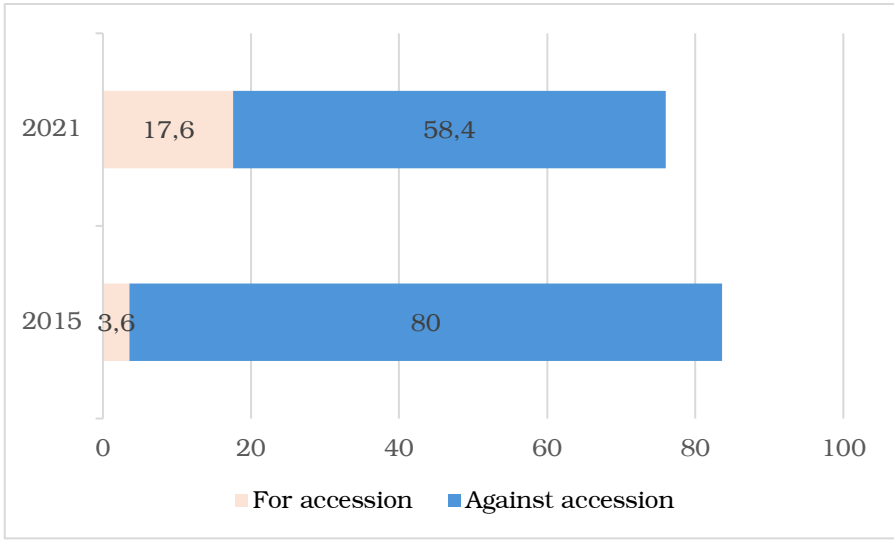
Even though these figures reflecting such low levels of inclination toward the EU may seem difficult to accept given the broader context and the evolution of relations with the European Union (among other factors, EU-funded projects have been implemented in the region), the survey data were nevertheless confirmed by the reality recorded during the referendum of 20 October 2024, when only 5.16% of voters in ATU Gagauzia chose the option of EU accession.

By 2021, however, the situation had changed, indicating that the Republic of Moldova's progress within the Eastern Partnership framework, together along with its efforts and increasingly strong ties with the EU, led to an increase up to 17.6% in those who selected the EU as their preferred option for external integration (while no less than 58.4% would vote against

EU integration). By comparison, the Eurasian Economic Union is preferred by 42.9%. Notably, in 2021 there was also a high proportion of respondents who opposed integration into the Eurasian Union (37%).

When the attitudes of Gagauz and Bulgarians toward external partners were measured, a clear preference emerged for the Russian Federation (over 90% reporting very good or good attitudes) and for the Eurasian Economic Union (60% reporting very good or good attitudes). Although positive and very positive attitudes toward the European Union amount to 51.5%, the data nonetheless reveal a substantial share of respondents who hold negative or very negative attitudes toward it (33.4%).

Figure 4: *Voting option in the event of a referendum on EU accession in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia District (%)*

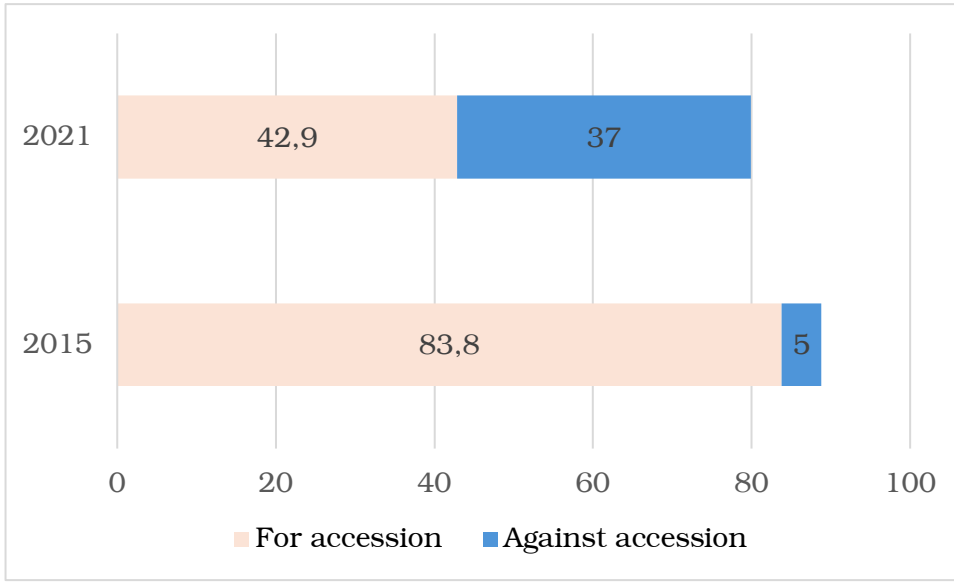


Note: the remaining percentages are: „I don't know"/„I don't answer"
(Source: author's elaboration based on data IPP, 2015, 2021)

Voting preferences in the case of the referendum on accession to the European Union (measured separately from accession to the Eurasian Union) reveal the same trend previously observed with regard to preferences and attitudes toward external partners. Thus, the EU's position improves in the geopolitical perceptions and preferences of Gagauz and Bulgarians. From 3.6% in 2015, the share of respondents who would vote in favor of EU accession increased to 17.6% in 2021 (this trend, however, was not confirmed in the 2024 referendum although it is possible that the broader geopolitical and domestic political context following the outbreak of Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to a reversal of the trend recorded during the 2015-2021 period).

In the case of a hypothetical referendum on accession to the Eurasian Union, the same trend is observed: among Gagauz and Bulgarians, public perceptions appear to be reshaped toward the early development of a more positive view of the EU, alongside a decline in support for potential accession to the organization led by the Russian Federation. Whereas in 2015, 83.8% of the population would have voted in favor of accession to the Eurasian Union, this statistic declined to 42.9% by 2021. This decrease can be attributed both to a substantial increase in those who would vote against joining the union (37%) and to a rise in the number of undecided respondents.

Figure 5: *Voting option in the event of a referendum for accession to the Eurasian Union in the ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia District (%)*

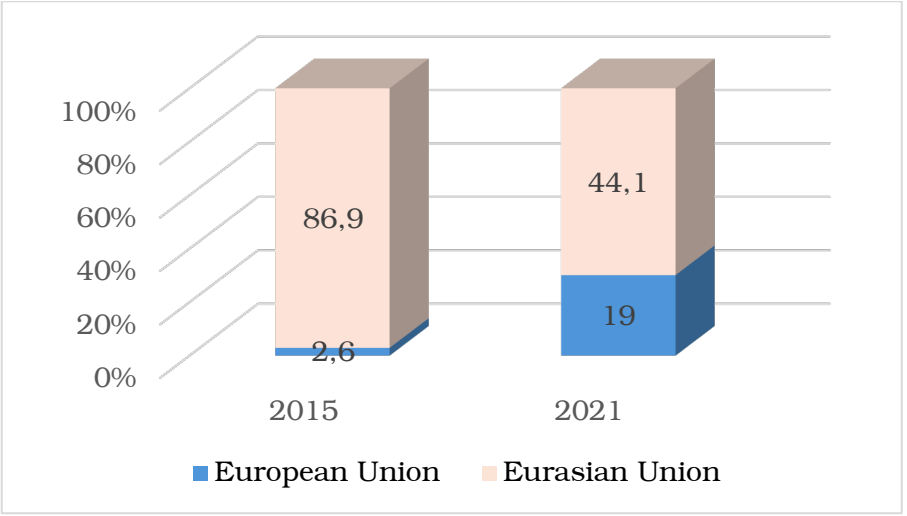


Note: the remaining percentages are: „I don't know"/„I don't answer"
(Source: author's elaboration based on data IPP, 2015, 2021)

IPP also measured external orientation preferences, which allows us to observe and analyze options expressed through an exclusive choice, eliminating the possibility of selecting both of the tested alternatives as preferred options. Moreover, respondents are placed in a situation that requires a more categorical choice, and the results can more clearly illustrate potential associations anticipated in relation to ethno-national and cultural-linguistic identity. The outcome of such a joint measurement of external preferences can contribute to clarifying analyses aimed at testing our hypothesis that, in the Republic of Moldova, there exists a cleavage in the choice of geopolitical options between these Gagauz and Bulgarian communities in the south and the majority option expressed by the Moldovan/Romanian community in the rest of the country. Evidently, as in

the case of the Transnistrian region, the Russian or Russian-speaking community displays a consistent inclination toward pro-Russian and anti-European options.

Figure 6: *Voting option in the event of a referendum with the possibility of choosing between joining the EU or the Eurasian Union in the ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia District (%)*



Note: the remaining percentages are: „I don't know"/„I don't answer"
(Source: author's elaboration based on data IPP, 2015, 2021)

Support for EU accession in case of a referendum was very low in 2015 (2.6%), highlighting a correlation with the separate measurement of this option (the decrease was only 1% when measured jointly with the pro-Eurasian Union option). This could suggest that citizens who favor the pro-EU option hold more crystallized views, however, given the very small numbers involved, such an interpretation must be treated with caution. More pronounced, however, are the dilemmas reflected in preferences for accession to either of the two unions in 2021 (19% in favor of EU accession and 44.1% in favor of accession to the Eurasian Union). Nevertheless, as in the categorical pattern observed in 2015, the Gagauz community in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia and the Bulgarian and Gagauz communities in Taraclia continue to show a stronger preference for accession to the Eurasian Union.

4. Conclusion

The evolution of public perceptions in the Republic of Moldova between 2009 and 2024 has highlighted a process of shaping in relation to domestic political realities, the geopolitical context, the level of political rapprochement with the European Union or the Russian Federation, the tangible outcomes of the Eastern Partnership particularly the

implementation of the Association Agreements as well as in accordance with the demographic structure of the population of the Republic of Moldova. The results of our research on public perceptions regarding EU accession, incorporating the identity component into the analysis, align with expectations and confirm our research hypothesis: public perceptions related to geopolitical orientation have been shaped primarily by identity fragmentation, rather than solely by other forms of fragmentation and polarization based on political, socio-economic, residential, or educational criteria.

The main conclusion is that Moldovan society is geopolitically polarized along ethnic and linguistic identity lines. Thus, Moldovan citizens of Russian ethnicity or Russian-speaking citizens, as well as Gagauz and Bulgarians, tend to prefer closer relations with the Russian Federation in terms of the Republic of Moldova's external orientation. The findings point not only to the existence of clearly delineated identity boundaries within Moldovan society, but also to the presence of an identity cleavage characterized by antagonistic and divergent positioning with respect to East-West geopolitical options. This cleavage has the potential to acquire conflictual dimensions. This reality reaffirms the premise that, in the Republic of Moldova, there exists a source of societal insecurity that may be geopolitically exploited by both internal and external actors.

Against the backdrop of this cleavage within Moldovan society, and despite current progress and firmly taken decisions in favor of closer integration with the European Union, the reversible nature of the Republic of Moldova's geopolitical choice of rapprochement with EU structures is once again confirmed. At any time, in the context of a changing international environment or amid socio-economic and political upheavals, a pro-Russian and anti-European government may come to power, and European integration may be suspended or even removed from the state's foreign policy agenda.

Bibliography

Baar, Vladimir, and Jakubek, Daniel (2017), *Divided National Identity in Moldova*, in *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politic* 11 (1): 58–92

Bărbulescu, I. Gh. (coord.), Brie, M., Toderaș N., 2016, *Cooperarea transfrontalieră între România și Ucraina, respectiv între România și Republica Moldova. Oportunități și provocări între 2014-2020*, Tritonic, București.

Brie, Mircea (2016). *Identity as Frontier in Central and Eastern Europe. The Case of the Republic of Moldova*, in Mircea Brie, Alina Stoica, Florentina

Chirodea (coord.). *The European Space Borders and Issues.* In *Honorem Professor Ioan Horga*, 359-381.

Brie, Mircea (2021). *Comparative Conceptual Perspectives on Identity Borders in the Republic of Moldova.* In *EUROPOLITY, Continuity and Change in European Governance*: Vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 5-29.

Brie, Mircea (2022), *Eșecul actualului model al Parteneriatului Estic. De la complicatele interese naționale la contextualizarea geopolitică*, Ioan Bolovan, Melania-Gabriela Ciot (coord.), *Românii și România în context European. Istorie și diplomație: Omagiu profesorului Vasile Pușcaș la împlinirea vârstei de 70 de ani*, Editura Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, Cluj-Napoca, p. 315-334

Brie, Mircea (2023). *Linguistic individuality in the Republic of Moldova and North Macedonia: an identity border as a political foundation of national construction.* In *István-József Polgár, Mircea Brie (coord.)*: *The legitimacy of new regionalism in the European integration process, supliment Analele Universității din Oradea, Seria Relații Internaționale și Studii Europene,* Debrecen / Oradea, pp. 281-294.

Brie, Mircea (2025*), EU Accession of the Republic of Moldova: the Challenges of the Internal and Geopolitical Context.* In *Analele Universităţii din Oradea, Seria Relaţii Internaţionale şi Studii Europene*, p. 83-106.

Brie, Mircea, Alexandru Solcan (2025), *Identity and societal security in the Republic of Moldova. Civil society perceptions and engagement.* In *Civil Szemle*, vol. XXII, Budapest, 2025/1, p. 157-175. https://doi.org/10.62560/csz.2025.01.10

Brie, Mircea; Ana-Maria Costea, Nicolae Toderaș (2025), *The European Orientation of the Republic of Moldova. Romania's Support for this Process / Orientarea Europeană a Republicii Moldova. Demersuri de sprijinire din partea României*, Debrecen University Press / Editura Universității din Oradea, Oradea, 2025.

EaP Summit (2011), *Summitul Parteneriatului Estic: între așteptări și realitate*, https://www.timpul.md/articol/summitul-parteneriatului-estic-intre-asteptari-si-realitate--27897.html, accessed on December 20th, 2025.

European Council (2024), UE deschide negocieri de aderare cu Republica Moldova, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/press/press-releases/2024/06/25/eu-opens-accession-negotiations-with-moldova/, accessed on January 15th, 2025.

Gábor Flóra (2011), *Identitate și ideologie națională: o perspectivă socio-istorică*, in Balogh Brigitta, Bernáth Krisztina, Bujalos István, Adrian Hatos, Murányi István (coord.), *Identitate europeană, națională și regional. Teorie și practică*, Editura Partium, Oradea.

Gogolashvili, K. (2015), „Position Paper 4: Georgia" în Hett, F., Kikić, S., Meuser, S. (eds.), *Reassessing the European Neighbourhood Policy. The*

Eastern Dimension, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn, disponibil la: https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/11483.pdf, accessed on December 20th, 2025.

Goltsov Andrei (2020), *Geopolitics of the Russian Federation Regarding the Republic of Moldova*, *Cogito - Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, Vol.XII, no. 3, p. 153-169.

Goreainov, Victoria and Brie, Mircea (2018), *The Republic of Moldova in the Framework of the Eastern Partnership and Prospects for Relations with the Russian Federation.* In *Analele Universităţii din Oradea, Seria Relaţii Internaţionale şi Studii Europene*, p. 143-169.

Nantoi, Oazu (coord.) et. all (2016), *Moldova între est și vest: viziuni din Găgăuzia și Taraclia*. Institutul de Politici Publice. Chișinău. https://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Moldova-intre-Est-si-Vest-Viziuni-din-Gagauzia-si-Taraclia_RO.pdf. accessed on November 27th, 2025.

NBSRM (2024a), National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, *Recensământul Populaţiei 2004*, http://www.statistica.md/pageview.php?l=ro&idc=295&id=2234, accessed on December 16th, 2025.

NBSRM (2024b), National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, *Recensământului Populației și al Locuințelor 2014*, https://statistica.gov.md/ro/recensamantul-populatiei-si-al-locuintelor-2014-122.html, accessed on December 16th, 2025.

Orjuhovschi, A., & Brie, M. (2025). *The level of integration of the Gagauz community from the Republic of Moldova. Public Perceptions and External Influences*. In Inclusivity Journal, 2, 53-80. https://doi.org/10.58603/UILO1264

Putină Natalia (2012), *The phenomenon of ethnic voting in the Republic of Moldova (the Gagauz case)*, MOLDOSCOPIE (Problems of Political Analysis), no.2 (LVII), Chișinău: USM, p.138-147

Putină, N. (2010). *The Role of the Geopolitical Factor in the Formation of Gagauzian-Autonomy within-the Republic of Moldova.* In *Analele Universităţii din Oradea. Relaţii Internationale şi Studii Europene (RISE)*, (2), 131-147.

Putină, N. (2011a). *The Socio-political dilemas of integration of Gagauz in Republic of Moldova.* In Mircea Brie, Ioan Horga, Sorin Şipoş (coord.), Ethnicity, Confession and Intercultural Dialogue at the European Union's East Border, Editura Universităţii din Debrecen/Editura Universităţii din Oradea, Debrecen/Oradea, 2011, 163-179.

Putină, N. (2011b). „Rolul partidelor în reprezentarea politică a minorităţilor etnice (cazul găgăuzilor din Republica Moldova". *Moldoscopie*, *55*(4), 163-177.

Putină, N. (2025). *Religion, Confessional Communities, and State–Church Relations in the Republic of Moldova*. In Inclusivity Journal, 2, 97-114. https://doi.org/10.58603/JDJC6772

Sprînceana, Vitalie (2013), *Moldova: God in Border Zones*. Pro et Contra, Vol. 17, No. 3-4, https://www.scribd.com/document/174683010/Moldova-God-in-Border-Zones, accessed on January 15th, 2025

Vintilă, P. (2025). *The Ethnopolitical Identity of the Gagauz: Between the Russian World and European Integration*. In Inclusivity Journal, 1, 141-158. https://doi.org/10.58603/RXBQ3649

CEC RM (2026). Comisia Electorală Centrală a Republicii Moldova, *Rezultatele referendumului republican constituțional*, https://a.cec.md/ro/rezultatele-referendumului-republican-constitutional-17041.html, accessed on January 15th, 2025.

IPP (2015, 2021), Institutul de Politici Publice, *Moldova between East And West: views from Gagauzia and Taraclia*. Chișinău. https://ipp.md, accessed on December 16th, 2025.

https://www.doi.org/10.58603/DCPY2207

The Status of Druze Women Between Religious Law, Tradition, and Modernity: A Historical Evolution With a Focus on Change in Israel

Imad Abu Reesh[1]

Abstract
This article examines the evolving status of Druze women in Israel at the intersection of religious law, communal tradition, and modern state structures. The study explores how religious norms governing marriage, divorce, and inheritance interact with social practice, and how political, educational, and economic changes since 1948 have expanded, yet also limited, the scope of Druze women's agency. Methodologically, the work combines an extensive theoretical review with a chronological–comparative perspective, situating Israeli Druze women within the broader Druze world and within the landscape of women in other minority communities. It analyses qualitative accounts of women lived experiences alongside quantitative trends in education and employment.
The main findings indicate simultaneous processes of change and continuity: significant advances in education and professional integration coexist with persistent expectations around family honour, marriage, and gendered divisions of labour. The article concludes by arguing for culturally sensitive, evidence-based policies that address both structural barriers and existing strengths, and by outlining an agenda for future research on Druze women's agency, changing masculinities, and comparative perspectives across regional and religious contexts.

Keywords
Druze women, religious law, gender roles, tradition and modernity, women's agency

Introduction

The status of Druze women in Israel is shaped by a complex interplay of religious law, long-standing communal traditions, and modern influences, an interplay that has changed significantly over the course of centuries. The

[1] Judge Dr. Appointed as Judge/Kadi in cout of appeal from 2017; Appointed as a Judge/Kadi in the Druze Religious Court (2012); 1976-1997-Treasuer at the local council in Yarka Israel; 1997-Chief Secretary to the Druze Religious courts in Israel; BA in law from Netanya College Israel (2014);-LLM degree from Netanya College Israel (2027); PhD in the field of International Relations and European Studies, Babes-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca (2025). Yarka Village (Israel). E-mail: Imad120@walla.co.il

Druze community, which has functioned for more than a thousand years as a closed ethno-religious minority in the Middle East, is characterized by dense social ties and a pronounced patriarchal structure that continues to govern family life and patterns of social interaction (Muschara, 2015; Johnson & Zeedan, 2024). Within this framework, Druze women have historically been required to navigate between loyalty to religious norms and communal customs, on the one hand, and the demands of modernity, on the other, thereby producing complex gender roles in both the domestic and public spheres (Ghanem, 2018; Faraj Falah, 2023).

This dissertation focuses on the ways in which these dynamics have been manifested in Israel since 1948, a period marked by far-reaching changes in schooling, higher education, labour-market participation, and state policy toward the Druze community. These changes have gradually destabilized the traditional normative order and opened new opportunities for women, while simultaneously exposing sharp gaps between formal rules and lived experience (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024). The central question guiding the study is the extent to which religious norms in the domains of marriage, inheritance, and divorce are in fact congruent with women's everyday realities, and what legal, communal, and familial mechanisms mediate between religious text and social practice (Lapniewska, 2016; Petesch et al., 2017; Abu Reesh, 2025). A further aim is to map how political, educational, and economic processes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have reshaped the scope of agency available to Druze women, and whether they have enabled the development of strategies of resistance to traditional patriarchal structures (Al-Abdin et al., 2018; Faraj Falah, 2023; Reineck et al., 2017).

The Druze community itself rests on a multilayered religious–cultural history. The Druze religion emerged from Ismaʿili Shiʿism in the eleventh century and is grounded in strong communal solidarity and a unique belief system that shapes patterns of authority, family life, and identity (IZZEDDIN, 1993; Muschara, 2015). Traditionally, Druze society has been organized as a patriarchal social order. However, in recent decades—and particularly in the Israeli context—there has been a discernible shift in the narrative surrounding women, against the background of expanded access to education, integration into the public service, and state policies that treat the Druze as a distinct group within the institutional system (Ghanem, 2018; Faraj Falah, 2023). Within this broader transformation, the study seeks to examine how women's status has evolved since the establishment of the state, and to assess whether religious doctrines concerning polygamy, divorce, and inheritance are in fact translated into gender equality, or whether they are eroded or distorted in their encounter with local social

norms (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Lapniewska, 2016; Petesch et al., 2017; Abu Reesh, 2025).

The research question is thus anchored in a combination of history, culture, and legal structure. On the one hand, the analysis must engage with the community's historical roots and with a religious narrative that ostensibly posits ideals of mutual moral responsibility; on the other hand, it examines the socio-political dynamics that have driven change: modernization, the expansion of the education system, the increase in the number of Druze female students, compulsory military service for men, and the growing integration of women into the labour market (Ghanem, 2018; Faraj Falah, 2023). From this emerge sub-questions that focus on the discrepancy between religious ideals and social reality, on the identification of political and educational turning points, and on understanding the contribution of higher education and employment to shifts in gendered power relations and to the development of "resistance from within the system" (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Lapniewska, 2016; Petesch et al., 2017; Al-Abdin et al., 2018; Faraj Falah, 2023; Reineck et al., 2017; Kra-Friedman, 2022).

In doing so, the study addresses a substantive gap in the literature on Druze society in general and on Druze women in particular. Despite an expansion of research on gender in minority communities, the status of Druze women, especially in the Israeli context, has remained only partially at the centre of scholarly discussion (Johnson & Zeedan, 2024). The dissertation seeks to deepen this discussion both theoretically and practically: to grasp the complexity of Druze women's identities as an intersection of gender, ethnicity, religion, class, and geography, and to propose an intersectional reading that is attentive to the overlaps between these axes (Kra-Friedman, 2022; Snapp, 2024; Kattoura, 2020; Al Munajed, 2025; Faraj Falah, 2023).

Methodologically, the dissertation is grounded in an extensive theoretical review that combines historical, legal, and sociological sources, alongside an analysis of qualitative and quantitative studies dealing with intermarriage, the division of household labour, women's agency, and the impact of education and employment on the status of Druze women (Muschara, 2015; Faraj Falah, 2023; Ghanem, 2018). A chronological–comparative approach makes it possible to identify stages of change from the formative period of the religion to the present, and to distinguish between processes occurring in Israel and those in Druze communities in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan (Lapniewska, 2016; Petesch et al., 2017; Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024). In this way, the study strengthens research validity and lays the groundwork for a culturally sensitive policy discussion that seeks to translate theoretical insights into concrete recommendations aimed at

improving gender equality and the wellbeing of Druze women (Al-Abdin et al., 2018; Reineck et al., 2017; Kra-Friedman, 2022; Snapp, 2024; Kattoura, 2020; Al Munajed, 2025; Shapiro, 2013).

The literature review integrates key concepts of intersectionality, neo-patriarchy, and religious feminism, demonstrating that the status of Druze women cannot be understood without taking into account their position as members of a national minority, their experience of social–economic peripherality, and their embeddedness within extended family structures (Petesch et al., 2017; Al-Abdin et al., 2018; Reineck et al., 2017; Kra-Friedman, 2022; Snapp, 2024; Kattoura, 2020; Al Munajed, 2025; Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024). This perspective makes it possible to trace the ways in which women act within patriarchal structures, sometimes through outward conformity and "strategic consent," while simultaneously advancing slow but cumulative change.

Finally, the introduction outlines the dual contribution of the dissertation: on the one hand, a theoretical contribution in the form of a broad chronological framework for examining the status of Druze women over roughly a millennium; on the other, a focused analysis of the dramatic transformations that have taken place in Israel in recent decades (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Lapniewska, 2016; Petesch et al., 2017; Al-Abdin et al., 2018; Faraj Falah, 2023). On the practical level, the findings are intended to assist policymakers and community leadership in identifying the specific challenges faced by Druze women and in formulating culturally sensitive policies that promote gender equality and social justice (Reineck et al., 2017; Kra-Friedman, 2022; Snapp, 2024; Johnson & Zeedan, 2024). In doing so, the dissertation lays the groundwork for future research that will continue to explore the complexity of Druze women's status and agency, and to broaden the discourse on gender, culture, and minority rights in Israel (Kattoura, 2020; Al Munajed, 2025; Shapiro, 2013; Cooper et al., 2025; Abu Reesh, 2025).

Literature Review

The contemporary situation of Druze women cannot be captured through a simple dichotomy of tradition versus modernity. Rather, it is a complex tapestry in which religious law, deeply rooted traditions, and the accelerating demands of modern life are tightly interwoven. The Druze community, with its deep historical roots in the Middle East, maintains a system of norms that clearly delineates the division of roles within the family. Historically, women have operated within a male-dominated framework in which family honor and marriage arrangements were determined for them in advance, largely on the basis of religious interpretations (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020). In recent decades, however,

especially following the expansion of access to education and global communication, a renewed conversation on gender roles has emerged. This is a slow process, but one that clearly positions women's rights on a trajectory of change (Muschara, 2015).

The literature portrays a prolonged struggle: alongside religious commitments, institutional and social patterns of discrimination persist (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020; Kattoura, 2020). Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the social landscape has changed significantly. The formal education system, the opening of institutions of higher education, and the expansion of employment opportunities have created new pathways for women toward economic independence and autonomous subjectivity (Nuwayhid, 1986). Their integration into state systems and the possibility of military service have opened channels of empowerment that were not previously available (Lapniewska, 2016; Muschara, 2015). Studies indicate a correlation between higher education and the increased presence of Druze women in the public sphere, as well as a reshaping of cultural perceptions of womanhood (Nuwayhid, 1986), even though in rural localities conservative traditions continue to impose substantial restrictions on their freedom (Kheir, 2024; Kattoura, 2020).

The encounter between religious law and modern legal orders raises complex questions of identity. Scholars emphasize a paradox: while religious law may contain elements open to progressive interpretation, deeply entrenched cultural norms continue in practice to preserve patriarchal control (Faraj-Falah, 2009; Shapiro, 2013). Hence the importance of contextual analysis: the lived experience of a Druze woman varies according to her economic status, place of residence, and specific family–social background (Batool, 2025). Epistemic gaps have also been identified: a substantial portion of the research focuses on highly educated women who are framed as "success stories", whereas the voices of women in more conservative circles, who continue to struggle for basic agency, are heard far less (Ghanem, 2018; Al-Abdin et al., 2018). The literature therefore calls for more systematic comparisons with other Arab communities in order to obtain a broader and more nuanced picture (Falah, 2013).

Recent studies underscore the need to deepen the examination of modernity's impact on tradition and of the possibility of implementing legal reforms without undermining religious belief (Batool, 2025; Faiad, 2024). The sources suggest that the process of change is marked, simultaneously, by barriers and by the opening of new opportunities (Kra-Friedman, 2022; Kheir, 2024). A chronological mapping of these developments shows that, initially, a highly restricted "possible space" was delineated for women, centered on male authority in the family and community (Kattoura, 2020). Over the course of the twentieth century, and especially since the 1970s,

education became a disruptive factor: women began to pursue academic studies and professional careers, thereby undermining the foundations of patriarchal norms (Kra-Friedman, 2022; Al-Abdin et al., 2018), and turning education into a key instrument for redefining their status within the family and the community.

The national context differentiates the experience of Druze women in Israel from that of their counterparts in Syria and Lebanon. In Israel, military service, citizenship, and national identity generate unique tensions between loyalty to tradition and the demands of modern citizenship (Shapiro, 2013). In recent years there has been a rise in the number of women holding leadership positions, against the background of local feminist discourse and broader social processes (Lapniewska, 2016). Young women increasingly draw on education and social activism to rewrite their life narratives and demand rights, thereby becoming agents of change within the community (Petesch et al., 2017; Al-Abdin et al., 2018). This process is described in the literature as a "slow reconciliation": attempts to promote legal and social reforms that are adapted to modern realities without relinquishing cultural identity (Falah, 2013), a delicate balance between past and future (Kra-Friedman, 2022; Kheir, 2024).

One of the central axes in the literature is the tension between religious texts and social reality. Although Druze religious texts may, at least in theory, allow for egalitarian interpretations, social norms often place women in a subordinate position, manifested, inter alia, in forced marriages and severe restrictions on freedom of movement (Lapniewska, 2016). At the same time, processes of modernity gradually erode the old order: the growing number of female students enhances the social legitimacy of women's presence outside the home, even though many still encounter significant labour-market and normative barriers despite their education (Al-Abdin et al., 2018). This struggle for recognition unfolds at a complex intersection of gender, ethnicity, and religious authority (Shapiro, 2013).

The literature also highlights a persistent tension between personal choice and communal expectations. Women constantly negotiate their identities between loyalty to tradition and the pursuit of modern aspirations; frequently, cultural preservation and the struggle for equality occur simultaneously, giving rise to creative strategies of resistance (Barakat, 2023). This yields a rich and complex picture that underscores women's resilience in the face of severe constraints (Lapniewska, 2016; Petesch et al., 2017).

Methodologically, research on Druze women employs a combination of tools. Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and ethnographic approaches, enable access to women's subjective worlds, exposing emotional

burdens and social pressures (; Lapniewska, 2016), while quantitative studies provide data on long-term trends such as the dramatic rise in the rate of women in higher education (Al-Abdin et al., 2018). This mixed-methods approach is essential for constructing a comprehensive picture (Cooper et al., 2025). Historical approaches add an additional layer by clarifying how past events have shaped contemporary religious interpretations and social norms (Shapiro, 2013).

At the theoretical level, the literature draws on historical frameworks that emphasize frictions between traditional practices and new economic realities (Muschara, 2015), on intersectional analysis that examines the interlocking of religion, class, and gender (Al-Abdin et al., 2018), and on cultural relativism, which urges evaluation of experiences within local value systems—even when these come into tension with universal human-rights principles (IZZEDDIN, 1993). Alongside this, feminist critique calls for a re-examination of religious norms that preserve male dominance, and locates the primary potential for change in two levers: education and economic resources (Falah, 2013; Shapiro, 2013; Lapniewska, 2016).

The cumulative conclusion of the literature is that Druze women are situated at the heart of a profound transformation: a movement from a history of male control toward a future in which they cross normative boundaries and claim rights, primarily through education (Faraj-Falah, 2009; Ghanem, 2018). This process unfolds under the dual pressure of cultural preservation and the struggle for equality (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017), and demands further in-depth comparative research—especially regarding women who have not benefited from educational mobility, and concerning the question of how legal norms may be updated without undermining religious faith (Erwani & Siregar, 2024; Batool, 2025; Snapp, 2024; Cooper et al., 2025). Ultimately, the literature portrays a group of women with exceptional resilience, navigating a dense maze of tradition and change, and issues an implicit call to action to create conditions that enable them to realize their full potential (Faiad, 2024; Nuwayhid, 1986).

Methodology

The methodology of this dissertation, *"The Status of Druze Women between Religious Law, Tradition, and Modernity: A Historical Evolution with a Focus on Change in Israel"*, is grounded in historical inquiry and systematic literature analysis, with the aim of elucidating the intersection of gender, religion, and nationality in the Druze context. The core research problem concerns how family structures, culture, and religion intersect to shape the shifting identities and social positioning of Druze women in Israel (IZZEDDIN, 1993). To that end, the study presents a broad historical analysis, from the emergence of the Druze religion to the present, examining

how modernity, the education system, and the political order have affected women's rights and status (Falah, 2018; Bals, 2009).

The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining archival sources, contemporary case studies, and in-depth interviews with the analysis of existing quantitative data. In this way, both personal narratives and "hard numbers" are gathered regarding education, employment, and demographic processes (Barakat, 2022; 2018; Kheir, 2024). This combination corrects the narrow focus of earlier studies that concentrated primarily on educational and employment indicators while neglecting the complexity of familial expectations and tradition (Faiad, 2024). Integrating the findings with theories of neo-patriarchy and intersectionality enables the study to highlight the tension between traditional Druze law and modern forms of women's agency (Falah, 2013; Zeedan & Luce, 2021), and to examine the lives of educated, professional women who navigate between religious obligations and career demands (Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020). Thus, the methodology seeks to bridge between theoretical frameworks and the everyday realities of women operating within a multi-layered power structure.

The research design is built on the integration of history, law, and sociology, based on the premise that no single disciplinary lens can fully capture the complexity of Druze women's status. The research questions address the encounter between traditional structures and modern influences, and the implications of this encounter for gender equality and community functioning (Barakat, 2018; 2022). The study aims to map the historical evolution of women's status and to analyze how education, legal structures, and political context contribute to women's capacity to make autonomous choices in the private and public spheres (Faiad, 2024). Accordingly, the design emphasizes qualitative methods, primarily in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, enabling exploration of how women navigate between patriarchal expectations and the challenges posed by modernity (Falah, 2018; Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020).

This methodological design has a dual value. At the academic level, it fills significant gaps in knowledge concerning Druze women and gender dynamics in minority societies; at the applied level, it provides a basis for designing educational policies and social programmes that respect tradition while seeking to promote gender equality (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020). Documenting the lived experiences of Druze women makes it possible to rethink the relationship between education and cultural identity and to propose a comparative model relevant to other minority groups (Barakat, 2023; Bals, 2009; Hazran et al., 2024).

The qualitative analysis relies on life stories and in-depth interviews with women from diverse backgrounds, employing ethnographic tools to depict the multilayered nature of their lives (Barakat, 2023; Jarar, 2012). This focus allows for a nuanced understanding of the delicate balance between traditional roles and modern aspirations, and of the ways in which women redefine their identities in the face of religious injunctions and social expectations. In parallel, quantitative analysis of data on education, labour-force participation, and demographic change situates these narratives within a broader socio-economic context (Kheir, 2024). The gap between formally egalitarian values embedded in religious doctrine and the reality constrained by patriarchal structures is a central axis of the research design; the goal is to show how educational and occupational advancement, combined with political change, reshape gender norms and enable empowerment (Falah, 2013; Barakat, 2024).

The data collection methods reflect the mixed-methods strategy: semi-structured in-depth interviews, analysis of archival documents, and the processing of statistical data from state agencies and previous studies (Barakat, 2022; Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019). The interviews focus on education, employment, and family life, and are designed to uncover the negotiations over identity and agency that women conduct in the tension between tradition and modernity (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020; Barakat, 2023). The quantitative data, by contrast, highlight trends such as the rise in the proportion of female students and women's participation in the labour market (Faraj-Falah, 2009; Hazran et al., 2024). The combination of these two dimensions allows for a richer interpretation of the relationship between educational achievement, women's empowerment, and shifting social attitudes, and supports the formulation of context-sensitive policy recommendations (Falah et al., 2017; Natoor et al., 2024).

In light of the character of the Druze community, a relatively closed, cohesive group with a deeply rooted patriarchal tradition—purposive sampling was chosen, aimed at "key voices" across a range of ages, educational levels, and socio-economic backgrounds (Falah, 2013). The sample includes both highly educated women in the liberal professions and women in more traditional roles, in order to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and to understand different degrees of gendered agency (Faiad, 2024). Previous research on gender in minority groups underscores the importance of representing diverse perspectives to enable a holistic analysis (Barakat, 2023; Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019).

The study is conducted within a strong historical and contextual frame. It begins from the assumption that, at the normative level, Druze religious doctrine articulates more egalitarian values than are realized in practice, and that women confront barriers arising from cultural interpretations and

legal arrangements (Falah, 2013). Integrating qualitative findings with indicators of education and employment helps demonstrate how historical–political processes, such as conscription to the Israel Defense Forces, separate Druze schooling, and limited integration into the labour market, shape women's lived realities (Faiad, 2024; Amer & Davidovitch, 2020).

An important component of the methodology concerns ethical considerations. Research within a closed ethno-religious community requires heightened sensitivity to anonymity, confidentiality, and the potential social implications for interviewees. Purposive sampling and individual interviews are therefore accompanied by explicit assurances of confidentiality and transparent presentation of the research aims, with careful attention to gendered power imbalances and internal stigma (Muschara, 2015; Ghanem, 2018). The use of survey data and official statistics makes it possible to broaden the evidentiary base without exposing participants (Kra-Friedman, 2022).

In sum, the methodology of this dissertation seeks to construct a balanced framework: on the one hand, fidelity to the unique cultural and religious context of the Druze community; on the other, adherence to scholarly standards of reliability, transparency, and research ethics. The systematic integration of historical sources, quantitative data, and qualitative narratives enables an in-depth examination of the changing status of Druze women in Israel and the derivation of insights of value to academic discourse, public policy, and community practice (Reineck et al., 2017; Snapp, 2024; Erwani & Siregar, 2024; Batool, 2025).

Findings

Examining the status of Druze women within the shifting space between religious law, tradition, and modernity reveals a complex picture of significant progress alongside persistent structural barriers. Historically, Druze women lived within a patriarchal framework that restricted their access to higher education and professional careers. In recent decades, however, a clear shift has emerged: an increasing number of women are pursuing academic studies and assuming leadership positions within their communities (Faraj Falah, 2023). Quantitative data indicate, for example, that by 2020 women constituted roughly two-thirds of Druze university students—an indicator of substantial change in gender perceptions and in women's social positioning (IZZEDDIN, 1993; Faraj Falah, 2023).

Growing integration into professions such as education, social services, and healthcare has afforded women greater economic independence and social empowerment, thereby challenging traditional gendered power structures (Falah, 2013; Faraj Falah, 2023). These findings

are consistent with scholarship that emphasizes the resilience and agency of Druze women even within constraining and sometimes oppressive structures (Muschara, 2015). At the same time, traditional family roles still shape educational and occupational trajectories: expectations around marriage, motherhood, and care work continue to influence women's choices and, in some cases, to limit the full translation of educational gains into labour-market outcomes (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020; Ghanem, 2018).

A regional comparison sharpens this picture. Druze women in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan face similar gendered challenges, yet the Israeli context, with its particular configuration of public schooling, access to higher education, military service for Druze men, and targeted state policies, creates unique spaces of agency for women that are not necessarily available in neighbouring states (Ghanem, 2018; Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024). Abu-Hassan Nebuani's (2024) comparative analysis of Muslim, Druze, and Christian women in Israel demonstrates that Druze women simultaneously participate in processes of change (e.g., entering higher education, postponing marriage, decreasing fertility) and in processes of preservation (e.g., maintaining strong kinship obligations and deference to communal norms). At the same time, customs such as arranged marriages and male dominance in key family decisions continue to restrict women's autonomy in choosing a spouse and determining their life paths, especially in more conservative localities (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024).

These findings refine, at the academic level, our understanding of the layered and specific challenges Druze women face, and of the ways in which their experiences differ from those of women in other Arab communities in Israel. Abu-Hassan Nebuani (2024) shows that Druze attitudes toward women's paid work are often more ambivalent than those of Christian respondents but somewhat more supportive than those of some Muslim sub-groups, illustrating the "simultaneity" of modernization and religious reinforcement. Practically, this underscores the need for culturally sensitive policy that takes into account the structure of Druze identity and the complexity of navigating between tradition and modernity. The duality through which women balance loyalty to heritage with aspirations for personal freedom reflects an ongoing negotiation between collective expectations and individual choice (Lapniewska, 2016; Petesch et al., 2017). Recognition of these processes of change lays the groundwork for future research on the evolving gender roles in Druze communities in Israel and beyond, and for more nuanced discourse on women's rights in traditional contexts (Al-Abdin et al., 2018; Faraj Falah, 2023).

Presentation of the Data

The data collected in this study provide a nuanced view of the status of Druze women, against the backdrop of their shifting position between tradition and modern forces. An historical–qualitative approach was adopted, combining in-depth interviews with archival sources, in order to capture lived experiences in the domains of education, employment, and family life (Falah, 2013; Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024).

The findings highlight a persistent tension between religious–legal norms and modern aspirations. Despite substantial gains in educational attainment among Druze women, systemic barriers still prevent their full integration into the labour market (Faraj Falah, 2023). For example, although women comprise a majority of Druze university students, their labour-force participation rates remain significantly lower than those of Jewish women and are concentrated in segmented, "feminized" sectors such as teaching and nursing (IZZEDDIN, 1993; Muschara, 2015). This disjuncture between obtaining a degree and being absorbed into the workforce is echoed in Abu-Hassan Nebuani's (2024) findings regarding the tension between women's economic independence and persistent expectations that they will prioritize family obligations.

Comparison with previous research reveals a recurrent theme: processes of empowerment are occurring, but alongside the continued preservation of patriarchal structures (Muschara, 2015; Faraj Falah, 2023). This dual pattern is also reflected in broader literature on gender, ethnicity, and politics in the Arab sector in Israel (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020; Ghanem, 2018). The historical focus of the present study makes it possible to trace how women's agency and strategies of resistance develop over time rather than being captured at a single moment.

These findings challenge static images of Druze women as passive "victims" of tradition and instead present them as active agents who engage in continuous negotiation over their roles in both family and public spheres (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024). The combination of personal narratives with quantitative data amplifies marginalized voices and yields a more complex picture of gender hierarchies within the community, thereby providing policymakers with an evidence base for developing inclusive, equality-promoting policies (Lapniewska, 2016).

Historical Trends in Women's Status

A historical perspective on Druze women in Israel reveals a dense interplay of religion, culture, and social structure. The Druze community, which emerged from Ismaʿili Shiʿism during the Fatimid period, developed a

distinctive religious legal system that ostensibly recognizes a measure of equality between women and men in areas such as inheritance and divorce (Falah, 2013; IZZEDDIN, 1993). In practice, however, the implementation of these rights is shaped within a patriarchal order that significantly constrains women's ability to realize them.

Historical analysis indicates that education has opened new opportunities for women since the late twentieth century, enabling them to build careers outside the home (Muschara, 2015; Faraj Falah, 2023). Nevertheless, entrenched gender divisions and strong pressure to conform to traditional expectations around marriage and motherhood continue to narrow the scope of meaningful choice (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020; Ghanem, 2018). Comparative work, including Abu-Hassan Nebuani's (2024) study of Muslim, Druze, and Christian women, suggests that Druze women face a distinctive constellation of socio-political challenges, shaped by the community's integration into Israeli state structures and by its unique religious status.

These historical trends point to an enduring tension between religious norms and processes of modernization, and call for policy that is attentive both to historical heritage and to contemporary realities (Reineck et al., 2017; Kra-Friedman, 2022).

The Impact of Education and Employment on Agency

Against the backdrop of social and political change in Israel, education and employment emerge as key levers in Druze women's struggle for equality. Traditionally, patriarchal structures severely limited women's access to education and the labour market (Falah, 2013). In recent decades, however, women's presence in academic programmes and prestigious professions has markedly increased, signaling not only a statistical shift but also a normative one. In 2021, women comprised more than 65% of Druze university students (Faraj Falah, 2023). and their participation in the health, education, and public sectors has expanded (IZZEDDIN, 1993).

Research identifies education as a central mechanism of empowerment for minority women, while also emphasizing that formal access to education does not, in itself, dismantle cultural expectations or economic inequalities (Muschara, 2015; Ghanem, 2018). The present study adds an additional layer by illustrating a "double struggle": women must simultaneously manage professional aspirations and familial demands, while contending with rigid communal norms.

From a policy perspective, understanding the role of education enables the design of educational and employment frameworks tailored to the Druze context, frameworks that not only open doors but also ensure that women

can act as agents of change for themselves and their communities (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Lapniewska, 2016).

Changing Family Dynamics and Gender Roles

Changes in family patterns among Druze women in Israel illustrate the encounter between tradition and modern life. For many years, women bore the primary responsibility for domestic labour, while the public sphere remained largely male-dominated (Falah, 2013). Rising levels of education and employment among women have led to shifts in decision-making dynamics, an increase in dual-earner households, and declining fertility—developments that together signal changes in family structure (IZZEDDIN, 1993).

Studies show that education challenges traditional gender norms and bolsters women's self-confidence and demands for autonomy (Muschara, 2015). Yet this transition is accompanied by tensions: many women continue to face deeply rooted expectations to conform to male authority structures. The findings of the present study indicate the construction of hybrid identities, simultaneously maintaining loyalty to tradition while pursuing modern aspirations (Ghanem, 2018).

These results are significant academically and practically: they deepen the discussion of gender in minority communities and point to the need for empowerment strategies that are attentive to cultural values (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Lapniewska, 2016).

Contrasting Traditional and Modern Influences, and Voices of Agency

The ongoing "dance" between traditional expectations and modern influences shapes the everyday lives of Druze women in Israel. In the past, women were often required to forgo higher education and careers in favour of domestic roles and the preservation of family honor (Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024; Faraj Falah, 2023). Today, the proportion of women in higher education and in professional careers has grown dramatically (IZZEDDIN, 1993; Falah, 2013). Nonetheless, cultural attitudes and institutional barriers continue to restrict their full participation in the political and public spheres (Ghanem, 2018).

The findings underscore that the empowerment of Druze women is a multi-layered process requiring support at the family, community, and institutional levels, and point to the need for educational reforms and workplace initiatives that gently but persistently challenge patriarchal norms (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Lapniewska, 2016; Petesch et al., 2017).

Finally, clear voices of agency and resistance emerge: educated women are entering leadership roles, demanding a more equitable division of household labour, and crafting hybrid identities that weave together tradition and change (Muschara, 2015; Ghanem, 2018). The pace of change and the degree of agency available to Druze women in Israel differ from those of women in other Arab communities, in part due to educational opportunities and the specific institutional context of the Israeli state (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017).

Taken together, the findings indicate that Druze women are active agents in reshaping gender priorities within their communities, and they call for continued research and social action to broaden these gains and deepen gender equality (Al-Abdin et al., 2018; Reineck et al., 2017).

Discussion

The discussion section underscores both the contributions and the limitations of existing scholarship and of the present study on Druze women in Israel. Theoretically, the work rests on a strong conceptual scaffold that draws on intersectionality, neo-patriarchy and religious feminism, frameworks that are well suited to capturing the multilayered realities of Druze women situated at the crossroads of religion, ethnicity, class and nationality (Falah, 2013; Kattoura, 2020). At the same time, Johnson and Zeedan's (2024) comprehensive bibliography demonstrates that research on the Druze in general, and on Druze women in particular, remains fragmented and relatively sparse, highlighting the need for original empirical studies rather than further syntheses of existing literature.

Empirically, the findings depict a pattern of concurrent change and continuity, echoing Abu-Hassan Nebuani's (2024) notion of "simultaneity": Druze women increasingly enter higher education and new occupational fields, yet expectations surrounding family honour, marriage and gendered divisions of labour remain powerful. Faraj Falah (2023) similarly documents significant advances in Druze women's public participation alongside the persistence of male dominance in key decision-making arenas. The present study corroborates these trends, showing that women do not simply abandon the religious and communal framework; instead, they renegotiate their roles from within, employing strategies of adaptation and incremental resistance.

Abu Reesh's (2025) analysis of Druze personal-status law adds a crucial legal dimension to this picture. While doctrinal texts include provisions that may be interpreted as comparatively protective of women, such as limits on polygyny and formal grounds for divorce, the day-to-day operation of religious courts, and the overlap between state and religious

jurisdictions, frequently produce outcomes that disadvantage women. When these legal insights are read together with the sociological evidence presented in this dissertation, it becomes clear that substantive change requires both normative reinterpretation of religious law and institutional reforms in the judicial and administrative arenas.

The "imagined debate" constructed around the study illuminates further methodological and ethical challenges. The Defender rightly stresses the value of the theoretical framework and the ambition to portray Druze women as active agents who challenge patriarchal structures and to situate their experiences within the specific Israeli context since 1948. He also notes that the text under discussion functions as a summary and that fuller methodological details appear in the complete dissertation. The Critic, however, highlights a serious concern: the section labelled "Findings" largely reproduces previous research and does not clearly differentiate between secondary synthesis and primary evidence. In his view, this blurring of boundaries is particularly problematic when the study is presented as mixed-methods research.

The Critic further points to methodological opacity, limited information about sampling, recruitment, and inclusion criteria, and to the absence of an explicit ethical discussion. In a small, tightly knit and conservative community, a lack of transparency about confidentiality, anonymity and potential social risks to participants is especially troubling. He also cautions that a focus on narratives of highly educated, boundary-breaking women may obscure the experiences of those who have not benefited from higher education or urban mobility and thus generate a partial, overly celebratory "empowerment" story (Faraj-Falah, 2009; Faiad, 2024).

Taken together, these points suggest a dual agenda for future research. First, there is a clear need for more rigorous mixed-methods designs that explicitly separate theoretical background from original empirical contribution and that provide detailed accounts of data collection, analysis and ethical safeguards. Conflating literature review with findings not only undermines confidence in the research but also risks silencing the very voices it seeks to amplify. Second, subsequent studies should broaden their scope to include a wider range of women—particularly those in peripheral villages, with lower levels of formal education, or in more conservative settings—and should systematically incorporate men's perspectives in order to trace changing forms of Druze masculinity alongside shifts in women's roles (Faraj-Falah, 2009; Faiad, 2024).

More broadly, the discussion suggests that the theoretical apparatus developed in this work can serve as a conceptual "map" of key questions, constructs and points of tension for future empirical inquiry. When

combined with transparent methodological practice and careful ethical engagement, such research can provide the evidence base needed to design culturally sensitive policies that genuinely support Druze women as they navigate between tradition and modernity and strive to realise their rights and aspirations.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this dissertation shows that the position of Druze women in Israel is the outcome of a long, gradual, yet potentially transformative historical process unfolding at the intersection of religious law, communal tradition, and modern social change. The analysis traces a trajectory from a rigid patriarchal order, within which religiously grounded norms and community expectations sharply constrained women's mobility, educational opportunities, and legal standing, to a contemporary reality in which schooling and employment increasingly reshape both individual life courses and collective gender imaginaries (Faraj Falah, 2023). The central research question, how specific social, cultural, and legal factors structure Druze women's status, was examined through the lenses of educational advancement, community dynamics, and personal-status arrangements governing marriage, divorce, and inheritance (IZZEDDIN, 1993; Abu Reesh, 2025).

Framed conceptually by intersectionality and neo-patriarchy, the study delineates multiple layers of constraint while also foregrounding women's agency and the boundaries of the space within which they can claim recognition and initiate change (Falah, 2013; Kattoura, 2020). The empirical picture aligns with Abu-Hassan Nebuani's (2024) account of "simultaneity," whereby processes of change and preservation occur in parallel, and with Faraj Falah's (2023) documentation of Druze women's expanding educational and professional roles in the twenty-first century. Women do not merely exit traditional structures; rather, they renegotiate their roles from within religious, familial, and state institutions.

From a policy perspective, the findings underscore the necessity of culturally attuned, evidence-based interventions that recognise both the vulnerabilities and the resources of Druze women. Recommended measures include gender-sensitive educational reforms that challenge stereotypes, the expansion of high-quality employment opportunities in Druze localities, and the provision of welfare and legal services that address women's specific needs, particularly those of widows, divorcees, and rural residents (Bals, 2009; Faraj-Falah, 2009; Reineck et al., 2017). Abu Reesh's (2025) legal analysis makes clear that meaningful progress also requires institutional reform of the personal-status system, so that doctrinal provisions that are potentially protective of women's rights are not eroded in practice.

The dissertation also delineates a broad agenda for future inquiry. It calls for systematic comparative studies of Druze women in Lebanon and Syria; in-depth research on young women entering high-status professions and emerging fields such as technology and entrepreneurship; and sustained analysis of shifting forms of Druze masculinity alongside changes in women's social roles (Faiad, 2024; Faraj-Falah, 2009; Abu Reesh, 2025). Such work is needed not only to refine theoretical understandings of gender in minority settings, but also to inform a normative discourse on gender equality and social justice that is grounded in the lived realities of Druze communities (Nuwayhid, 1986).

Taken together, the body of literature reviewed and the empirical evidence presented here portray Druze women not simply as subjects constrained by tradition, but as active agents who navigate a dense mesh of religious, cultural, and state structures and, in doing so, gradually reconfigure gender relations in their communities (Faraj Falah, 2023; Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024). The challenge for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers is to sustain and deepen this momentum through research and action that clearly distinguishes theoretical background from empirical contribution, maintains methodological and ethical transparency, and supports Druze women's efforts to secure a more just and equitable future.

Summary of the Main Findings

The dissertation *The Status of Druze Women between Religious Law, Tradition, and Modernity: A Historical Evolution with a Focus on Change in Israel* depicts a gradual yet far-reaching transition from a context of severe social, legal, and familial constraints to one in which Druze women have, in recent decades, gained markedly broader access to higher education and paid employment. These expanded opportunities have altered women's economic and social positioning and opened new avenues for articulating their voices, claiming visibility in the public sphere, and contesting entrenched patriarchal norms (Faraj Falah, 2023).

A central aim of the study was to illuminate the gap between the rights that religious doctrine ostensibly accords women and the realities they encounter in their daily lives, while foregrounding the tension between an accelerating modern world and traditions that are difficult to relinquish (IZZEDDIN, 1993). By examining a wide range of contexts, including schooling, military service, and economic restructuring, the research shows how Druze women renegotiate their identities, develop a more autonomous voice, and confront gender discrimination and communal pressures (Falah, 2013; Faraj Falah, 2023).

In theoretical terms, the findings contribute to broader debates on women in minority communities situated between national belonging and modernity, and in practical terms, they suggest several directions for community- and state-level intervention. These include revising curricular materials so that they reflect women's historical and contemporary contributions to Druze heritage; expanding employment opportunities in peripheral Druze localities; and designing culturally sensitive welfare and legal services, particularly for widows, divorcees, and other women in vulnerable positions (Falah, 2016, 2018; Faraj-Falah, 2009). At the same time, the study underscores the importance of a balanced approach—one that respects communal and religious traditions while actively advancing the structural changes needed for Druze women to flourish in Israeli society (Bals, 2009; Faiad, 2024).

The Evolution of Druze Women's Status and the Implications of Education and Employment

A key component of the dissertation is the historical reconstruction of the shift from a rigid, normatively patriarchal order to a social context in which education and employment function as primary engines of change. The data indicate a sharp rise in the number of Druze women pursuing tertiary education and entering professions that were previously coded as male, such as law, medicine, and certain public-sector leadership roles. This trend destabilizes traditional gender expectations and reshapes local patterns of power and authority (Faraj Falah, 2023).

The study emphasises that the gap between religious doctrines that, at least in principle, promise gender equality and the lived experiences of women remains pronounced, although it is neither static nor one-dimensional. Socio-economic transformations and educational gains emerge as central drivers of expanded agency and of resistance to oppressive structures (IZZEDDIN, 1993; Falah, 2013). In concrete terms, education not only improves women's chances in the labour market, but also strengthens their capacity to negotiate within the family, to delay marriage or childbearing when they wish, and to participate more fully in community decision-making (Faraj-Falah, 2009; Faraj Falah, 2023).

On the policy level, the findings point to the need to acknowledge these changing gender roles and to support them through institutional means: targeted educational reforms, removal of overt and covert barriers in the labour market, and programmes that extend women's presence and influence in public and communal arenas (Falah, 2018). The dissertation also calls for further empirical work on the factors that shape career paths among Druze women, on generational differences in attitudes and aspirations, and on cross-group comparisons with other minority populations in Israel so as to better understand the complex interplay of

tradition, modernity, and empowerment in the Druze context (Faraj-Falah, 2009; Faiad, 2024).

Cultural, Social, and Normative Implications

A central conclusion of the dissertation is that education and employment must be understood not only as socio-economic indicators, but also as cultural and normative mechanisms through which deep change is produced. As Druze women attain higher levels of education and enter the paid workforce, recognition of their social and economic contribution grows, and with it the legitimacy of their participation in intra-family and communal decision-making processes (IZZEDDIN, 1993; Faraj Falah, 2023).

The study makes clear that this transformation does not take place in isolation from tradition. Rather, it unfolds alongside powerful religious and cultural norms, which continue to shape expectations regarding modesty, marriage, and family honour. Consequently, the findings call for nuanced policy responses: reforms that do more than simply "open doors" and instead signal a gradual, context-sensitive challenge to patriarchal norms, all while maintaining respect for communal values and identities (Falah, 2013; Bals, 2009). In this sense, the dissertation contributes to the broader discourse on women's rights in minority communities and offers a model for implementing culturally sensitive policy that engages, rather than ignores, local cultural logics (Faraj-Falah, 2009).

Challenges, Barriers, and Future Directions

Alongside the advances it documents, the dissertation also highlights persistent challenges. These include gaps between rights that exist at the normative or doctrinal level and their uneven realization in practice; structural barriers in the labour market that restrict women's occupational mobility; and strong familial and communal pressures that limit the scope of autonomous choice, particularly around marriage, fertility, and residence (Nuwayhid, 1986; Falah, 2013).

Yet the analysis also shows that Druze women are not passive in the face of these constraints. Rather, they actively redefine their identities and rights within a changing social and political context, demonstrating a high degree of resilience and strategic adaptability (Nuwayhid, 1986; Faraj Falah, 2023).

Building on these insights, the dissertation proposes several directions for future research and action. It argues for expanded regional comparisons with Druze women in Lebanon and Syria to clarify what is specific to the Israeli context and what reflects broader Druze patterns (Faraj-Falah, 2009). It calls for studies that explore the integration of younger generations into technology, entrepreneurship, and other emerging sectors, as well as for systematic analyses of shifting male roles and masculinities within the

Druze community, based on the understanding that a full account of gender relations must consider both women's and men's changing positions (Faiad, 2024).

In sum, the dissertation presents a narrative of resilience and transformation: Druze women are portrayed not merely as objects of social forces, but as active agents reshaping gender relations within their families, communities, and institutions. The findings underscore the need for ongoing scholarly attention and for concrete, context-aware policy interventions to sustain this momentum and to help pave the way toward a more equitable future for all members of the community (Falah, 2018; Nuwayhid, 1986).

Bibliography

Abu-Hassan Nebuani, A. (2024). *Avoda, mishpacha u-mah she-beineihen: Mabat al nashim musulmiyot, druziyot ve-notsriyot be-Yisrael* [Work, family, and what lies between: A view of Muslim, Druze, and Christian women in Israel]. *Yisrael* [Israel], 33, 97. https://humanities.tau.ac.il/sites/humanities.tau.ac.il/files/media_server/humanities/zionism/%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9C/33/abu_hassan_nebuani.pdf.

Abu Reesh, I. (2025). *Developing a policy for official mediation between the legal system and the traditional civil justice system: Cultural aspects regarding divorce processes within the Druze community in Israel* (Doctoral dissertation, Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of European Studies, Cluj-Napoca, Romania). https://share.google/YVjcyUvdWUQSZXpj2.

Abu Reesh, I. (2025). *The Druze Minority in the Middle East: Religion, Community Structure, and Policy in Minority–State Relations in Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan*, in Inclusivity, 1, p. 81-94. https://doi.org/10.58603/XQGT3475

Al-Abdin, A., Roy, T., & Nicholson, J. D. (2018). Researching corporate social responsibility in the Middle East: The current state and future directions. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, 25*(1), 47–65. https://core.ac.uk/download/82966128.pdf

Al-Dajah, H. A., & Alshalabi, I. A. (2020). Political culture of ethnic minorities in Al-Azraq Region. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences, 10*(2), 29–44. https://doi.org/10.7176/RHSS/10-2-04.

Al Munajed, D. (2025). *Syrian women in Lebanon and Turkey: Assessing the impact of conflict and identity on civic participation* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Bonn). https://core.ac.uk/download/671548223.pdf.

Amer, A., & Davidovitch, N. (2020). The case of Druze society and its integration in higher education in Israel. *International Education Studies, 13*(8), 68–78. http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ies.

Bals, N. (2009). Eifo ha-kol sheli? Masa feministî ba-kehila ha-druzit baderekh le-arekhut-din aḥeret [Where is my voice? A feminist journey in the Druze community on the way to a different legal practice]. *Ma'asei Mishpat, 2*, 105–118. https://law.tau.ac.il/sites/law.tau.ac.il/files/media_server/law_heb/Maasei_Mishpat/Volume_B/balas-heb.pdf

Barakat, A. (2022). *Nashim druziyot be-Yisrael ke-heker mikre shel nashim ha-me'atgerot et ha-hasdārim ha-me'unagim be-dominantiyut ha-si'aḥ ha-dati ha-gavri* [Druze women in Israel as a case study of women challenging arrangements anchored in the dominance of male religious discourse]. *Politika, 32*, 172–180. https://politika.huji.ac.il/sites/default/files/politika/files/ebtesa.pdf.

Barakat, E. (2018). Nashim be-ḥevrot patriarkhaliot ne'evakot lehassig hashkala [Women in patriarchal societies struggle to attain education]. *Megamot, 2*, 83–106. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27294739.

Barakat, E. (2024). Changing the division of household work in conservative and minority context: The case of Arab-Druze women in Israel. *International Journal of Sociology, 54*(3), 198–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/00207659.2024.2342645.

Barakat, E. H. (2023). Pious women challenge arrangements anchored in the dominancy of the religious discourse: Druze women in Israel as a case study. *Religions, 14*(8), 995. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14080995.

Batool, R. (2025). Metaphors a power signature in a post-colonial text: A critical discourse analysis of *The Kite Runner*. *Journal of English Language, Literature and Education*. https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/ecd934bc499c21bc3a47da9f1d27b1eff4065f84.

Beigi, M., & Shirmohammadi, M. (2017). Qualitative research on work–family in the management field: A review. *Applied Psychology, 66*(3), 382–433. https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/413037/1/Qualitative_research_on_work_family_interface_A_Review_Accepted_Version.pdf.

Cooper, S., Schmidt, B., Jama, N. A., Ryan, J., Leon, N., Mavundza, E. J., Burnett, R. J., Tanywe, A. C., & Wiysonge, C. S. (2025). Factors that influence caregivers' and adolescents' views and practices regarding human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination for adolescents: A qualitative evidence synthesis. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, 2025*.

https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/24ec4bbb09eb1113808012cbbd0708a3fc54ce6b.

Erwani, I., & Siregar, A. S. (2025). The role of women in Islamic sacred texts: A critical study of women's narratives and authority in Islamic tradition. *Pharos Journal of Theology, 106*(1). https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.6.

Faiad, F. (n.d.). The status of the Druze woman in modern society: Tradition, challenges, and social change in the 21st century. *Open Journal for Sociological Studies, 8*(2), 81–92. https://doi.org/10.32591/coas.ojss.0802.02081f.

Falah, J. F. (2013). The portrayal of women in Israeli Arabic textbooks on Druse heritage. *Online Submission, 3*(1), 33–37. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED539974.pdf.

Falah, J. F. (2016). She is a widow: The story of six Druze widows in Israel. *Open Journal of Social Sciences, 4*(9), 210–221. http://www.scirp.org/journal/jss.

Falah, J. F. (2018). "He is alienated": Intermarriage among Druze men in Israel. *Sociology Mind, 8*(1), 70–82. https://www.scirp.org/journal/sm.

Falah, J. F., Maman, Y., & Amasha, W. (2017). Brides across the border: Syrian Druze brides who have married Israeli Druze men of the Golan Heights after the Israeli occupation in 1967. *Open Journal of Social Sciences, 5*(5), 289–303. http://www.scirp.org/journal/jss.

Faraj-Falah, J. (2009). Widows in Druze society. *Gender Issues, 26*(3), 247–252. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-009-9079-7.

Faraj-Falah, J., & Maman, Y. (2019). "Pioneers"—The Druze women school principals as role models & generators of social change. *Creative Education, 10*(7), 1573–1588. http://www.scirp.org/journal/ce.

Faraj Falah, J. (2023). The development of the status of Druze women in the 21st century. *Frontiers in Sociology, 8*, Article 1206494. https://samwell-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/essay-resource/93036a-fsoc-08-1206494percent204-da1cc74e.pdf.

Ghanem, C. Y. (2018). Providing a gender perspective to integration in Western Europe: Muslim women's agency between multicultural and assimilationist policies. *Peace Human Rights Governance, 1*(3), 307–332. https://core.ac.uk/download/186448500.pdf.

Hazran, Y., Reed, M. A., Schäbler, B., Timani, H. S., & Zeedan, R. (2024). The status of Druze studies and launching the *Druze Studies Journal (DSJ)*. https://doi.org/10.17161/druze.2024.22602.

Izzeddin, N. M. A. (1993). *The Druzes: A new study of their history, faith, and society*. Brill.

Jarar, M. (2012). Jawānib min ḥayāt al-Durūz fī ḍaw' kitābāt raḥḥāla gharbiyyīn [Aspects of Druze life in light of Western travelers' writings]. *Majallat Jāmiʿat al-Quds al-Maftūḥa li-l-buḥūth al-insāniyya wa-l-*

ijtimāʿiyya, *1*(26). https://journals.qou.edu/index.php/jrresstudy/article/view/1256.

Johnson, C., & Zeedan, R. (2024). Bibliography of periodical literature on the Druze in 2023. *Druze Studies Journal, 1*. https://doi.org/10.17161/druze.2024.22381.

Kattoura, O. (2020). *Arab battered women in Israel: How social and political contexts shape their experiences* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Otago). https://core.ac.uk/download/360558411.pdf.

Kheir, E. A. (2024). Religious unification, regional divergence: Exploring multifaceted linguistic practices and identities among the Israeli Druze and the Druze community in the Golan Heights. *Druze Studies Journal, 1*. https://doi.org/10.17161/druze.2024.21445.

Kra-Friedman, A. (2022). *Determinants of reproductive freedom among Israeli women ages 18–50: A mixed methods study* (Doctoral dissertation, Duquesne University). https://core.ac.uk/download/587960664.pdf.

Łapniewska, Z. (2016). Reading Elinor Ostrom through a gender perspective. *Feminist Economics, 22*(4), 129–151. https://core.ac.uk/download/293881450.pdf.

Muschara, M. (2015). Kurdish women guerrilla fighters: History in the making. *History in the Making, 8*(1). https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making/vol8/iss1/6.

Natoor, M., Zarka, H., & Shoshana, A. (2024). Child placement in the community: Socio-religious challenges for Druze social workers in Israel. *Child & Family Social Work, 29*(1), 217–228. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.13066.

Nuwayhid, N. (1986). *Women from my country*. The Arab Institute for Research and Publishing.

Reineck, D., Schneider, L., Spurk, C., Dorn-Fellermann, E., Nyambuga, C., & Schuerhoff, R. (2017). *Audience research in media development: Overview, case studies, and lessons learned.* https://core.ac.uk/download/145199117.pdf

Shapiro, M. (2013). *The politics of intimacy: An ethnography of illegalized migrant women and their undocumented children in Tel Aviv, Israel.* https://core.ac.uk/download/77105417.pdf

Snapp, M. (2024). *Empowerment in patriarchy: A phenomenological study of working mothers in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.* https://core.ac.uk/download/604436460.pdf

Zeedan, R., & Luce, M. (2021). Druze women and gender in Druze society: A systematic literature review. *Religions, 12*(12), 1111. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12121111

https://www.doi.org/10.58603/ZJAU7286

Reassessing Juvenile Sanctions in Romania (2014–2024): Educational Detention vs. Non-Custodial Packages. Insights Into European Practices and Policy Recommendations

Ioana Leucea[1] • Dan Octavian Rusu[2] • Mihaela Teodor[3]

Abstract

This study critically examines the effectiveness of sanctions applied to minors in Romania between 2014 and 2024, focusing on the comparison between educational detention and non-custodial measures for young people aged 14 to 17 convicted of non-violent property crimes. Against the backdrop of rising property crime rates and expanding community supervision across the European Union, the study investigates whether cognitive-behavioral and restorative interventions—delivered through legitimate, community-based practices—are more effective in reducing recidivism than short-term incarceration for first or low-risk offenders. Employing a multidisciplinary approach, the research integrates doctrinal analysis of the Romanian Criminal Code (Title V), enforcement laws, and European/International standards, comparing Romanian practices with those in Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway. The paper emphasizes the need to reconsider the logic that differentiates offenses warranting imprisonment from those suitable for alternative sanctions, advocating for broader consideration of essential social values and the social implications of criminal policy. Ultimately, the research advocates for a youth justice system in Romania centered on rehabilitation, education, and fairness, guided by evidence-based policy and European best practices.

Keywords

juvenile justice; educational measures; Romania; restorative and procedural measures; EU crime statistics

Introduction

In a context of rising property crime in the EU and expanding community supervision, evidence indicates that cognitive-behavioral and

[1] "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy, Bucharest, Romania. E-mail: leucea.ioana@animv.eu.

[2] Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, E-mail: dan.rusu@ubbcluj.ro.

[3] "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy, Bucharest, Romania. E-mail: teodor.mihaela@animv.eu

restorative components—implemented with practices that enhance legitimacy—reduce recidivism more reliably than short-term incarceration at first/low-risk. Framed by disciplinary power, normative ambiguity, postmodern control, and psychological models (risk-need-responsivity, the good life model, procedural justice, adolescent neurodevelopment), the study combines doctrinal analysis of the Criminal Code (Title V) and enforcement laws with European/International standards and a comparison of the Romanian case with Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway. In this respect, the paper seeks to critically examine the social philosophy that shapes a nation's criminal law, emphasizing the importance of re-evaluating the logic used to differentiate between offenses resulting in imprisonment—whether for brief or extended periods—and those subject to alternative sanctions. It advocates for a broader consideration of essential social values that the state must uphold. Specifically, the paper invites reflection on the criteria used to determine which offenses warrant mandatory incarceration and what justifies alternative penalties, especially considering the ongoing challenges within Romanian prisons.

Thus, the objective of this paper is to encourage a rethinking of the criminal code to identify categories of crimes where imprisonment could be replaced with other, potentially more effective, measures. In this respect, we believe that legislators should consider the full spectrum of social implications when drafting the criminal code, as the social implications of criminal policy are enormous. For example, regarding drug use, research increasingly suggests that punitive responses may not resolve underlying issues and can, in fact, exacerbate negative outcomes. Increasingly, researchers show that incarceration for non-violent drug offenses often fails to address the root causes of substance use and may contribute to higher rates of recidivism and social marginalization, highlighting that punitive policies can undermine public health goals and disrupt social reintegration efforts (Drucker, 2013). Leading organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO, 2016) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2015 and 2025) now recommend shifting towards health-centered and harm reduction approaches, citing evidence from countries where decriminalization of drug possession and new support and rehabilitation policies has led to lower rates of problematic drug use. Moreover, a review by the Global Commission on Drug Policy (June 2011) underscores that criminalizing drug users increases stigma, reduces access to treatment, and often results in overcrowded prisons without measurable benefits in public safety or drug control. As a result, there is growing consensus in the literature that alternatives to incarceration—such as diversion programs, treatment courts, and community-based interventions—are more effective in promoting rehabilitation and reducing recidivism among individuals with substance use disorders (Kilmer et al., 2018).

As a methodological approach, the article evaluates the social effectiveness of sanctions applied to minors in Romania (2014-2024) for young people aged 14 to 17 convicted of non-violent property crimes, comparing placement in educational centers with structured packages without deprivation of liberty (civic training, supervision, weekend curfew, daily assistance, proportional electronic monitoring). As a result, we make policy recommendations and we especially recommend pro-non-custodial presumption, proportionate electronic monitoring within rehabilitation plans, and standardized 12/24/36-month indicators (recidivism; school/professional reintegration; compliance).

The subject of reconsidering the Romanian Criminal Code when discussing categories of crimes punishable only by imprisonment becomes extremely important when correlated with data reported by various agencies or institutes. For instance, according to the World Prison Brief (WPB, 2025), Romania's prisons operate at about 117.3% capacity, indicating severe overcrowding[4]. This represents a persistent and significant issue, as the living space provided to each inmate falls below the Council of Europe's recommended minimum of four-square meters per person.

The fact that Romania has lost a lot of cases at the European Court of Human Rights (Țicu 2019, p. 9) being forced to take coercive measures, including compensation for prisoners, is another issue that must be considered[5]. Reports mention inadequate detention conditions, unhygienic, poorly ventilated cells, limited access to hot water and infrequent showers, poor-quality food, etc. Empirical research suggests that incarceration for offenses such as theft or robbery may inadvertently strengthen the networks and influence of organized crime within prison environments. For instance, studies have shown that prisons can act as "schools of crime," where individuals convicted of non-organized offenses are exposed to established criminal groups, potentially leading to recruitment and deeper criminal involvement (Skarbek, 2014). Research in various European contexts has documented cases where individuals convicted for non-organized crimes, such as petty theft, became involved with organized criminal groups during their incarceration (Aebi et al., 2015). Among other shortcomings reported (Țicu, 2019), we note the lack of staff and adequate training for different categories of personnel involved, such as doctors, psychologists, and

[4] The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2013, 8) defines overcrowding as the "situation where the number of prisoners exceeds the official prison capacity".
[5] The Court dealt with 2,848 applications concerning Romania in 2024, of which 2,608 were declared inadmissible or struck out. It delivered 58 judgments (concerning 240 applications), 49 of which found at least one violation of the European Convention on Human Rights. See more on Council of Europe Press Country Profile September 2025. See more on CP_Romania_ENG.

reintegration counselors; reported violence and abuse among prisoners or effective mechanisms for investigating abuse; limited access to education, work, and reintegration programs; health problems (physical and mental); outdated infrastructure, well below European detention standards; corruption and preferential treatment. Romania's 2014 Penal Code aligned itself with this change, replacing prison sentences for minors with educational measures – either **non-custodial** (civic training, supervision, weekend curfew, daily assistance), **or custodial** (placement in educational or detention centers)—in accordance with Title V and associated enforcement laws (Romania, 2013a, 2013b, 2014).

This approach reflects non-binding European legislation and safeguards that prioritize a child-centered and developmentally appropriate response (Council of Europe, 2008; European Union, 2016). Moreover, this approach embodies the guiding principles embedded within various non-binding yet influential European legal instruments and safeguards, which collectively advocate responses to juvenile offending that are tailored to the unique needs and developmental stages of children. For example, the Council of Europe and the European Union have emphasized that juvenile justice systems should prioritize the welfare and best interests of the child, focusing on rehabilitation, education, and social reintegration rather than punitive sanctions. These frameworks call for comprehensive assessments that recognize the evolving capacities of young people and encourage interventions designed to foster their personal growth, responsibility, and positive engagement with society.

European Juvenile Justice Framework

This chapter provides a logical transition to the subsequent discussion of Romania's compliance with these standards and the broader European framework. In Europe, contemporary juvenile justice policy emphasizes education, proportionality, and custody as a last resort—a direction reflected in both international recommendations and national reforms. For example, the Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)11 on "The European Rules for juvenile offenders subject to sanctions or measures" underscores that deprivation of liberty should be used only when strictly necessary and for the shortest appropriate period, advocating for educational and rehabilitative strategies (Council of Europe, 2008).

National implementations vary but follow these principles. For instance, in Germany, juvenile justice laws (Jugendgerichtsgesetz, JGG) prioritize educational measures—such as community service, mediation, and supervision—above custodial sentences (Dünkel et al., 2011). Dünkel et al. (2011) detail how educational centers in various European countries

prioritize structured routines, psychological counseling, and vocational training, all designed to foster personal development and reduce recidivism. Moreover, the Grand Chamber ruled in Salduz v. Turkey that children must have prompt access to a lawyer, and in Blokhin v. Russia that so-called "educational" detention without genuine education and treatment violates Convention standards (European Court of Human Rights, 2008 and 2016).

Recent European indicators provide context for non-violent property crimes among young people. In 2023, police-reported property crimes increased across the EU (theft +4.8%; burglary +4.2% compared to 2022), after lows recorded during the pandemic (Eurostat, 2025). At the same time, the use of community sanctions and measures, including probation and electronic monitoring, has expanded: as of January 31, 2022, there were approximately 1.35 million people on probation across Europe—an increase of 4.6% compared to 2021—consolidating a long-term shift towards non-custodial responses (Aebi & Hashimoto, 2022).

From a psychological and sociological perspective, we interpret these developments through the lens of Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power and institutional normalization, and Connolly's description of the ambiguous norms that structure legal-political discourse, and Young's critique of control institutions in the postmodern era. Both provide a compelling framework for understanding the evolution of juvenile justice in Romania and across Europe. Foucault posits that modern societies exercise control not only through legal statutes but through diffuse mechanisms that shape behavior and internalize norms—schools, probation services, and educational centers serve as key sites for this "gentle" form of discipline. In the context of juvenile justice, these institutions do not merely punish, the aim is to to transform young offenders by instilling social values, routines, and self-regulation, aligning with the rehabilitative ideals reflected in both national reforms and broader European standards. Building on Foucault, Connolly's analysis of legal-political discourse underscores the ambiguity inherent in the balancing of protection and control in youth justice policy. Connolly draws attention to the ways in which legal frameworks are negotiated spaces, shaped by shifting societal values and political priorities. Moreover, Young's critique of control institutions in the postmodern era points to the subtle forms of exclusion and marginalization that can persist even within ostensibly progressive systems. While educational and rehabilitative interventions represent a departure from punitive isolation, Young reminds us to remain vigilant about the potential for these institutions to reproduce social inequalities and reinforce societal boundaries. Taken together, these theoretical perspectives illuminate the nuanced ways in which Romania's

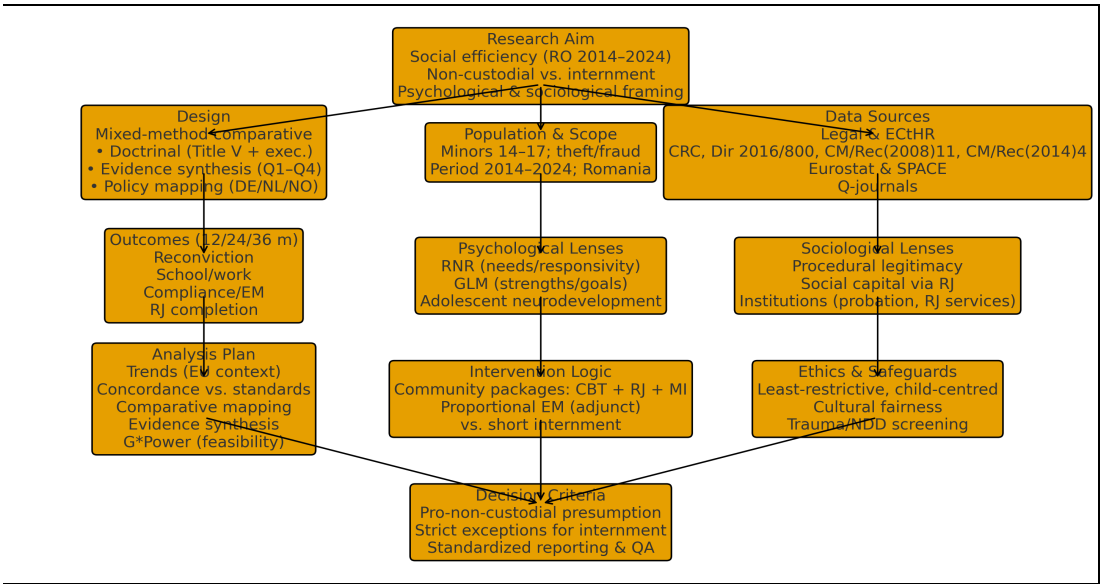
juvenile justice system—like those of its European counterparts—seeks to manage and integrate young offenders. Through a constellation of community-based and custodial responses, the system aspires to both discipline and empower, fostering social reintegration while negotiating the complex ethical terrain of rights, responsibilities, and institutional power.

In parallel, the "Risk-Need-Responsivity" (RNR) framework prioritizes criminogenic needs and responsivity; the "Good Lives" model complements risk reduction with strengths-based goals; procedural justice predicts cooperation and compliance; and adolescent neurodevelopment highlights heightened socio-emotional reactivity against a backdrop of maturing executive control (Andrews & Bonta, 2016; Ward & Maruna, 2007; Tyler, 2006; Casey et al., 2008; Steinberg, 2010). In Kohlberg's structural description, moral reasoning progresses from pre-conventional to conventional and post-conventional levels; advancement reflects identification with internalized moral standards rather than external reward or punishment (Kohlberg, 1963; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Hoffman (1982) argues that empathy-based affects underlie moral internalization and prosocial restraint; Eisenberg (2000) integrates emotion and regulation, showing that differentiation and management of moral emotions (guilt vs. shame) predict prosocial actions and reduced antisociality. These perspectives align with community-based interventions that combine cognitive-behavioral skills (self-regulation, perspective taking), restorative work (restitution) and legitimacy-enhancing practices—supporting moral identification with prosocial roles and compliance during supervision.

Methodological Design

In order to encourage a rethinking of the criminal code to identify categories of crimes where imprisonment could be replaced with other, potentially more effective, measures, we peopose the following methodological map (Figure 1) with the psychological and sociological perspectives for the study on institutional mechanisms and sanctions applied to minors in Romanian in the period 2014-2024. We combine: (a) a doctrinal review of Title V of the Criminal Code and enforcement laws, aligned with CRC/CoE/EU standards and ECHR case law and a synthesis of the administrative series (2014-2024) to track placement flows and outcomes; (b) a comparative policy mapping for Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway.

Figure 1: *Methodological flow (psychological and sociological perspectives) for the study on sanctions applied to minors in Romania (2014-2024)*



(Source: authors' idea)

a. A doctrinal review of Title V of the Criminal Code and enforcement laws, aligned with CRC/CoE/EU standards and ECHR case law and a synthesis of the administrative series (2014-2024) to track placement flows and outcomes.

This activity starting by systematically gathering and analyzing the relevant legal texts: title V of the Romanian Criminal Code and associated enforcement laws, focusing on provisions applicable to minors; compare the results with the core requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Council of Europe (CoE) standards, and relevant European Union directives (such as Directive (EU) 2016/800), identifying points of convergence and divergence and proposing some recommendations for legislative or regulatory adjustments where inconsistencies or gaps are found. By integrating this comparative approach, the review not only clarifies the current legal landscape but also offers a roadmap for continuous improvement in the protection and rehabilitation of minors within the Romanian justice system.

The primary outcomes to be standardized at 12/24/36 months include recidivism, re-enrollment in school/employment, completion of restitution, and compliance with supervision conditions for the study's methodological map. Regarding the age and responsibility, the analysis conducts to the following results: the minimum age of criminal responsibility is 14; persons aged between 14 and 16 must prove their discernment; persons aged between 16 and 17 fall under the juvenile regime. Moreover, educational

measures include non-custodial responses (civic training, supervision, weekend curfew, daily assistance) and custodial responses (placement in educational or detention centers) in accordance with Title V of the Criminal Code and enforcement laws (Romania, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). **Non-custodial responses**—such as civic training, supervision, weekend curfews, and daily assistance—are designed to provide structured, rehabilitative alternatives to detention, prioritizing the child's reintegration into society. **Custodial measures**, including placement in educational or detention centers, are reserved for cases where non-custodial options prove insufficient or where the gravity of the offense necessitates a more controlled environment (Romanian Criminal Code, Art. 115-124).

National electronic monitoring (Law 146/2021) is available in defined contexts and should remain a complement to rehabilitation plans. Building upon the existing framework, the law is implemented as part of a targeted approach to juvenile justice, applying only in specific legally defined contexts—such as conditional release, house arrest, or as a supervision tool for non-custodial sanctions. Its use is designed to enhance, not replace, individualized rehabilitation plans for young offenders. Electronic monitoring serves primarily as a means to ensure compliance with judicial decisions while maintaining the young person's connection to their community, education, and family life. In accordance with the best practices outlined in European standards, the monitoring period should be strictly limited in duration, proportionate to the offense, and always accompanied by access to educational, psychological, or social support services.

In practice, the Romanian system's focus on safeguarding the educational and developmental needs of minors, while ensuring public safety and accountability, demonstrates a commitment to european and international standards. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) anchors juvenile justice in dignity, reintegration, and minimal use of custody. Specifically, Article 37(b) of the CRC (1989) provides that the arrest, detention, or imprisonment of a child must be used only as a last resort and for the shortest time possible. Article 37(c) requires that children deprived of liberty be separated from adults and maintain contact with their families. Furthermore, Article 40 of the CRC (1989) ensures that every child accused of infringing the penal law is treated in a manner that promotes the child's sense of dignity and worth, reinforces their respect for human rights, and facilitates their reintegration and constructive role in society. These principles are further elaborated in General Comment No. 24 (2019) by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which strongly recommends the use of alternative and non-judicial measures whenever possible, and highlights the importance of rehabilitation over punishment (CRC, 1989; Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2019).

Within the EU, Directive (EU) 2016/800 implements child-specific procedural safeguards for suspects and accused persons under the age of 18: timely legal assistance, age-appropriate information, effective participation, and age-appropriate conditions. Children must be assisted by a lawyer when a judge decides on detention and during detention; the imposition of a custodial sentence requires effective legal assistance (European Union, 2016). At the Council of Europe level, the European Rules for Juvenile Offenders Subject to Sanctions or Measures (CM/Rec(2008)11) favor community responses and require individualized and proportionate interventions. Moreover, Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)4 clarifies that electronic monitoring is a supervision tool—not a sanction in itself—and should be necessary, proportionate, limited in time, and associated with rehabilitation activities (Council of Europe, 2008, 2014). The Council of Europe Guidelines on Child-Friendly Justice (2010) translate these rights into practice in proceedings, requiring accessible and age-appropriate procedures and qualified professionals (reinforcing diversification, restorative approaches, and minimal use of detention (Council of Europe, 2010).

European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) case law supports the right to a fair trial and restrictions on liberty for children: Salduz v. Turkey requires early access to a lawyer establishing that early legal representation is *essential* to safeguard vulnerable suspects—especially children—from coercion and to ensure procedural fairness; Blokhin v. Russia condemned 'educational' detention without genuine education/treatment—confirming that de facto custody triggers article 5 safeguards and reinforcing that any deprivation of liberty—even under the guise of education—must be lawful, necessary, and accompanied by appropriate care and oversight (European Court of Human Rights, 2008 and 2016). Those two landmark cases from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) have significantly shaped the legal landscape for children's rights in justice systems across Europe.

b. A comparative policy mapping for Romania, Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway.

We go on to propose a comparision beetween Romania, Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway in terms of **age, alternative/community measures, use of custody, and electronic monitoring (EM), using EU/CoE statistics and peer-reviewed evidence from Q-ranked journals, property crimes increased across the EU in 2023** (theft +4.8%; burglary +4.2%), while community supervision expanded in Europe—a context that encourages proportionate, skills-focused responses (Eurostat, 2025; Aebi & Hashimoto, 2022).

Table 1: *Basic juvenile responses for non-violent property crimes in Romania, Germany, Netherlands, Norway*

Jurisdiction	Age/ coverage	Primary responses without deprivation of liberty	Custody options	Anchors
Romania	MACR 14; 14–16 discernment; 16–17 minors	Civic training; supervision; weekend curfew; daily assistance; (targeted EM)	Placement in educational/detention centers	CC Title V; Laws 253/2013, 254/2013; EM Law 146/2021
Germany (JGG)	14–17; 18–20 in accordance with JGG (development)	Erziehungsmaßregeln; Zuchtmittel; diversification	Custody for minors (last resort)	Erziehung principle; JGG
Netherlands	12–17; 18–22/23 in accordance with ACL (2014)	HALT diversion; community orders; restorative	Juvenile detention (proportional)	ACL; HALT orientation
Norway	MACR 15	Youth punishment/prosecution (restorative plan; EM possible)	Exceptional custody	Konfliktrådet (since 2014)

(Source: Eurostat, 2025)

Germany: Architecture, practice, results. The Juvenile Court Act (JGG) prioritizes **education** (Erziehung). The measures ordered escalate from educational measures (Erziehungsmaßregeln) and disciplinary measures (Zuchtmittel) to juvenile detention as a last resort, with diversion and mediation being widely used for non-violent offenses. Meta-analytic evidence from juvenile justice systems indicates that community sanctions—when combined with cognitive-behavioral components and quality assurance—a lower recidivism than custodial processing (Koops-Geuze & Weerman, 2023).

The Netherlands: HALT Diversion and the Adolescent Criminal Law (ACL). HALT offers police-level diversion measures focused on restitution and learning tasks for minor offenses committed by young people; Programmatic enhancements, such as youth-initiated mentoring (YIM), are evaluated as adjuvants for resilience building (Boering, Koops, Assink, Stams, & van der Put, 2024). Since 2014, the ACL has allowed juvenile sanctions for developing young adults (18-22/23). Evaluations suggest that this developmental approach can support desistance from crime in certain cases and has seen proportional growth despite an overall decline in crime (van der Laan, Beerthuizen, & Barendregt, 2019). Consistent with the broader evidence base, Dutch community packages that integrate CBT-type skills, restorative elements, and legitimacy-building practices are more effective

than short-term detention for first-time/low-risk offenders (Koops-Geuze & Weerman, 2023).

Norway: Youth punishment and youth monitoring (since 2014). Ungdomsstraff and ungdomsoppfølging in Norway combine restorative conferences (Konfliktrådet), multi-agency plans, and proportionate controls; detention remains exceptional. Recent analyses highlight tensions between restorative ideals and criminal justice requirements but confirm the central importance of victim-offender meetings and perceptions of legitimacy for law compliance (Andrews & Eide, 2024). Systematic evidence on police deviant continues to support fair and early procedural avenues for avoiding detention (Wilson, Brennan, & Olaghere, 2018).

Romania: In line with the European standards and recommendations, which advocate for restorative and rehabilitative practices over incarceration (European Union, 2016), Romania has established a specialized infrastructure for minors that blends custodial[6] and non-custodial alternatives—consisting of two educational centers and two detention centers—while probation services facilitate community-based measures across the country. Romania's system reflects these principles by offering minors in educational centers access to schooling, therapeutic services, and social skills programs—contrasting sharply with traditional punitive isolation. Concrete examples include civic training modules that teach young people about citizenship and social responsibility, mirroring similar programs in the Netherlands and Germany where participation in community service and engagement in restorative justice initiatives have yielded positive results (Council of Europe, 2008). For instance, since the adoption of the 2014 Penal Code, Romania has implemented a range of educational measures for minors instead of imprisonment. Among the most notable examples are the use of non-custodial sanctions such as civic training programs—which educate young people about citizenship and social responsibility—supervision measures that involve regular check-ins with probation officers, weekend curfews designed to balance accountability with continued integration in family life, and daily assistance requirements for at-risk youth. By implementing a framework that emphasizes education, rehabilitation, and social integration, Romania's juvenile justice system exemplifies the broader European move toward child-centered, developmentally appropriate responses to youth offending—anchored in both academic research and international best practice.

[6] In cases where custodial measures are considered necessary, minors may be placed in educational centers (Centrul Educativ) or detention centers (Centrul de Detenție), both of which offer rehabilitative activities, schooling, and psychological support rather than punitive isolation.

The Perspective of Forensic Psychology

Judicial psychology underpins every decision in juvenile proceedings: assessing culpability and discernment—particularly for those aged between 14 and 16—, formulating cases according to risk, need, and responsiveness, choosing the least restrictive and most effective educational measure, and monitoring changes over time. In practice, pre-sentencing reports should integrate a developmentally sensitive assessment of socio-emotional maturity, suggestibility, moral reasoning, and executive control, along with a structured assessment of criminogenic needs and protective resources. This allows for the development of proportionate skills-building plans that align public safety with children's rights (Andrews & Bonta, 2016; Tyler, 2006; Casey, Jones, & Hare, 2008; Steinberg, 2010).

Risk-Need-Receptivity (RNR) guides "what" to target (dynamic risk factors such as antisocial peers, school disengagement, substance use, pro-criminal thinking) and "how" to tailor delivery (reading level, cognitive style, attention and language profiles, cultural-linguistic context). In practice with young people, validated instruments (e.g., YLS/CMI, SAVRY, YASI, START: AV) can structure the assessment of both risks and strengths, but they must be integrated with professional judgment and information provided by the family/school.

Beyond risk, the Good Lives Model (GLM) guides formulation toward achieving prosocial goals and identity development (Ward & Maruna, 2007). The appropriateness of the intervention stems from the formulation. For first-time/low-level non-violent property offenses, effective packages combine cognitive-behavioral skills training (problem solving, self-control, perspective taking) offense-specific work (restitution planning, victim impact, and empathy), and family—or school-based components to rebuild supervision and routine. Motivational interviewing can increase engagement, while restorative justice options (mediation/conferencing) address responsibility and victim needs. Consistent meta-analyses show that CBT-based programs and restorative conferences reduce recidivism when delivered with quality and responsiveness (Landenberger & Lipsey, 2005; Strang, Sherman, Mayo-Wilson, Woods, & Ariel, 2013).

Procedural justice is essential for compliance with norms: adolescents are more willing to cooperate when they are treated with respect, receive clear explanations, have a voice, and enjoy neutrality in decision-making (Walters & Bolger, 2019; Bolger & Walters, 2019). In supervision, this translates into collaborative goal setting, predictable responses to (non)compliance with rules, and transparent criteria for adjusting conditions. If electronic monitoring is used, it should be strictly limited to specific risks (e.g., evening curfews) and combined with skills training and

support; independent monitoring produces limited benefits (Belur et al., 2020). Monitoring change requires both justice outcomes (recidivism in 12/24/36 months, completion of restitution, school/professional reintegration) and psychological indicators (improvements in emotion regulation, problem solving, prosocial identity, and perceived legitimacy). Case reviews should update the formulation with new strengths and risks, adjusting the intensity downwards as competencies are consolidated. Ethically, assessments and interventions should adhere to the principle of "least restrictive, child-centered," ensure informed participation, and pay attention to trauma, neurodevelopmental conditions (e.g., ADHD, language/learning difficulties), and cultural equity.

Sociological Perspective

Sociological interpretation situates individual change within institutional practices and broader social conditions. Following Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power, educational measures and institutionalization can normalize behavior through surveillance, routines, and corrective exercises, while risking institutional dependency when used reflexively (Foucault, 1995). Young's critique of postmodern control institutions adds that risk management can drift toward an incapacitating logic that dilutes reintegration goals (Young, 2007). Connolly's description of normative ambiguity helps explain how competing frameworks—care, control, punishment—coexist in policies and practices, shaping frontline discretion (Connolly, 1993). At the meso level, legitimacy and social ties mediate compliance. Procedural justice predicts willingness to cooperate and comply when young people perceive respectful treatment, voice, and neutrality—critical elements in probation contacts, family meetings, and school reintegration (Tyler, 2006). Restorative practices can rebuild social capital by repairing harm, strengthening family and school relationships, and increasing community guardianship; these mechanisms complement the acquisition of cognitive-behavioral skills highlighted in the psychological perspective (Strang, Sherman, Mayo-Wilson, Woods, & Ariel, 2013).

Social efficiency therefore depends on reintegration capabilities – education and attachment to work, stable routines, and community supervision geared more toward problem solving than pure surveillance. In the EU context, characterized by a recent increase in property crime after a decline during the pandemic and an expansion of community sanctions (Eurostat, 2025; Aebi & Hashimoto, 2022), packages combining supervision with restorative and CBT components are associated with better outcomes than short-term detention for first-time or low-risk young offenders (Koops-Geuze; Weerman, 2023).

Electronic monitoring, where applied, should remain proportionate and be integrated into rehabilitation plans so that control functions do not replace support for reintegration. From a mechanical point of view, psychological microprocesses (self-regulation, empathy, problem solving) are reinforced or undermined by mesocontexts (family, school, peer networks) and macroinstitutions (probation resources, availability of restorative services, child-friendly procedures).

Discussions and Limitations

Structured community measures that target criminogenic needs (RNR), develop human assets (GLM), and operate in a procedurally fair manner are consistent with evidence on adolescent neurological development, supporting skill acquisition and law compliance more effectively than short-term incarceration for non-violent property offenses committed for the first time or with low risk. Non-custodial measures are consistent with detention as a last resort as provided for in the CRC, EU safeguards, and CoE standards on minors.

Comparative practices in DE/NL/NO illustrate feasible architectures for a community-led pathway in Romania. This synthesis is based on administrative series and transnational policy evaluations rather than randomized field studies in Romania; the selection of measures and definitional variations may influence effect estimates. Program content heterogeneity and implementation fidelity complicate common inferences; long-term impact beyond 36 months remains under documented. These constraints reinforce the value of prospective evaluation designs (e.g., matched cohorts with prespecified, intention-to-treat analyses) and routine publication of standard indicators.

In context, recent EU-wide increases in police-reported thefts and burglaries after pandemic lows, along with the expansion of community supervision across Europe, suggest that systems will increasingly manage risk in the community rather than through isolation (Eurostat, 2025; Aebi & Hashimoto, 2022). Under these circumstances, standardized reporting at 12/24/36 months on recidivism, reintegration into school/work, completion of restitution, and compliance with supervision becomes essential to ensure comparability, accountability, and learning. The Norwegian experience also warns that tensions between restorative ideals and criminal justice requirements must be actively managed to maintain legitimacy (Andrews & Eide, 2024; Holmboe, 2017).

The 2014 Romanian framework is directionally aligned with these models, but real-world effectiveness depends on the quality of implementation and available resources. Probation packages require the

provision of CBT elements (problem solving, self-control, perspective taking), access to restorative options, and consistent communication practices that convey respect, neutrality, and clear reasoning (Tyler, 2006). The neurological development of adolescents further emphasizes the need for gradual skill and responsibility development, rather th e isolation (Casey, Jones, & Hare, 2008; Steinberg, 2010). If electronic monitoring is added in a proportionate manner (e.g., curfew), it should be explicitly linked to concrete risks and accompanied by skills training and support (Belur et al., 2020).

The JGG architecture in Germany, the HALT/ACL pairing in the Netherlands, and the youth punishment/monitoring models in Norway all codify a presumption of community education, with custody as a last resort. Despite institutional differences, they converge on three mechanisms: (a) targeting criminogenic needs while respecting responsiveness (RNR), (b) strengthening strengths and prosocial identities (GLM), and (c) protecting perceptions of fairness to elicit cooperation (procedural justice). These psychological mechanisms are consistent with a sociological layer that emphasizes procedural legitimacy, social capital through restorative practices, and institutional capacity (probation, RJ services).

Taken together, the comparative map in Table 1 and the European evidence base point in the same direction: for first-time, low-risk youth offenders for non-violent property crimes, structured community packages combining cognitive-behavioral skills, restorative components, and legitimacy-enhancing supervision outperform short-term educational incarceration in terms of public safety and reintegration outcomes (Koops-Geuze & Weerman, 2023; Landenberger & Lipsey, 2005; Strang, Sherman, Mayo-Wilson, Woods, & Ariel, 2013). These effects are consistent with systematic reviews of early diversion and mixed results from independent electronic monitoring without rehabilitative content (Wilson, Brennan, & Olaghere, 2018; Belur et al., 2020).

Conclusions

The weight of evidence from Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway, together with meta-analytic findings on CBT and restorative practices, indicates superior or at least comparable outcomes in terms of public safety, along with better prospects for reintegration, when supervision is carried out in a procedurally fair manner and tailored to receptivity (Koops-Geuze; Weerman, 2023; Landenberger; Lipsey, 2005; Strang et al., 2013).

This study concludes that, for non-violent property crimes committed by young people aged 14 to 17, Romania should prefer well-structured educational packages without deprivation of liberty instead of short-term

detention. Operationally, the Romanian system should codify a pro-noncustodial presumption for specified cases, include standard 12/24/36-month benchmarks, and invest in probation capacity, restorative infrastructures, and staff training (CBT, MI, child-friendly communication). The compensatory remedy provided for in Law 169/2017 is an example that supports the idea that the criminal code should be designed in accordance with other social values that must be respected. The law introduces a compensatory remedy aimed at addressing the adverse effects of excessive pretrial detention and unjustified delays within the criminal justice system, seting forth clear legal standards to ensure that individuals who have suffered undue deprivation of liberty are provided with an efficient mechanism to seek redress. The law also establishes procedural guidelines for filing claims, delineating the scope of eligibility and the required documentation to substantiate harm. Judicial authorities are empowered to review cases promptly and award compensation proportionate to the duration and impact of improper detention. Additionally, by incentivizing timely judicial action and adherence to due process, the law aims to enhance the overall efficiency and fairness of the justice system.

Juvenile justice reform sits at the crossroads of law, psychology, sociology, and public policy. For real progress, reforms must treat each young person as an individual, considering their unique development, psychological background, and social circumstances. The best European practices focus on rehabilitation and restorative justice while ensuring the rights of minors are protected—moving away from purely punitive models of the past. In sum, developing the idea means constructing a youth justice system where rehabilitation, education, and fairness are not peripheral considerations but the central pillars guiding every decision. Through legislative reform, investment in community resources, rigorous outcome evaluation, and a steadfast commitment to procedural justice, Romania can build a future in which young offenders are equipped to overcome adversity, repair harm, and thrive as productive members of society. To fully realize these policy recommendations, it is vital to establish a cohesive legislative and operational strategy that places youth rehabilitation and public safety at its core. Legislative reforms should be coupled with robust procedural guidelines that outline clear, evidence-based criteria for defining low-risk and first-time offenders, utilizing validated risk assessment tools, prior offense records, and engagement indicators. A comprehensive approach must also address the practical dimensions of implementation. Investment in probation infrastructure—both in terms of personnel and training— is essential. Community resources, such as educational institutions, vocational programs, and family support services, need to be mobilized to create an integrated network capable of supporting reintegration and addressing the roots of offending behavior.

An approach based on psychological and sociological knowledge—targeting criminogenic needs, strengthening strengths and prosocial identities, and cultivating procedural legitimacy—offers the best chance for sustained compliance and desistance. Future research should prioritize prospective evaluations and transparent reporting so that policy can be iteratively adjusted based on comparative performance.

Policy Recommendations

a. Codify a presumption for non-custodial educational packages in first-time/low-risk, non-violent cases, reserve incarceration for strict criteria.

To further develop the idea, the codification would serve as a foundational pillar in juvenile justice reform. This legal presumption would mean that, by default, courts and decision-makers prioritize structured community-based educational packages—comprising cognitive-behavioral therapy, restorative practices, and supervised reintegration—over any form of incarceration. Detention would be considered only as a measure of last resort, reserved for circumstances where clear evidence indicates that community-based interventions would be insufficient to ensure public safety or the youth's engagement in rehabilitation. It would require legislative amendments and clear procedural guidelines for practitioners. For eligible cases, judges would be obligated to articulate specific, evidence-based reasons on record should they depart from the non-custodial approach and impose detention, ensuring transparency and accountability. In practice, this approach supports early intervention and capitalizes on the developmental flexibility of youth, aligning with the principles of minimal intervention and proportionality.

b. Standardize indicators at 12/24/36 months (recidivism; school/professional reintegration; restitution; compliance).

Community-based educational packages could include tailored probation plans, comprehensive family support, school or vocational reintegration programs, and therapeutic services addressing criminogenic needs and fostering prosocial identities. By forging a legal and operational framework that places rehabilitative and educational responses at the center of youth justice the system can better safeguard public safety, reduce recidivism, and maximize the prospects for positive, long-term reintegration of young people into society. The development of standardized outcome indicators, tracked at regular intervals (12, 24, and 36 months), will build a data-driven foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions. These indicators

should encompass not only recidivism rates but also measures of educational and professional reintegration, restitution completion, and compliance with supervision plans.

c. Expand restorative justice (mediation/conferences between victim and offender) with validated Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) components, applied within probation.

In practice, this approach seeks to repair harm by creating a safe, facilitated space in which victims and offenders can communicate openly about the impact of the offense, address underlying needs, and agree on meaningful ways to make amends. Incorporating CBT components into restorative justice sessions strengthens their rehabilitative effects. By embedding restorative justice and CBT within probation, the justice system moves beyond punitive responses, fostering a culture of responsibility and hope. This shift supports the developmental needs of young people, prioritizes public safety, and helps rebuild trust between offenders, victims, and the broader community.

d. Use electronic monitoring sparingly, as a proportional adjunct to community plans.

Electronic monitoring can play a supporting role when necessary and proportionate, but only as an adjunct to rehabilitation work (Belur et al., 2020). The judicious use of electronic monitoring as a supplementary measure ensures that supervision remains proportional and flexible, complementing rather than overshadowing rehabilitative efforts. By reserving electronic monitoring for situations where additional structure is genuinely needed, the system avoids the pitfalls of overreach and maintains its focus on positive development.

e. Integrate child-friendly communication and legitimacy-building practices (procedural justice) across all agencies.

This integration means that every stage of the process—from initial police contact and court proceedings to probation supervision and reintegration programs—must prioritize interactions that are appropriate, respectful, and transparent for young people. Child-friendly communication involves using clear, jargon-free language tailored to the youth's age and cognitive development, ensuring they truly understand their rights, obligations, and the decisions affecting them. Legitimacy-building practices, drawing from procedural justice theory, emphasize fairness, impartiality, and consistency in all decision-making. Moreover, feedback mechanisms should be established so that young people and their families can express

concerns and suggest improvements in how they are treated throughout the justice process.

f. The Romanian Penal Code classifies offenses according to their legal object and may provide for different categories, which could also include the rationale for the nature of the protected legal interest and the consequences provided for when considering the public goods saved.

When determining disciplinary measures, sanctions, or penalties within the juvenile justice context, the guiding principle should be their proven effectiveness in reducing future offenses and fostering positive behavioral change. This evidence-based approach emphasizes that interventions must be continually assessed for how well they prevent recidivism, promote rehabilitation, and ensure public safety, rather than simply fulfilling a punitive function. By prioritizing interventions with measurable, positive impacts, the justice system can more effectively reduce crime, support lasting reintegration, and build safer, more supportive communities.

Bibliography

Aebi, M. F., Hashimoto, Y., & Tiago, M. M. (2015). *Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics: SPACE I – Prison populations*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. (10) Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics SPACE I-Prison Populations.

Aebi, M. F., Hashimoto, Y. Z. (2022). *SPACE II—Persons under the supervision of probation agencies*. Council of Europe. https://wp.unil.ch/space/files/2023/07/SPACE-II_2022_230523.pdf.

Andrews, D. A., Bonta, J. (2016). *The psychology of criminal behavior (6th ed.)*. Routledge.

Andrews, T. M., Eide, A. K. (2024). *Reviewing the gap between ideals and realities in restorative justice: Experiences from juvenile justice reform in Norway*. Criminology and Criminal Justice. https://doi.org/10.1177/17488958241235403.

Belur, J., Thornton, A., Tompson, L., Manning, M., Sidebottom, A., & Bowers, K. (2020). A systematic review of the effectiveness of electronic monitoring of offenders. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, *68*, 101686. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2020.101686.

Boering, A., Koops, W., Assink, M., Stams, G.-J. J., & van der Put, C. E. (2024). Effectiveness, mechanisms of action, and implementation of the Youth-Initiated Mentoring (YIM) program at Halt: Study protocol. *Health & Justice, 12,* 6. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40352-024-00258-9.

Bolger, P. C., Walters, G. D. (2019). The relationship between police procedural justice, police legitimacy, and people's willingness to

cooperate with law enforcement: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 60,* 93–99. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2019.01.001.

Braithwaite, J. (2002). Restorative Justice & Responsive Regulation. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Casey, B. J., Jones, R. M., & Hare, T. A. (2008). The adolescent brain. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, *1124*, 111–126. https://doi.org/10.1196/annals.1440.010.

Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2019). *General comment No.* 24 (2019) on children's rights in juvenile justice. United Nations.

Connolly, W. E. (1993). *Terms of Political Discourse (3rd ed.*). Princeton University Press.

Council of Europe. (2008). *Recommendation CM/Rec (2008)11 on European standards for juvenile offenders subject to sanctions or measures.*

Council of Europe. (2010). *Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on child-friendly justice.*

Council of Europe. (2014). *Recommendation CM/Rec (2014)4 on electronic monitoring (and explanatory memorandum).*

Drucker, Ernest (2013). A Plague of Prisons: The Epidemiology of Mass Incarceration in America. The New Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.31732026.

Dünkel, F., Grzywa, J., Horsfield, P., & Pruin, I. (2011). *Juvenile Justice Systems in Europe: Current Situation and Reform Developments*. Forum Verlag Godesberg. (PDF) Juvenile Justice Systems in Europe – Reform developments between justice, welfare and 'new punitiveness'1.

European Court of Human Rights. (2008). *Salduz* v. Turkey [GC], no. 36391/02. https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-89893.

European Court of Human Rights. (2016). *Blokhin* v. Russia [GC], no. 47152/06. https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-161822

European Union. (2016). *Directive (EU) 2016/800 of 11 May 2016 on procedural safeguards for children who are suspects or accused persons in criminal proceedings*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2016/800/oj/eng.

Eurostat. (2025). *Crime statistics – Police-reported crime in the EU, 2008-2023*. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Crime_statistics

Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (A.* Sheridan, trans.). Vintage. (Original work published in 1975).

Global Commission on Drug Policy. (June 2011). *War on Drugs: Report of the Global Commission on Drug Policy*. https://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/GCDP_WaronDrugs_EN.pdf.

Holmboe, M. (2017). *Sentences imposed on Norwegian youth – Opportunity or trap? Bergen Journal of Criminal Law & Criminal Justice, 5(2), 176–197* https://doi.org/10.15845/bjclcj.v5i1.1352.

Kilmer, B., Caulkins, J. P., Midgette, G., & Reuter, P. (2018). *Reducing the harms of drug use and drug policy*. RAND Corporation.

Koops-Geuze, G. J., & Weerman, F. M. (2023). Community sanctions in juvenile justice compared to other responses to juvenile crime: a meta-analysis. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, *20(2)*, 758–781.

Landenberger, N. A., & Lipsey, M. W. (2005). The positive effects of cognitive-behavioral programs for offenders: A meta-analysis of factors associated with effective treatment. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, *1(4)*, 451–476. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-005-3541-7.

Petrosino, A., Turpin-Petrosino, C., & Hollis-Peel, M. E. (2013). "Scared Straight" and other juvenile delinquency prevention programs: a systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews,* 9*(1),* 1–55. https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2013.5.

Romania. (2013a). *Law 253/2013 on the enforcement of non-custodial sanctions and measures*. Official Gazette.

Romania. (2013b). *Law 254/2013 on the enforcement of custodial sanctions and measures*. Official Gazette.

Romania. (2014). *Criminal Code (Title V: Minors,* Articles 113–125).

Romania. (2021). *Law 146/2021 on electronic surveillance (SIME).*

Sherman, L.W., & Strang, H. (2007). Restorative Justice: The Evidence. London: The Smith Institute.

Skarbek, D. (2014). The Social Order of the Underworld: How Prison Gangs Govern the American Penal System. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Steinberg, L. (2010). A dual model of adolescent risk-taking. *Developmental Psychobiology*, *52(3)*, 216–224. https://doi.org/10.1002/dev.20445.

Strang, H., Sherman, L. W., Mayo-Wilson, E., Woods, D., & Ariel, B. (2013). Restorative justice conferences (RJC) using face-to-face meetings between offenders and victims: Effects on offender recidivism and victim satisfaction. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 9(*1),* 1–59. https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2013.12.

Țica, Gabriel (2019) "The Romanian prison system in a global context," https://anp.gov.ro/revista-de-practica-penitenciara/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2019/01/Sistemul-penitenciar-romanesc-%C3%AEn-context-global.pdf.

Tyler, T. R. (2006). *Why people obey the law (*revised edition). Princeton University Press.

United Nations. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. *United Nations Treaty Series*, *1577*, 3.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2015). World Drug Report 2015. unodc.org/documents/wdr2015/World_Drug_Report_2015.pdf.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2025). World Drug Report 2025. https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR_2025/WDR25_B1_Key_findings.pdf.

Walters, G. D., & Bolger, P. C. (2019). Perceptions of procedural justice, beliefs about legitimacy, and law compliance: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, *15(3)*, 341–372. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-018-9338-2.

Ward, T., & Maruna, S. (2007). *Rehabilitation: Beyond the Risk Paradigm*. Routledge/Willan.

Wilson, D. B., Brennan, I., & Olaghere, A. (2018). Police diversion for youth to prevent future delinquent behavior: a systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, *14(1)*, e1051. https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2018.5.

World Prison Brief (WPB 2025), https://www.prisonstudies.org/world-prison-brief-data.

World Health Organization. (2016). Consolidated guidelines on HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care for key populations. 19004_KP guidelines revised English-March 2019 For Web.pdf.

Young, J. (2007). *The Vertigo of Late Modernity*. Sage. https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/justitie/adevarul-despre-inchisorile-si-detinutii-din-romania-dezvaluit-de-ultimul-raport-al-consiliului-europei-1043101.

https://www.doi.org/10.58603/CHTJ3063

Reform Fund Linked to the Inclusion of Roma and Other Vulnerable Groups

Christian Bergmann[1]

Abstract
The Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Program 2009-2019 (SRCP) helped to implement around 300 projects in Romania with a total budget of 180 million Swiss Francs over a period of 10 years. While the program was evaluated at the end, it lacked a sustainability analysis. The SRCP was made up of eight thematic funds, each containing several projects. This article shows, on the basis of a thematic fund, how the entire program was analyzed for sustainability. While the overall program received a fairly positive review on sustainability, some thematic funds did not perform satisfactorily. The article will illustrate the problem we faced during the analysis and presents one thematic funds with all its projects. The projects left a positive impact on the target population but it could not influence policy making on the national level. This left several interventions at the end of the program phase without the necessary funding to continue their activity.

Keywords
International-Relations, Europe, Swiss-Romanian cooperation, minorities, integration

1. Introduction and Methodological Approach

This article is an extract from the PhD thesis titled *"The Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Program 2009-2019. A Sustainability Analysis of the First Swiss Contributions to Romania"*. The thesis's overall goal was to conduct a sustainability analysis of the first comprehensive Swiss-Romanian cooperation programme implemented between 2009 and 2019. The article describes one thematic fund from that programme, which is called "*Reform Linked to the Inclusion of Roma and other Vulnerable Groups*". Before discussing the thematic fund and its findings, we present the methodological approach to this thematic fund. Followed by a brief review of the programme and an examination of how it was designed, structured, and implemented. Additionally, we will outline

[1] Independent scholar. PhD in International Relations and European Studies, University Babeș-Bolyai (Cluj-Napoca, Romania). Swiss-German citizen from Marly, Switzerland. Alma mater: University of Bern. E-mail: c.bergmann2279@gmail.com.

other similar projects implemented in Romania. We conclude the article with the results and conclusions from the analysis of this thematic fund.

How did we analyse the sustainability of this thematic fund? The fund implemented five projects, one of which was to build a structure for occupational purposes. The other four focused on health, education, awareness-raising, and information campaigns. As this analysis was part of a larger project, we were limited by time and financial resources. As a result, we were unable to conduct thorough surveys among the target population to assess the extent to which the intervention improved their lives or changed their attitudes and core beliefs. It would also have been necessary to conduct an on-site visit to observe the built object. However, that was not within our scope. We had to settle for "desk-top" reviews by telephone and email.

The preferred method was a questionnaire survey submitted to each project manager by email, along with additional non-formal discussions via telephone. To make the cases comparable, we decided to ask each participant the same question. Additionally, each one was asked 2-3 project-specific questions. The task of the sustainability analysis was to find out how the implemented projects influenced a desired change in the long run, especially without the Swiss funding. The projects finished at different time points, the oldest in 2017. In December 2019, the entire SRCP was terminated. We analysed the program from 2023 to 2024. This gave us up to seven years since the oldest project was terminated in 2017. Plenty of time for a project to develop and evolve.

What seems to be an advantage, in some cases it turned out to be a challenge. On average, it is recommended to implement sustainability analyses around two years after program termination (Mertens, 2019: 11). In our cases, it is between five to seven years after. On one side, we have very solid and reliable data, confirming the sustainability of a project; on the other side, we could not always find the people involved with the projects, so many years after program implementation. Although the sustainability analysis does not concern the project during the program phase, it is very advantageous to survey those people who were involved during implementation. They can compare the situation before, during, and after the program phase. This gives us valuable data for the final classification. In the case of the Roma Inclusion Fund, we were lucky because, except for one project, we were able to conduct telephone surveys with four project managers from the other projects. This helped a lot, especially to obtain better contextual information, which would not have been possible only with the schematic project descriptions online.

2. The Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Program 2009-2019

The Swiss financial contributions to the extended European Union (EU) were established before Romania joined the EU. The legal framework was the

Memorandum of Understanding between the European Union and Switzerland, signed on 27. February 2006. (Swiss Federal Government, 2006) The reason for this payment was twofold: Switzerland benefited from the common EU market without being a member. Therefore, the European Commission decided that Switzerland has to pay an "entrance fee" to the common market. Switzerland agreed on a financial contribution of 1.302 billion Swiss Francs (Sfr.) to all new EU member states that joined in 2004. In Switzerland, the contribution program was approved by a popular referendum on 26 November 2006. (Federal Chancellery, 2006)

When Romania and Bulgaria joined in 2007, the agreement was extended to cover the two new member states. The guiding framework was enshrined in the bilateral Framework Agreement of September 2010. (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2010) In Romania, it was enacted in November 2010 by Government Decision No. 1.065/2010. (Romanian Government, 2010)

The other reason this program was developed was that Romania and the other new member states were not on par economically with the Western member states. To help mitigate this issue, the new member states benefited from financial help that was allocated. However, Switzerland did not just transfer money; it designed together with Romania the Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Program (SRCP). By doing so, it kept a certain control over the use and distribution of those funds.

In **Table 1** on the following page, we see how the entire Swiss contribution sum was distributed among the new member states. The distribution was based on population size and per-capita income. (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, 2020: 4).

Table 1: *Swiss Financial Contributions to the new EU member states*

	Contribution in million Swiss Francs
Poland	489
Romania	181
Hungary	131
Czech Republic	110
Bulgaria	76
Lithuania	71
Slovakia	67
Latvia	60
Croatia	45
Estonia	40
Slovenia	22
Cyprus	6
Malta	5

(Source: Source: author's elaboration based on data provided by the Swiss State Department – EDA, 2025)

The contributed sum for Romania was 180 million Sfr. over a period of ten years. As shown in Table 1, it was the second-highest sum among all 13 member states. The SRCP was structured into eight thematic funds:

- Security Issues Fund
- Sustainable Energy Action Fund (SEAF)
- Health Issues Fund
- Scholarship Fund
- Research and Project in Education Fund
- Civil Society Participation Fund
- Partnership and Expert Fund
- Reform Fund linked to the Inclusion of Roma and other Vulnerable Groups

The last-mentioned fund is the object of this article. From now on called the Roma Inclusion Fund or just (RIF). Each fund had several projects within its field of operation. Some funds had only five projects, others had up to 141 projects. The program implemented a total of **307** projects. The idea behind this structure was to combine Swiss expertise with Romanian needs. A country-specific leitmotif was also expressed:

"To reduce the economic and social disparities within the enlarged European Union and between different regions of development of the beneficiary country of Romania. And to contribute within Romania to the reduction of economic and social disparities between the dynamic urban centers and the structurally weak peripheral regions." (Annex 1, 2010: 1)

The key factor for the program was the Swiss expertise behind almost every thematic fund. The Swiss experts acted as Swiss Intermediate Bodies (SIB) and coordinated the funds. Almost because the SEAF and the Roma Inclusion Fund did not have a specific SIB in Switzerland. Additionally, almost every project had another Swiss organisation as a partner for additional support.

In Romania, the program coordination was conducted by a governmental agency. It was designated the National Coordination Unit (NCU) and made up of operatives from the financial ministry. On the Swiss side, there were three governmental institutions involved: the Swiss Contributions Office (SCO) in Bucharest, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), both in Bern. (Annex2, 2010: 6-7)

The projects were all implemented by Romanian Executing Agencies (EA). This structure ensured solid Swiss expertise delivered directly where it was needed most. It is noteworthy to mention that only three funds

involved Swiss official institutions; the other five had little to no institutional involvement from the Swiss side. The vast majority of projects were implemented through NGOs and other non-governmental organisations. The overall positive outcome of the sustainability analysis assures the competence and professionalism of those involved on the Romanian side.

The projects were chosen after specific objectives:

(...) focused on the needs of Romania and took into account the possibility to transfer Swiss knowledge and experience, institutional partnerships, potential for networking, innovation and visibility (...) (Annex 4, 2010: 3)

3. The Reform Fund Linked to the Inclusion of Roma and Other Vulnerable Groups (Swiss State Department, 2010)

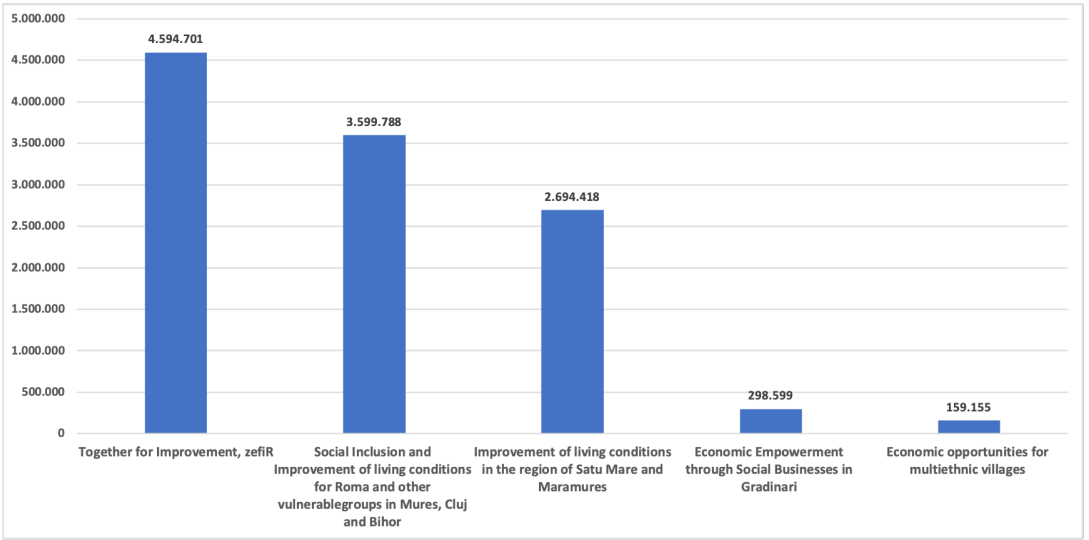
The RIF consisted of five projects. It did not have a dedicated SIB from the private sector; it had a combination of government operatives from the SDC, with the help of Swiss NGOs. Those NGOs were also the Swiss Project Partners for some projects within the fund. This means the SDC helped with administrative and organisational problems, but they could not provide the necessary expertise for this field of operations. That was left to the Swiss partners. Unlike other thematic funds, where the SIB was an organisation with expertise in its area of responsibility.

The framework left the project organisation to the Romanian EAs and did not bother to additionally install an umbrella organisation. The fund also had a leitmotif:

"The Thematic Fund shall contribute to improve the living conditions of Roma and other vulnerable minorities in a number of communities as well as contribute to the empowerment and awareness building in order to foster the social inclusion of the same groups."

Thematically, priority was given to children's and women`s education and health. The other goal was to build empowerment and awareness by strengthening the cultural identity and integration of Roma and other minorities, improving acceptance, and enhancing their participation in decision-making. The fund absorbed around 14M Sfr. illustrated in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: *The five RIF Projects by Budget*



(Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the Swiss State Department)

The five projects in Figure 1 are:

Together for Empowerment, Zefir (Swiss State Department, 2010)

This project aimed to improve access to education and health for more than 25.000 people in several rural communities in three counties: Dolj, Olt, and Gorj. (SASTIPEN, 2015) The communities mainly include vulnerable Roma people. The activities were divided into three categories: education, health, and empowerment. (Terre des hommes, 2015)

The educational component helped forty-two people from Roma and other vulnerable groups to increase their business and entrepreneurial skills. After the project's conclusion, 26 income-generating activities and individual companies out of 28 were efficient and profitable in ten local communities.

The health component provided information, education, and awareness activities for vulnerable populations. General practitioners were supported in improving their standards of care for Roma patients. The project addressed the health component with parents, pupils, and teachers. It provided parental support activities, after-school classes, intercultural kindergartens for children, and teacher training. The health component yielded plenty of results: 3475 children and 400 mothers were registered with general practitioners and received quality health care services. 100% of the newborn babies were vaccinated.

Six community centres were established. Ten schools supported the introduction of health education classes focusing on reproductive health and maternity risk prevention. Forty-four teachers were trained to deliver health classes.

The community empowerment component consisted of initiatives for intercultural dialogue, which solved common problems and enhanced the capacity of community members. The results were notable: 1893 benefited from the educational component, 1220 children participated in different psychosocial activities, 600 parents participated in parental education for at least one year, and 223 teachers and educators were trained in intercultural skills. The empowerment component helped develop ten communities and increase their level of empowerment. More than 30 community initiatives helped more than 3.800 community members, and 290 community members improved their skills and competence in advocacy, communication, negotiations, project writing, management, and mobilisation. (AGERPRES, 2019)

Social Inclusion and Improvement of Living Conditions of Roma and Other Vulnerable Groups in Mureș, Cluj, and Bihor (Swiss State Department, 2010)

The project's overall goal was to improve the living conditions and social inclusion of Roma communities and other vulnerable minorities in Mureș, Cluj, and Bihor counties. The project intervened in the areas of education, health, social assistance, and vocational training. (HEKS-EPER, 2013)

The objectives were attained through after-school classes, catch-up summer kindergarten, and other preschool and primary school support to foster inclusive education. Information on the right to access medical services and health insurance, offering assistance with registration, awareness raising on health issues, medical services, nutrition, hygiene, childcare, family planning, social counselling services, and establishing home care services by Roma for Roma, as well as promoting access to vocational training and micro-business development.

The results have been promising: 5.231 children benefited from educational support in the after-school groups organised in 93 communities; 11.757 children participated in intercultural educational activities, and 305 in mentoring programs; 206 teachers and non-teaching staff participated in training programs on children's abilities, learning difficulties, and social pedagogy; 564 parents were involved in educational activities. 5.062 beneficiaries received information and support on their rights and how to access public services and avoid health problems. Two thousand sixty-six

people benefited from a package of employability services and the microcredit system; 1553 beneficiaries benefitted from information, counseling, and job mediation; 220 people benefitted from the vocational training program, and almost half of them obtained an employment contract; 258 people found a job through job mediation, and nearly 110 jobs were created through the microcredit scheme; a total of 598 people improved their income situation.

Ninety-five families from 9 communities improved their housing conditions, specifically through extensions with bathrooms or entirely new houses.

Improvement of Living Conditions in the Region of Satu Mare and Maramureș (Swiss State Department, 2010)

The project aimed to improve the living conditions, health and education, and prospects of Roma communities in Satu Mare and Maramureș. The project aimed to empower members of Roma communities and vulnerable groups to participate actively in social, economic, and political life.

To achieve its objectives, the project implemented the following measures: Members of Roma communities and other vulnerable groups were given access to existing resources to improve their situation; children and young persons were participating in the public educational process appropriate for their age and specific needs; the vulnerability of members of Roma communities and other marginalised groups to health risks was reduced.

Activities consisted of initiative groups assessing the situation and elaborating strategies for the development of their communities; each community will have an expert present to coordinate project activities, mobilize people, and maintain the network. Kindergarten groups, afterschool programs, and social support were introduced as programs for the beneficiaries. A network has been established with local economic actors for vocational training programs to provide internships and jobs. Local healthcare teams will develop recommendations to improve access to health services for the members of the local Roma communities. They will put the recommendations on the authorities` agenda and promote activities like information and health education programs, counselling, and support.

Community development was the final component of this project. Thirteen local initiative groups, three youth groups, and 53 micro-projects were implemented in 10 communities, covering a total of 2170 beneficiaries from the Roma communities.

The results were remarkable: 819 children benefited from educational programs, 157 were employed in regular jobs, and 114 kindergarten and primary school teachers were trained. The health component also flourished: 85% of the children born in the project communities received all vaccinations included in the national immunisation program, 117 people had access to medical specialists, and 1386 members of the project communities used a permanent health counselling and referral service.

Economic Empowerment Through Social Businesses in Grădinari (Swiss State Department, 2010)

The task was to set up a processing plant for canned fruit and vegetables. The reason was that in Grădinari, Olt County, the farmers were wasting approximately 1,200 tons of grain a year. The other reason was that many farmers were selling their produce on the side of the main road in poor conditions. (Gazeta de Sud, 2015) This was not acceptable from a sustainability perspective, and the farmers wanted a facility to process the leftover food into canned fruits and vegetables. This helped the community leaders and program partners to conduct a thorough needs assessment. (Primaria Gradinari, 2014) The equipment was installed, and they are now able to process 250 tons of fruits and vegetables every week with the new installation. The facility also created around ten jobs during the harvest season. The inauguration was videotaped and uploaded to YouTube. (VGTV Regional on YouTube, 2018)

The output was 20 different types of cans for the local market and some grocery stores. When the funding stopped, the facility kept operating, but it was still the property of the local council of Grădinari. It was explained to us that nobody was willing to take the facility over and invest in it; the association members did not have the time to run such a facility. This harmed the project. One was that it did not grow into a more serious hub for vegetable and fruit processing, and the consequence of this lack of growth was a low number of employees and low production, which prevented it from satisfying the national market with Romanian-made canned fruits and vegetables.

Economic Opportunities for Multiethnic Villages (Swiss State Department, 2010)

This project aimed to empower Roma people to participate in formal economic activities. The participating communities were Archița in Mureș County, Mălâncrav in Sibiu County, and Viscri in Brașov County. The task was to create at least two social economy or individual enterprise structures, one in Archița and one in Mălâncrav; to strengthen the community relations

with the help of a Whole Village Local Action Plan; to increase the sale of locally handcrafted objects produced by Roma members through new channels, such as local markets and online means, by the end of the project.

The project implemented several activities to reach the goals: it used and capitalised on the traditional crafts of the area, especially those of the Roma people. This should have led to the formalization of economic activity; the community development component Whole Village Local Action Plan was implemented where local authorities worked together with the community; training sessions were held for local authority representatives from the three villages; collaborations were established between designers and Roma artisans; a weekly market in the citadel of Sighişoara was organized to ensure the participation of the formalized economic structures.

The implemented activities produced results: two social economic or individual enterprise structures were created in Archita; three strategic action plans were developed to strengthen community relations and common visions; 117 people were consulted and participated in the elaboration of the Whole Village Action Plans; 32 potential beneficiaries from the localities were identified, but only 5 were Roma; 18 sale events were organized, selling 528 items.

The five projects were implemented between 1 March 2012 and 31 March 2019. Social Inclusion and Improvement of Living Conditions for Roma and Other Vulnerable Groups in Mureș, Cluj, and Bihor took seven and a half years to finish. While Economic Opportunities for Multiethnic Villages took only 22 months to do so. The variation of time and budget is vast among the projects; however, each project achieved its stated goal. This was confirmed by the evaluation conducted at the end of the thematic fund. The thesis sustainability analysis began in 2023 and was completed in 2024. This ensured that between four and six years elapsed since project termination. Making it ideal for a sustainability analysis. The next chapter will discuss the methodology used to analyse the sustainability of this thematic fund.

4. Similar Projects Review

We would like to present other projects in Romania dealing with the Roma people and implemented around the same time as the RIF. The SRCP was one of many foreign programs dealing with the challenge. We will present the EEA Grants/ Norway Grants program and see what they have done to improve the situation.

The first EEA Grants/Norway Grants round took place between 2004 and 2009. According to the evaluation, 0% was allocated to Roma people or other vulnerable groups. (Mogen et. al. 2012: 31) The second round took

place between 2009 and 2014. This round had a dedicated Roma support plan. The program covered access to social services, combating discrimination, combating poverty, and improving access to education. The program had 100 projects relevant to Roma people and their needs with a budget of approximately 90 million Euros. (eeagrants, 2009-2014) The third round ran from 2014 to 2021 and covered empowerment through education and employment, advocacy, social participation, the fight against anti-Gypsyism, health care, education, housing, and promotion of Roma culture and arts. (eeagrants, 2022: 20) The allocated budget was approximately 100 million Euros. (eeagrants, 2020)

Another funding source is the EU financial help. The EU funds are distributed among several programs; according to the EU Commission, they are the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. (European Commission, 2025) Additionally, the EU funds other programs in collaboration with the Council of Europe.

There was ROMACT, *Roma Inclusion at Local Level*, working on critical areas such as education, housing, employment, and health (2013-2017 and since 2018 exclusively in Romania and Bulgaria), 134.588.259 Euro generated through 94 projects supported by ROMACT between 2013 and 2023. (ROMACT, 2015)

Another ongoing project is ROMED – Mediation for Roma. This project aims to train mediators to help reduce the gap between Roma communities and public institutions.

It was initiated in 2011 and is supported by 1 million Euro annually. (Council of Europe: 2) JUSTROM is another noteworthy project. First launched in 2016, it was in its third phase until 2021 — the program aimed to improve access to justice for Roma women. (JUSTROM, 2025)

The last program worth mentioning is the Roma Youth Action Plan, initiated in 2011 to support the participation and inclusion of young Roma people in Europe. (Council of Europe, 2025) Unfortunately, not all programs list the allocated budget for the projects. Several mentioned allocating some of the country's funds to civil society activities or minority protection programs.

Researching budget spending within a ministry 10 years ago is not practical. It would have been better if the program website had displayed the amount spent on each program since it was implemented more than ten years ago.

According to the CEU website, as of July 2018, 12 accredited NGOs in Romania were working on Roma issues. (CEU, Center for Policy Studies,

2025) We surveyed three of them for this analysis. Each NGO implements projects funded by other programs, other than the ones mentioned.

For example, "*Acceptă Schimbarea!*" was implemented by the Resource Center for Roma Communities from Cluj-Napoca. The project was about the reduction of discrimination and inequalities of Roma people. It had a budget of 53.570 Euro, funded by the PHARE 2005 program. (Centru de Resurse pentru Comunitatile de Romi, 2022)

Another example is Asociația Pro Roma from the city of Iași. Founded in 2008, they have implemented several projects over the years. One such project is "Fii profesionist în audio-vizual" implemented in 2018. The aim was to help young Roma build competencies in multimedia; the budget was 42.864 Euro. (ProRoma, 2025) Or the Policy Center for Roma and Minorities from Bucharest.

They implemented a project in Ferentari (a neighbourhood in Bucharest) in July 2015 called *"The Alternative Education Club"* to decrease the risk of drug use, improve school results, develop skills and talents, and promote active citizenship; the budget was 96.952 SFr. (Policy Centre for Roma and Minorities, 2015) As we can see, the EEA Grants/Norway Grants allocated approximately 190 million Euro between 2009 and 2021, the SRCP 14 million SFr., and the EU several million Euro between 2007 and 2020.

5. Analysis Results

The fund was evaluated by a specialised agency from Basel, Switzerland, and the final report was published in April 2019. (Meier et. al., 2019) We conducted the surveys and phone calls regarding all five projects. The results were not very encouraging. Although the fund performed well during the implementation phase, in cases, the sustainability was not up to par. Let us take a close look at each project:

Together for Empowerment, Zefir

We surveyed the SIB Terre des hommes Switzerland and its Romanian partner organisation, Terre des hommes Romania. We learned that the Swiss agency delegated the project management and execution entirely to its Romanian partner, Tdh Romania. Tdh had an executing partner, PACT Foundation Romania. This NGO was also part of the survey. We discovered that there was no exchange of expertise between the Swiss and Romanian sides.

The management reported mixed observations, believing that the intervention had a positive impact on the targeted communities. After all, certain social activities like after-school programs, psycho-social

counselling, and the community health centres are continued, and the target population is still benefiting from them. Certain small businesses also continue to generate income. However, no policy change on the national level was achieved. This means the long-term financial insurance is not given. The running support measures are at risk of running out of funding. Some local changes could be amended, but that is not enough for the long run, according to the participants. Another challenge remains the still fairly negative perception of the Roma people among the Romanian population.

This problem could not be solved to a measurable extent. As the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and its report "*Roma in 10 European Countries*" confirms. We will get back to this report later on.

Social Inclusion and Improvement of Living Conditions of Roma and Other Vulnerable Groups in Mureș, Cluj, and Bihor

This project had a Swiss SIB; it was HEKS Switzerland. They used HEKS Romania as the executing agency in Romania. After surveying both organisations, we found out that there was a strong expertise exchange between both organisations and a third one in Switzerland, which was the Pedagogical Institute in Zürich.

The management confirmed a strong collaboration between local authorities, Romanian NGOs, and members of the target population. The local authorities continued to finance certain activities after Swiss funding stopped. HEKS Romania could continue after-school activities, mentoring programs, and teacher training.

Although a policy change on the national level could not be achieved either, the management is convinced that this will happen any time soon. Overall, the management is satisfied with the current situation given the limited financial resources.

Improvement of Living Conditions in the Region of Satu Mare and Maramureș

We had the opportunity to survey Caritas Satu Mare, the Swiss Partner Agency in Romania, and The Resource Centre for Roma Communities Foundation (RCRC) from Cluj-Napoca, acting as an executing partner agency.

Even though this project did not have a designated SIB, Caritas Satu Mare had a vast expertise exchange with Caritas Switzerland. This helped a lot, especially to strengthen the relations between the two countries' organisations. However, some activities had to be stopped after Swiss funding, such as the community health care teams. But Caritas maintains

counselling and advocacy activities as well as kindergarten groups. And social workers still provide basic services. What is needed, though, is stronger cooperation between the NGOs and the local authorities. Another issue is the still missing infrastructure in one of the project communities. The problem here is that authorities consider that specific community illegal. Which means all the inhabitants must be relocated, but there is no proper plan to do so. This project did not yield a policy change on the national level and, according to the involved parties, it is unlikely to happen any time soon.

Economic Empowerment Through Social Businesses in Grădinari

The mayor of the Gradinari community was the driving force behind this project. Unfortunately, he passed a few days before we could survey him. A Romanian NGO, the Social Economy Development Foundation, implemented this project entirely. There was no SIB in Switzerland.

The information was collected through a non-formal telephone survey with the project manager. There was no Swiss involvement in this project, and no Swiss expertise or know-how was exchanged.

We learned that this project was a success story at the beginning. However, today it runs on very limited financial help from the local authorities. One of the main issues identified by the project team was the need for more trust among farmers.

Some were reluctant to associate with others out of fear of being deceived. Another problem for the processing plant was insufficient funds to buy the raw material from the farmers.

So far, the products are only sold regionally. The association could not secure substantial contracts with large retailers operating on a national scale like Lidl or Kaufland.

Even though the results of this fund were promising, the impact has been more local than national. Nevertheless, this type of project had the best measurable output of all five. The processing plant is still a part of the Gradinari community, although it is only running after the harvest season. The functioning of this plant can be observed during that time. This makes measurement immensely easier than trying to find out if specific information or an educational campaign improved the living conditions of a participant.

Economic Opportunities for Multiethnic Villages

The SIB for this project was not Swiss, but a Romanian NGO called Mihai Eminescu Trust (MET). They were also the executing agency. We

contacted the organisation and sent them two questionnaires to learn about the project's sustainability. We discovered they had no contact with any Swiss institution or organisation during or after project implementation. There was no exchange of expertise or know-how. MET did the entire project alone; therefore, they do not believe that the project contributed to any significant improvement in relations between Swiss and Romanian institutions or organisations.

Although MET was pleased with the project, they pointed out that Roma integration requires further funding and intervention in the long term. Since the project`s conclusion in 2017, community members have continued to receive training even seven years later. Since then, 11 training courses have been implemented for Roma people and all community members, including other communities from the area. This was remarkable.

However, the formalisation of more artisans was slowed down almost to a standstill. The reason was the massive bureaucratic effort required to formalise their businesses. Nevertheless, Roma artisans in the three villages have continued their activities since the project`s conclusion.

The situation of the Roma in the three project communities has improved, but not as much as hoped. Some craftsmen still leave the country to work abroad on a seasonal basis, often in precarious conditions, such as crop picking in Germany, France, or Spain.

Although the MET was satisfied with the project implementation, it reiterated that more was needed to improve the situation in the long term. More funding is needed to continue with other projects that involve similar activities.

The Roma Inclusion Fund did not receive a satisfying sustainability assessment. Although the five projects were successful during implementation and several of the project activities are still running, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and its report "*Roma in 10 European Countries*", published in 2022, painted a sobering picture of the situation in Romania in 2021. (FRA, 2021) The report points out positive developments, especially regarding hate-motivated harassment, which improved between 2016 and 2021 and violence against Roma people; unfortunately, there have been no genuine improvements in tackling discrimination. (FRA, 2021: 13)

The issue we observed was the limited reach of the RIF. The improvements were mostly on the local level, barely visible on the broad national level. Policy change did not occur, and new laws were not passed to help with the financial coverage.

According to the survey results, between 2016 and 2021, education and health deteriorated. Housing problems remained persistent, like poverty and social exclusion issues. Employment deteriorated the most; this category had four measurable items; none of them improved or remained unchanged; they all deteriorated! However, the measurement of long-term success turned out to be difficult. The SRCP was not the only source of financial aid to Romania during the project implementation phase. For us, it would have been almost impossible to measure the effect the RIF had on behavioural change among the target population as well as among the general population.

This was a main issue with the whole thematic fund; we couldn't assert that any measured effect was caused by the RIF alone, or were there contributing factors from outside.

Besides all the rather negative remarks on sustainability, we must mention the project in the Gradinari community. It was about a fruit and vegetable processing and cooling plant built for the local farmers.

This project left a tangible output in that community, and compared to the rather less manifest outputs of the other four projects, it benefited from the long-term appreciation by the local people. It covered a long-sought-after need in that community.

The same is valid for the community health centres with basic health coverage and support. They could be used at the moment of inauguration, and they also covered an urgent need. Unfortunately, most of the centres were closed after the program stopped. In those cases, the follow-up financing was not elaborated by the community, and the structure was abandoned.

We will catch up on these observations and remarks in our final chapter, Conclusion. Before that, we would like to discuss the recommendations we made on this fund.

6. Recommendations

Our recommendations are not targeting the individual project; this would not have been feasible. The recommendations focus on the overall thematic fund. We combine our recommendations with the ones voiced by the evaluation agency. They recommended improvements in light of a possible second Swiss contribution to Romania. And as we know, the second contribution is already coming.

We based our recommendations on the FRA report and the surveys conducted with the SIBs and EAs. The Roma Inclusion Fund results are too few and too slow. The thematic fund was successful on a local level but needed to contribute more at the national level.

The best example of this is the lack of a policy change emerging from one of the projects. Without a law helping to fund and implement the needed measures, the target community must rely on donations, NGOs, and local authorities. That is not a safe, long-term environment for such necessities.

The FRA Roma Report 2021 outlines the most significant issues the Roma community still faces despite various support measures and programs. Discrimination needs to improve; the report shows a one per cent improvement between 2016 and 2021. The risk of poverty is still high among Roma people compared to the local population. Children aged 0-17 are the most vulnerable among the Roma population. There is still a need to reduce under-reporting, which shows a massive lack of trust in law enforcement agencies. This is connected to a low level of trust in the legal system in general.

More emphasis needs to be placed on education; there has been no improvement in kindergarten enrollment, high school drop-outs, segregation, and overall discrimination. The employment situation has not improved either; the gender gap is too wide, and there is still discrimination when looking for a job.

Health is another important field that needs more attention; life expectancy is lower than that of the local population, and discrimination in access to health services remains high. To address these issues, the new contribution program must include a component tailored explicitly for Roma people. Our recommendations are:

- There should also be a greater focus on ***raising awareness*** among the local population. The problems will only be solved with the help of every citizen
- ***Campaigns*** need to be intensified, especially at the political level. Minority rights need to be strengthened more at the national level. This measure will benefit not only the Roma population but also other minorities living in Romania, such as Hungarians, Germans, or Slovaks.
- The ***education*** system needs better monitoring. Roma children must not be subject to discrimination or segregation. Roma children must attend kindergarten and school, not roam the streets and beg for money or do illegal work.
- ***Infrastructure issues*** must be remedied. Access to clean drinking water must be a right, not a privilege. Designated Roma settlements must be provided with the same quality of infrastructure as their Romanian counterparts.

Health issues among the Roma population need to be addressed. Access to health services must be guaranteed, and discrimination based on ethnicity must be eliminated.

NGOs play a crucial role in this domain; they have the knowledge and experience to deal with the problems mentioned. They are also connected with other NGOs and maintain a network of organisations at national and international levels. Contacts with local and regional authorities are important and need to be strengthened. With the help of the NGOs, it is possible to apply best practices on a large scale throughout the country, not just locally. Romania and Switzerland must continue the cooperation in this domain; the following SCRP must include an element dealing with the Inclusion of the Roma people.

We looked at the project in the Grădinari community in Olt County. This single project was not included in the agencies` evaluation because it had not been completed at the time of their review. This project was successful and looked very promising. It still works, but only after the harvest season. People are benefiting from it. Unfortunately, the town hall was not able to provide us with statistical data to see how the program performed during its implementation and after the Swiss funding ended. However, we have two recommendations based on this project:

- This type of project should be repeated in other regions of agricultural significance. It showed that the people appreciated the project and used it to the full extent of its possibilities.
- Statistical data must be tracked to measure performance, compare, and predict future efficiency. This must be mandatory for such projects, especially those funded from abroad.

7. Conclusion

During the analysis phase of this thematic fund, we had to accept the fact that it would not be possible to get an integral picture of the true results of this intervention. Measuring the impact and especially a long-term change, whether behavioural or attitudinal, is a true challenge. The target group was made up of around 40.000 people of different ages and genders, spread out in 11 counties.

To conduct a sustainability analysis on a program with this large number of participants, the analysis must be prepared in advance, during project implementation. Each participant must agree to a follow-up survey at a specified point in the future, and the development until then, related to the project activity, must be tracked and documented. The tangible outputs, as we could see in one of the projects, had the highest success rate from a sustainability point of view. This leads us to the question: Are more projects with manifest outcomes preferable?

If the government wants to further integrate the Roma people into society and build lasting relationships based on trust, more interventions must be planned for the future.

We argue that a project with tangible outputs generates more trust among the target population. So far, there are thousands of Roma people still living without basic infrastructure coverage like clean running water, electricity, and a functioning sewer system in their community. These are administrative responsibilities, and as long as the affected population is not taken into serious consideration, they will continue to lose trust in that administration. People in dire need of basic services and health care are less likely to be interested in civic rights and advocacy workshops. To avoid misunderstandings, we do not want to stop advocacy or awareness projects; the argument is that there must be more projects with instant, tangible outputs, together with the advocacy and awareness projects.

The material deprivation is only one part of the problem; discrimination and harassment are the other. While several awareness campaigns have been conducted and information events held, the basic needs coverage is still not enough. In such an environment, it is not hard to believe that the target population is not evolving as desired, and trust in the government is fading. This is the point where administrations and authorities must act, starting with providing services and infrastructure for basic needs. Once the needed services are provided and a basic infrastructure established, the government will regain trust.

Once the Roma people in Romania live under acceptable conditions, civic rights and duties projects will have a higher acceptance among the Roma people, and the sustainability rating of such projects will be much higher.

Another important aspect is the lack of a dedicated Swiss Intermediate Body (SIB). It would be the task of the SIB to develop a concept on how to obtain the thematic fund`s set goals. It would then gather the necessary resources and implement the projects. The SIB would also be able to set up the framework for a thorough sustainability analysis in the future.

Bibliography

An online news portal mentioned the problems in the Grădinari community. www.gds.ro/Local/2015-09-11/gradinari-comuna-cu-legumicultori-gospodari/ It was praised as a model solution for similar situations. Accessed December 2025.

Annex 2: Rules and Procedures for the overall Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Programme p. 6-7

www.eda.admin.ch/schweizerbeitrag/Der_Erweiterungsbeitrag/Laender/Annex2-Rumaenien_en.pdf, Accessed December 2025.

Annex 4: Rules and Procedures for Thematic Funds p. 3 www.eda.admin.ch/schweizerbeitrag/Der_Erweiterungsbeitrag/Laender/Annex4-Rumaenien_en.pdf, Accessed December 2025.

Central European University, Center for Policy Studies, *Roma Civil Monitor - List of NGOs involved*. country Romania. www.cps.ceu.edu/roma-civil-monitor-ngos-involved, Accessed December 2025.

Document called *Der Schweizer Erweiterungsbeitrag. Bilanz zum Abschluss der Länderprogramme in den EU-12 Staaten*. Published by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Bern, 2020, p. 4 www.europa.eda.admin.ch/bilanz-abschluss-laenderprogramme-eu-12-Staaten_DE.pdf, Accessed December 2025.

EEA and Norway Grants 2009-2014 Final Strategic Report Romania. Attachment - Report on the objective regarding the improvement of the situation of the Roma people, p. 1. Report is available on the eea grants website, www.eeagrants.ro/final-strategic-report-2009-2014.pdf, Accessed December 2025.

European Commission website, *EU funding for Roma equality, inclusion and participation*. Funding programmes. www.commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/justice-and-fundamental-rights/eu-funding-roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation_en, Accessed December 2025.

Federal Chancellery (Bundeskanzlei). This page hosts all popular decisions in Switzerland. Among them, the one from 2006. www.bk.admin.ch/volksabstimmungen/volksabstimmung-20061126.html, Accessed December 2025.

FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Roma Survey 2021*, Publication Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2023 www.fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2023/roma-survey-2021-technical-report, Accessed December 2025.

Homepage of Roma Center in Cluj-Napoca. Project page with information about the project. www.romacenter.ro/proiecte-finalizate/accepta-schimbarea/, Accessed December 2025.

Homepage of the Asociația Pro Roma. The projects are listed in the section *Despre noi* (about us) www.asociatiaproroma.ro/site/index.php/despre/scurtistoric, Accessed December 2025.

Homepage of The Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, projects are found in the section Our Stories, projects. *July 2015 - The Alternative Education Club*. www.policycenter.eu/en/july-2015-the-alternative-education-club/. Accessed December 2025.

Joint Programme, Roma Women`s Access to Justice, About JUSTROM1-3. www.coe.int/en/web/access-to-justice-for-roma-women/about-justrom3, Accessed December 2025.

Mertens, Donna M., Amy T. Wilson (2019), *Evaluation Theory and Practice, A Comprehensive Guide* (2. ed.), The Guilford Press, New York, NY.

Mogen, Mari Brekke, Mike Ferguson, Zozan Kaya, Tore Laugerund (2012), *End Review - EEA and Norway Grants 2004-2009, Final Report 2012.* Evaluation obtained from the website: www.eeagrants.org, Accessed December 2025

Norway Grants Results Reporting Guide. Categories and codes for EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021 data, November 2022, p. 20. https://eeagrants.org, Accessed December 2025.

Official website of the Swiss Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research. *Swiss contribution to the enlarged EU: Signing of a memorandum of understanding.*

Portal Legislativ is a website of the Romanian Ministry of Justice. It contains a list of legislative changes and existing laws. The decision can be found here www.legislatie.just.ro/Public, Accessed December 2025.

Roma Youth Participation website, About the project, document *Roma Youth Action Plan*, p. 2, www..coe.int, Accessed December 2025.

ROMACT infographics, website with information and data about the project, funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe. www.coe-romact.org/sites/default/files/Edited_infographics_compressed_0.pdf, Accessed December 2025.

Swiss Confederation. ARAMIS information system contains information regarding research projects and assessments run or funded by the Federal Administration. Meier, Harald, Michael Morlok of B,S,S. Economic Consultants, with contributions from: Claudiu Ivan, Enrichetta Placella, Laurent Ruedin, Enikö Vincze *Evaluation of the Swiss Contribution to the inclusion of Roma and other vulnerable groups. "Reform Fund linked to the Roma Inclusion and other Vulnerable Groups" Final Report Romania* April 2019 www.aramis.admin.ch, Accessed December 2025.

The allocated funds are an approximation calculated with the help of two documents, one is the EEA Factsheet Roma Inclusion and Empowerment, www.eeagrants.org/sites/default/files/resources/EEA_Factsheet_roma_7.pdf. Accessed January 2026, and the EEA Grants country profile website www.eeagrants.org/countries/romania, Accessed December 2025.

The channel is called Online Television (VGTV) Olt County. It is a private channel hosted by the news outlet VGtv Regional. They provide news

from the Olt region. www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSNwLK4B4UM, Accessed December 2025.

The community administration of Grădinari posted the press release for the public. It was a round-table event to promote the project. They mentioned the main stakeholders and program organizers and also what the project is about. www.primariagradinari-olt.ro/comunicat-de-presa/, Accessed December 2025.

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs is the publisher of all official documents relating to the SRCP. The memorandum, together with the five annexes, can be found there. www.eda.admin.ch/schweizerbeitrag/Der_Erweiterungsbeitrag/Rahmenabkommen-Rumaenien_en.pdf, Accessed December 2025.

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs is the publisher of all official documents relating to the SRCP. The annexes one to five to the MoU can be found here, too. *Annex 1: Conceptual Framework of the Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Programme p. 1*, https://www.eda.admin.ch/schweizerbeitrag/Der_Erweiterungsbeitrag/Laender/Annex1-Rumaenien_en.pdf, Accessed December 2025.

Website of the Council of Europe, direct link to the pdf document, p. 2, www.coe.int/16802ed00f, Accessed December 2025.

Website of the Federal Council, section Swiss contribution to select EU member states, title: *Countries of the enlargement contribution*. www.europa.eda.admin.ch/en/countries-of-the-enlargement-contribution, Accessed December 2025.

Website of the Swiss State Department. All the RIF projects are listed there. www.eda.admin.ch/schweizerbeitrag/the-swiss-contribution/rumaenien/projekte, Accessed December 2025.

www.admin.ch/gov/en/start/documentation/media-releases, Accessed December 2025

https://www.doi.org/10.58603/HPSS5137

Advancing Multilingual Education in the Republic of Moldova: Policies, School Practices, and the Role of Higher Education

Angela Solcan[1] • Svetlana Burea[2]

Abstract
This paper studies the development of multilingual education in the Republic of Moldova, with a particular focus on how national policies, school practices, and higher education institutions interact in the current reform context. The study aims to examine Moldova's linguistic and cultural diversity and to explain why multilingual education has become a strategic priority for inclusion, social cohesion, and European integration. It reviews early approaches to linguistic diversity in schools, the role of the Education Code (2014), and the 2023 amendments that officially introduced the concept of multilingual education. Special attention is given to the multilingual education pilot launched in 2025–2028, highlighting its objectives, methodological foundations (CLIL, translanguaging, plurilingual approaches), and implementation challenges, particularly regarding teacher readiness, resources, curriculum adaptation, and assessment. The article also discusses the contribution of "Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University through teacher education, professional development, and applied research, showing higher education as a key driver of sustainable multilingual reform.

Keywords
Multilingual education, language policy, linguistic diversity, intercultural competence, CLIL, translanguaging

Introduction

In the context of growing linguistic and cultural diversity across Europe, multilingual education has increasingly become a central issue for educational policy and practice. In the Republic of Moldova, multilingualism is not a new phenomenon but a characteristic shaped by historical, social, and demographic factors. The coexistence of Romanian as the state language alongside minority and regional languages such as Russian, Gagauz, Ukrainian, and Bulgarian creates both challenges and opportunities for

[1] PhD, Associate Prof., "Ion Creanga" State Pedagogical University, Republic of Moldova, E-mail: solcan.angela@upsc.md.
[2] PhD, Associate Prof., "Ion Creanga" State Pedagogical University, Republic of Moldova, E-mail: burea.svetlana@upsc.md.

inclusive education. Within this framework, multilingual education is increasingly seen as a strategic response to issues of equity, social cohesion, and democratic participation.

Recent educational reforms in Moldova, particularly the amendments to the Education Code in 2023, formally introduced the concept of multilingual education and marked an important shift in educational thinking. This policy development reflects alignment with European principles that promote linguistic diversity, intercultural dialogue, and learner-centred approaches. However, implementing policy into classroom practice remains complex and requires institutional support, teacher training, and methodological changes.

Against this background, the present study explores the interaction between language policy, school practices, and higher education in advancing multilingual education in the Republic of Moldova. Special attention is given to the role of "Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University as a key actor in teacher education, applied research, and professional development, highlighting how higher education institutions can support sustainable multilingual reform.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative and descriptive-analytical methodology designed to examine multilingual education as a policy-driven and practice-oriented movement in the Republic of Moldova. The study is grounded in document analysis, including national education legislation, policy frameworks, strategic programmes, and international guidelines related to multilingual and inclusive education. This approach allows for a systematic examination of how multilingual education is conceptualised at the policy level and how it is framed within broader European educational discourse.

In addition, the research incorporates a case-study approach focusing on the contribution of "Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University to the implementation of multilingual education. Institutional initiatives such as teacher-training programmes, professional development activities, applied research projects, and the work of the Language–Education–Multiculturality Laboratory (LEM) are analysed to illustrate how theoretical principles—such as CLIL, translanguaging, and plurilingualism—are translated into educational practice. This qualitative case study highlights institutional capacity-building and innovation within higher education.

Complementary data are drawn from surveys and reflective reports collected during professional development activities involving teachers participating in the multilingual education pilot. These data provide insights into teachers' attitudes, perceived readiness, and professional needs. The

combination of policy analysis, institutional case study, and practitioner perspectives ensures methodological triangulation and strengthens the validity of the findings by linking macro-level policy with educational practice.

The main aim of the research is to analyse how multilingual education is conceptualised, implemented, and supported in the Republic of Moldova, with a particular focus on the role of higher education institutions in facilitating inclusive and sustainable educational reform. The study seeks to explore the extent to which national language policies, school-level practices, and teacher education initiatives interact to promote linguistic inclusion, intercultural competence, and social cohesion.

To achieve this aim, the research pursues the following objectives: to examine the policy framework regulating multilingual education in the Republic of Moldova; to analyse school practices and pilot initiatives related to multilingual instruction; to investigate the contribution of "Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University to teacher preparation and professional development for multilingual classrooms; to identify key challenges and opportunities in implementing multilingual education from a practitioner perspective.

The study is guided by the research hypotheses that assumes that multilingual education, when supported by coherent policy frameworks and teacher training, contributes to greater educational inclusion and social cohesion in linguistically diverse contexts; higher education institutions play an important role in bridging the gap between multilingual education policy and classroom practice through teacher education, applied research, and professional support structures.

Multilingualism as a Contemporary Educational Imperative

In the twenty-first century, using more than one language has become part of everyday life. Travel, migration, and online communication bring people with different languages and cultural backgrounds into regular contact (Gilstein, 2023). As a result, schools across Europe and elsewhere now teach students who speak different languages. Multilingual and multicultural education have therefore become practical answers to this growing diversity rather than special or short-term measures (European Commission, 2025). From both European and global viewpoints, multilingual education is seen as an approach that accepts *language diversity* as a lasting social fact and aims to give all learners fair access to education (UNESCO, 2024).

European and international bodies often point out that language is closely tied to who people are, where they belong, and how they take part in

society (Barbosa, 2023). *The Council of Europe* of the *European Union*, *UNESCO*, and *the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights* all see multilingualism as both a shared democratic value and a daily need in diverse societies. The concept of plurilingualism introduced by the Council of Europe, that suppose the fact that people use different languages for different tasks and at different levels throughout their lives. This view challenges the belief that speaking only one language is normal and urges schools to value learners' whole language range, including minority and migrant languages.

From a *psycho-educational point of view*, the work of *Jim Cummins* shows clearly that growing up with two or more languages brings strong cognitive, social, and school-related gains (Cummins, 2005; 2017). Supporting learners' home languages and respecting their language identities are, in this view, basic conditions for educational inclusion and fairness. Multilingualism should therefore not be treated as an optional extra, but as a core need for schools that aim to be fair, democratic, and forward-looking. Cummins' research highlights that bilingual and multilingual development is linked to *greater mental flexibility, stronger critical thinking, and better problem-solving skills*. It also supports cognitive transfer between languages, which helps learners gain new knowledge, improve learning strategies, and achieve better school results.

Today, multilingualism is more and more seen as a strength rather than a burden. In schools, it can help build social bonds by supporting inclusion and shared understanding among students from different language groups (UNESCO, 2024). When schools respect and use pupils' home languages, learners from minority groups are more likely to feel seen and accepted. Multilingual learning also opens space for contact between language groups, which can lower prejudice and social gaps. In this way, togetherness grows not by removing difference, but by learning how to live with it in common learning spaces.

From a *social angle*, multilingualism is closely tied to community cohesion and inclusion in education. As Michael Byram explains, learning more than one language supports the growth of intercultural competence, understood as the mix of knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to act as a bridge between cultures (Byram, 1997). In this sense, the multilingual school does more than teach language forms. It creates space for real exchange between cultures and helps shape active, responsible citizens in a democratic society.

Multilingual education also plays a key role in *democratic citizenship* (Szabo, 2024). Taking part in public life depends on access to language, above all the state language, while respect for minority languages helps build

trust and social balance. School systems that support both strong skills in the state language and the use of minority languages allow people to take part fully in society without giving up their language roots. This balanced path reflects a democratic view of citizenship based on fairness, shared rights, and respect for difference.

At the European level, multilingualism is firmly set as a core value and as a key tool for social and cultural integration. Policy texts such as the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992) and the European Commission's Strategy for Multilingualism (2007) confirm every citizen's right to learn and use more than one language, while also stressing the role of language diversity in building social cohesion. In the same spirit, the goal known as "mother tongue + 2" promotes strong skills in the home language alongside at least two foreign languages, as a way to support democratic participation, mobility, and Europe's shared future.

These questions matter greatly in the Republic of Moldova, where language diversity has grown out of history and political change. Moldova is home to several national minorities, including Gagauz, Russian, Ukrainian, and Bulgarian groups (Minority Rights Group 2023). Its Soviet past and the language choices made after independence have led to tension between strengthening Romanian as the state language and protecting minority languages. In education, both separate minority-language schools and strict one-language models have shown clear limits, either by slowing social mixing or by pushing minority students to the margins.

For these reasons, the study of multilingual education in Moldova is well grounded. As the country moves closer to European values, reform of the education system has become a key goal (Stocker, 2025). The European Union's language policy, which supports diversity, inclusion, and lifelong language learning, offers an important guide in this process.

The Need for Multilingual Education in the Republic of Moldova

The need for multilingual education in the Republic of Moldova is shaped by pedagogical, social, civic, and economic factors. From a pedagogical perspective, multilingual education is supported by strong evidence of cognitive and academic benefits (Solcan and Burea, 2025). Research shows that using more than one language enhances cognitive flexibility, problem-solving, and attention (Cummins 2005). Learners who develop skills in multiple languages often show better performance in reading, writing, and critical thinking across subjects (TESSA 2024). In Moldova, where many children grow up in multilingual environments,

education that builds on these experiences can turn linguistic diversity into an academic advantage.

Valuing the mother tongue is especially important for learning outcomes. When students are taught in a language they understand well, particularly in the early years, they develop stronger literacy skills and a better understanding of subject content. These skills can later support learning in the state language and additional languages. When the mother tongue is ignored or undervalued, students may struggle academically and lose confidence (Atkinson 1987). Multilingual education recognises the first language as a foundation for further learning, helping reduce achievement gaps and promote equal educational outcomes, while also supporting more inclusive teaching practices. Linguistically diverse classrooms encourage learner-centred approaches that adapt to different needs and learning paths (Cummins, 2017; UNESCO, 2024; Solcan and Burea, 2025). Such practices benefit all students by increasing engagement and participation, not only those from minority backgrounds.

Social and civic reasons strengthen the case for multilingual education. Schools are spaces where attitudes toward diversity are shaped. By exposing students to different languages and cultures, multilingual education promotes mutual understanding and respect. Regular interaction in diverse classrooms helps challenge stereotypes and supports the development of tolerance and peaceful coexistence, which are essential in societies with complex historical and linguistic divisions. In a plural society, unity cannot be built through uniformity. Instead, it requires recognition of multiple identities within a shared civic framework. By combining respect for linguistic diversity with common civic values, multilingual education allows minority learners to feel included while strengthening their sense of belonging to the state.

Economic and mobility considerations provide additional justification. In a globalised economy, multilingual skills and intercultural competence are increasingly valuable in the labour market. Moldova's strong links to migration, cross-border work, and international cooperation make language skills a practical asset. Multilingual education prepares students for wider employment opportunities and supports both national and international mobility (CMI 2025). Proficiency in the state language remains necessary for access to higher education, public services, and civic life, while additional languages expand opportunities beyond national borders. In this context, multilingual education supports this balance by promoting additive multilingualism, where learning new languages does not replace existing ones.

Last but not least, multilingual education is also economically efficient. Education systems that fail to support linguistic diversity often face higher dropout rates and long-term social costs. Inclusive approaches help reduce underachievement and strengthen human capital. For Moldova, investing in multilingual education is a cost-effective strategy that supports sustainable development.

Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Moldova

The Republic of Moldova is characterised by significant linguistic and cultural diversity shaped by historical border changes, migration, and political transformations. Language in Moldova is closely connected to identity and belonging, making it a main issue in education. To analyse multilingual education, one has to understand the country's national minorities, their regional distribution, and the historical legacy of language practices (Young European Ambassadors, 2022). National minorities represent an important part of Moldova's population and are officially recognised by the state through constitutional and legislative frameworks. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2024), the largest groups include Ukrainians – 4.9%, Russians – 3.2%, Gagauz – 4.2%, Bulgarians – 1.6%, and Roma – 0.4%, alongside smaller communities such as Poles, Jews, and Belarusians. These groups differ in size, geographic concentration, and social status, which strongly affects their access to language education (Demographics of Moldova, 2026). Ukrainians and Russians are the most numerous and are spread across urban and northern or eastern regions. Most Gagauz people live in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia in southern Moldova, where political autonomy supports the protection of language and culture. Even though the region recognises Gagauz as a language alongside Romanian and Russian, schools retain from using it as a language of instruction (Burea and Solcan, 2025, p. 193). On the other hand, Minority Rights Group (2018a) states that the Bulgarian people who live in Taraclia uphold the Bulgarian language and culture education in schools as individual subjects. The lack of teachers and materials is probably why these schools do not use Bulgarian for all subjects (Minority Rights Group International, 2018). The Roma community is more scattered across the country. They often face strong social marginalisation, and many Roma students deal with poverty, discrimination, and limited access to quality education. This includes support for learning in their mother tongue (Minority Rights Group, 2018b).

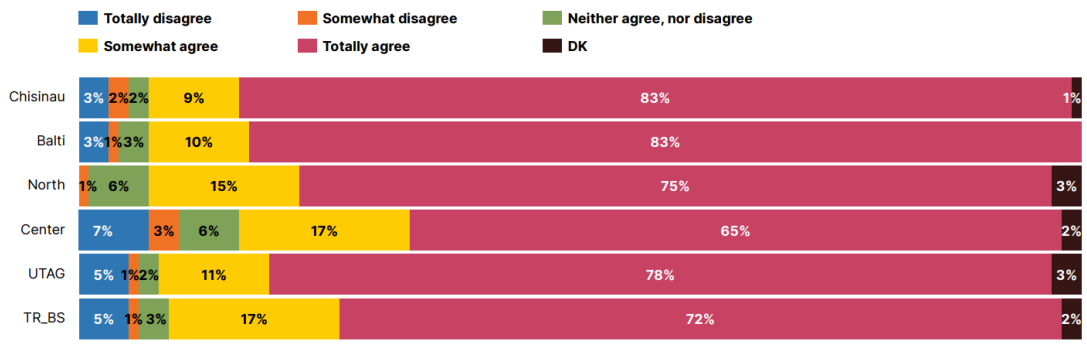
School language patterns largely mirror these demographic realities. Moldova's education system mainly operates in Romanian or Russian instruction. Russian-speaking schools are common in cities and often enroll students from diverse ethnic backgrounds because they offer minority

languages, such as Gagauz, Bulgarian, and Ukrainian. However, these languages are still taught as separate subjects rather than as full languages of instruction. These schools often lack resources, trained teachers, and weak institutional support (Bencheci, 2025). Multilingual education, therefore, develops unevenly and often depends more on local capacity than on a clear national strategy.

Regional variation also shapes how schools use language. Chișinău and other larger cities have a high linguistic diversity. Romanian and Russian operate side by side in schools and serve mixed student populations. Rural areas usually have only one language of instruction, although migration and demographic changes increase diversity there little by little. Schools in these contexts have to adjust to change on their own, which leaves gaps between official language policies and everyday educational practice.

There is a clear vision of society regarding Moldova`s multilingual character. It is a widely shared understanding across Moldova that the country is linguistically diverse, with multiple languages spoken (Lingobarometru - Moldova, 2024). At the question "Do you agree that Moldova is a multilingual country?" most respondents from all six regions expressed strong agreement with this view.

Figure 1: *Perceptions of Moldova as a Multilingual Society*



(Source: Lingvobarometrul Chișinău, 2024)

The highest levels of total agreement were recorded in Chișinău and Bălți (83%), suggesting that linguistic diversity is especially well acknowledged in urban areas. The North region also shows a high level of agreement (75%), although here a slightly larger number of respondents expressed neutral views or disagreement. In the Centre region, total agreement is comparatively lower (65%), with more respondents indicating that they "somewhat agree" (17%) or remain neutral (6%) (see Figure 1). In the southern parts of the country, Gagauzia (78%) and

Taraclia/Basarabeasca (72%) also demonstrate strong agreement, although neutral and dissenting responses appear more frequently than in Chișinău or Bălți. Despite small regional differences, the data clearly show that the idea of Moldova as a multilingual country is broadly recognised and accepted across society.

Early Attempts at Multilingual Education in Moldova.

The first responses to linguistic diversity in Moldova's education system developed gradually after independence and before the launch of formal multilingual education pilots (Gagauzia Dialogue 2021). These early approaches were not part of a coherent strategy but emerged from existing structures and immediate needs. They reflected efforts to preserve access to education, respond to minority concerns, and strengthen the role of the state language within a complex linguistic environment shaped by historical bilingualism.

One major pre-pilot approach was the continued operation of minority-language schools, most notably Russian-medium schools inherited from the Soviet period (OSCE 2005). These schools remained widespread, particularly in urban areas and regions with large minority populations, and served students from various ethnic backgrounds rather than exclusively ethic Russians. For minority communities, they provided stability and access to education in a familiar language during a period of social change. However, these schools functioned as parallel institutions, limiting interaction between students from different linguistic backgrounds and reinforcing separation rather than integration.

A second early approach involved the introduction of Romanian as a second language in minority-language schools (Government of RM 2021). Policymakers recognised the need to support minority students in learning the state language when Romanian became increasingly important for higher education, employment, and civic participation. This marked an important shift toward inclusion, but the implementation was uneven. Romanian was often taught using methods designed for native speakers, and teachers lacked training in second-language instruction. Teachers often lacked specialised training in second-language pedagogy, and appropriate teaching materials were scarce, particularly in rural and minority-dense regions. As a result, learning outcomes varied significantly. Many minority students completed compulsory schooling with limited functional proficiency in Romanian, constraining their educational and professional opportunities.

Optional mother-tongue education represented a third strand of early multilingual practice. In regions with concentrated minority populations,

languages such as Gagauz, Bulgarian, and Ukrainian were offered primarily as optional subjects within the curriculum. In Gagauzia, limited autonomy enabled local authorities to support language and culture through education, though implementation was constrained by limited resources and teacher availability. Bulgarian and Ukrainian language instruction similarly depended on regional demand and external support, including cultural and educational assistance from kin-states.

The Education Code and the Shifts in Educational Thinking

The Education Code adopted in 2014 represented a turning point in Moldova's approach to education. It emerged as a response to long-standing issues such as linguistic diversity, uneven educational results, and limited interaction between social groups. Through this reform, schools were reconceptualised as environments meant to foster inclusion, fairness, and social cohesion. The Code guaranteed equal access to education for all learners, irrespective of language, ethnicity, or social background, while recognising that students do not start from the same position and therefore require different forms of support. It also affirmed the right of national minorities to maintain and develop their languages and cultures within the public education system, acknowledging diversity as an enduring characteristic of Moldovan society.

In line with European educational trends, the Code encouraged a move away from traditional, teacher-led instruction toward learner-centred and competence-based approaches. Greater emphasis was placed on active participation, communication, and critical thinking. At the same time, the reform aimed to address the social separation often produced by language-based schooling by promoting shared educational standards and more inclusive learning settings, without diminishing linguistic and cultural differences. Special consideration was given to minority and socially vulnerable learners, whose weaker academic outcomes were closely linked to restricted access to higher education and employment. As a result, early intervention and differentiated instruction were framed as responsibilities of the education system as a whole.

This reform trajectory was reinforced in 2023 through amendments to the Education Code that formally introduced the concept of multilingual education. Defined as instruction carried out in two or more languages, intending to develop effective communication skills in both Romanian and the learner's mother tongue, this change marked more than a simple terminological update. It reflected a broader policy shift in which multilingual education came to be recognised as a structured and legitimate educational approach, one that supports both linguistic inclusion and social integration.

The Multilingual Education Pilots in Moldova: Design and Objectives

On September 18, 2025, the Ministry of Education and Research approved the regulatory framework for the implementation of a multilingual education pilot in the Republic of Moldova. (Gagauzia Dialogue 2025). Launched by the Ministry of Education and Research, the pilot tests new approaches to language use, teaching methods, and institutional cooperation, serving as a preparatory phase for future system-wide reform. The initiative targets selected primary and lower secondary schools in linguistically diverse regions where Romanian is not the main language of instruction, including areas such as Cahul, Ungheni, and Gagauzia. Participation is voluntary, with schools chosen based on readiness, teacher motivation, and community support. Implementation is planned in stages between 2025 and 2028, allowing for gradual testing and adjustment.

Instruction combines Romanian, the local mother tongue, and an international language—usually English or French—following an additive multilingual model that builds on students' existing linguistic resources. Methodologically, the pilot draws on European practices, particularly Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), alongside plurilingual and translanguaging approaches that support meaningful learning, participation, and reduced language anxiety (Zemach, 2024; Haynes, 2025).

Intercultural education is embedded across the curriculum, with learning materials reflecting Moldova's cultural diversity and promoting dialogue and critical thinking. The pilot's implementation has strong institutional support. The Ministry of Education and Research leads coordination, offers guidance, and monitors progress. At the same time, higher education institutions contribute through teacher training, research, and professional development. The National Center for Multilingual Education at the "Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University plays a particularly important role by focusing on CLIL, translanguaging, and intercultural teaching methods. The pilot also has international partners, such as the *OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Eurac Research, and the Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation*, all of which contribute expertise, policy advice, and comparative experience. Sweden provided financial and technical support, mainly through the "Gagauzia Dialogue" project, to help build local capacity, train teachers, and engage key stakeholders.

Case Study: The Implementation of Multilingual Education in Schools

In the context of current educational reforms in the Republic of Moldova, *"Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University* has proven to be a key institution to support the present and future needs of the national education system. Responding to the growing demand for well-prepared teachers and corresponding professional development, the university plays an active role in the implementation of multilingual education policies and inclusive pedagogical practices.

An important contribution in this area is made through the *Language – Education – Multiculturality Laboratory (LEM), (Laboratorul Limbă – Educație – Multiculturalitate (LEM),* recently initiated, which serves as a hub for applied research and pedagogical innovation. Within LEM laboratory, students and academic staff engage in translanguaging activities, multilingual educational projects, and the development of bilingual teaching materials designed for schools in linguistically diverse and minority-language regions. These initiatives are closely connected to classroom needs and provide practical guidance for teachers working in multilingual school environments.

The university also facilitates professional and academic dialogue through events such as the international conference *"Multicultural Education as a Formative Space for Values Education."* This forum offers opportunities for reflection on language policies, inclusive pedagogy, and the role of languages in shaping European identity. By bringing together perspectives from different disciplines and educational contexts, the conference promotes intercultural dialogue, teachers' experience exchange, and strengthens the university's role in advancing educational communication and language education at the national level.

With this in mind, it is worth noting that „Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University has long-standing experience in implementing a *multilingual approach in* teacher education.

Reflecting on the early initiatives, one milestone was achieved in 2013, when the University won a project funded by AUF (Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie). This project brought together a strong international partnership involving the Technical University of Civil Engineering of Bucharest (Romania), Université Paris Nanterre (France), *and „Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University of Chișinău (Republic of Moldova)*, through the *Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures.* As a result of this productive collaboration, a Master's degree programme was launched: *Didactics of Non-Linguistic Disciplines in French and English.*

The main objective of this programme was to prepare teachers to teach general school subjects through a foreign language, namely French and English. At that time, Moldova had a considerable number of bilingual schools, especially in regions such as Bălți and Chișinău, where several subjects were taught in French.

Aligned with Moldova's evolving multilingualism policies and supported by the success of this initiative, the University continued to expand its multilingual teacher-training programmes. In 2024, it launched a new Master's programme entitled *Didactics of Non-Linguistic Disciplines in English and German*, and in 2025, thanks to another valuable collaboration with Romanian universities, it initiated the Master's programme *Integrated Content and Foreign Language Learning for Primary and Preschool Education – Didactics of Non-Linguistic Disciplines in English.*

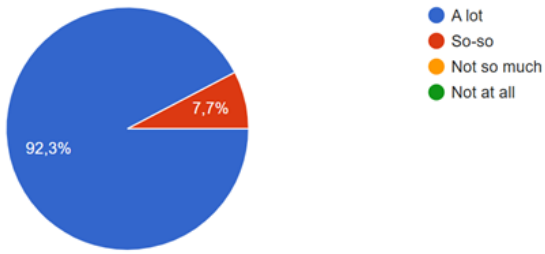
Going back to the Ministry of education pilot program, that is still just starting out, many challenges deal with teachers' preparation, curriculum, and didactic resources development. Many teachers in the pilot are used to one language or to limited bilingual skills, and they often do not have much experience with methods like teaching subjects in a second language or using multiple languages in the classroom. Even if teachers are motivated and confident in more than one language, teaching subjects while also helping students learn the language requires new skills and a totally different way of thinking.

Although national policies support multilingual education, many schools do not have enough textbooks and materials in minority languages. Teachers often have to create or modify their own resources, which takes time, a bigger budget, and leads to differences in quality between classrooms. These problems could be worse in subjects that follow strict national standards and exams, where teachers feel pressure to meet existing requirements. Assessing students adds another complication. Traditional tests usually focus on how well students know the official language, which can make it hard to fairly evaluate their knowledge of other subjects when they are learning in multiple languages. Teachers might find it difficult to assess student progress in ways that do not disadvantage students who are less fluent in the main language, Romanian.

Despite these constraints, most teachers involved in the pilot express a positive attitude toward the initiative. During professional development activities organised or supported by the university, participating teachers demonstrated strong interest and clear awareness of the need for multilingual approaches in schools serving minority-language students. According to the data reflected in the diagrams, *92.3% of respondents*

recognised the importance of multilingualism for social cohesion in Moldova, indicating a strong alignment between educational practice and broader societal needs.

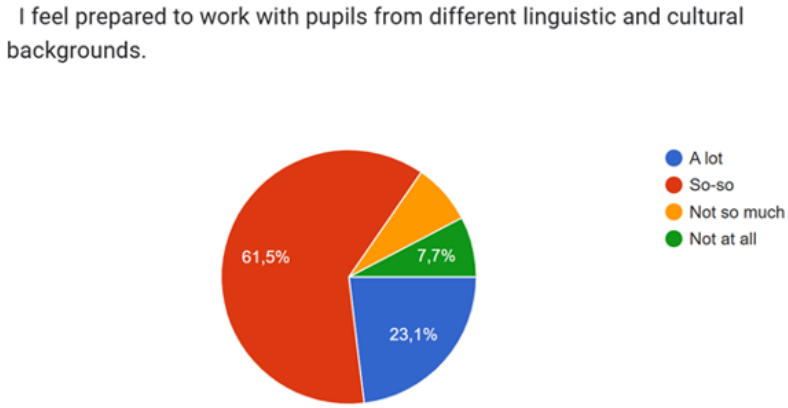
Figure 2: *The Teachers` Attitude towards Multilingual Education*



(Source: Authors' own elaboration based on data obtained through a structured questionnaire administered to teachers, 2025)

At the same time, the data highlights a clear need for further professional support. When asked about their readiness to work with pupils from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, only 23.1% of teachers reported feeling well prepared, while 61.5% described their level of preparedness as moderate. These figures confirm that positive attitudes alone are not sufficient and that sustained training, methodological guidance, and institutional support are essential for successful implementation.

Figure 3: *The Teachers` Readiness to Work with Pupils of Different Ethnics*



(Source: Authors' own elaboration based on data obtained through a structured questionnaire administered to teachers, 2025)

Through these complementary directions—internationalisation, digital innovation, continuous professional development, and applied research—„Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University demonstrates its capacity to translate multilingual and translanguaging principles into educational

practice. In doing so, it contributes to the development of a pedagogical culture grounded in respect for diversity, intercultural cooperation, and plurilingual competence, which are increasingly central to the contemporary Moldovan education system.

Taken together, these efforts—ranging from initial teacher education and ongoing professional development to applied research and the creation of collaborative learning spaces—show how *"Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University* helps connect educational policy with everyday classroom practice. The case study suggests that the university does more than simply adapt to ongoing reforms. It actively supports teachers in developing the skills and confidence needed to work in multilingual and multicultural classrooms, thus making a sustained contribution to a more coherent and inclusive education system in the Republic of Moldova.

Conclusion

Studying how different languages and cultures are taught in the Republic of Moldova shows that while there are some big challenges, there are also many opportunities for positive change. Since Moldova is diverse through languages like Gagauz, Russian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, and more, schools need to do more than just teach them, but also help students feel connected, proud of their community, and respectful of others. Learning in a multicultural way is a good idea to reduce social divisions and help all students succeed.

The past efforts made in the educational system proved that some methods worked and others were a good starting point, but required improvement. The new pilot projects can make education more inclusive and equal, while also bring Moldova closer to European standards for respecting minority rights and focusing on students' needs. The pilot program, in its first phase, mainly targets primary and secondary schools but the efforts of the Ministry of Education and its international partners can hopefully make it succeed and be implemented at a larger scare.

At the same time, before large-scale systemic changes are introduced, policymakers must take into account the realities faced by teachers. These include the need for additional training, support in managing increased workloads, adaptation of curricula and assessment practices, limited teaching resources, weak coordination between institutions, and persistent societal attitudes toward language and identity. In this context, higher education institutions play a crucial role. Through initial teacher education, continuous professional development courses, applied research, and collaborative learning spaces, Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University contributes directly to preparing teachers for multilingual and multicultural

classrooms and supports them in translating policy objectives into classroom practice.

Bibliography

Abedi, J. (2004). The No Child Left Behind Act and English language learners: Assessment and accountability issues. Educational Researcher, 33(1), 4–14.

Atkinson, D. (1987). The mother tongue in the classroom: A neglected resource? ELT Journal, 41(4), 241–247. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/41.4.241

Barbosa. (2023). The relationship between language and identity. https://medium.com/@clacviii2023.1/the-relationship-between-language-and-identity-7e0d23d67da1

Bencheci. (2025). Moldova teacher shortage: Why 700 posts remain vacant. Moldova1. https://moldova1.md/p/58813/moldova-teacher-shortage-why-700-posts-remain-vacant

Bialystok, E., Craik, F. I. M., Klein, R., & Viswanathan, M. (2004). Bilingualism, aging, and cognitive control: Evidence from the Simon task. Psychology and Aging, 19(2), 290–303.

Byram, M. (1997). Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence. Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M., & Parmenter, L. (2012). The Common European Framework of Reference: The globalisation of language education policy. Multilingual Matters.

Cenoz, J. (2003). The additive effect of bilingualism on third language acquisition: A review. International Journal of Bilingualism, 7(1), 71–87.

Chiriac, R., & Dungaciu. (2024). The weaponization of language in irregular warfare: Moldova, a case study. https://irregularwarfare.org/articles/the-weaponization-of-language-in-irregular-warfare-moldova-a-case-study/

CMI. (2025). CMI launches National Center for Multilingual Education to promote diversity and inclusive learning in the Republic of Moldova. https://cmi.fi/2025/11/28/cmi-launches-national-center-for-multilingual-education-to-promote-diversity-and-inclusive-learning-in-the-republic-of-moldova/

Council of Europe. (2026). Plurilingualism and pluriculturalism. https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/plurilingualism-and-pluriculturalism

Cummins, J. (2005). A proposal for action: Strategies for recognizing heritage language competence as a learning resource within the mainstream classroom. Modern Language Journal, 89(4), 585–592.

Cummins, J. (2017). Teaching for transfer in multilingual school contexts. In O. García, A. M. Y. Lin, & S. May (Eds.), Bilingual and multilingual education (pp. 103–115). Springer.

Demographics of Moldova. (2026). Wikiwand. https://www.wikiwand.com/en/articles/Demographics_of_Moldova

Drexel University. (n.d.). Promoting inclusion in the classroom – School of Education. https://drexel.edu/soe/resources/student-teaching/advice/Promote-Inclusion-in-the-Classroom/

European Union. (n.d.). Languages, multilingualism, language rules. https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/languages_en

Gagauzia Dialogue. (2021). Languages are part of the national identity of Moldova. https://gagauziadialogue.md/languages-are-part-of-the-national-identity-of-moldova/

Gagauzia Dialogue. (2025). Multilingual education in the Republic of Moldova: Framework approved and pilot phase launched. https://gagauziadialogue.md/the-dialogue-process-on-multilingual-education-marks-a-new-achievement-for-the-education-system-of-the-republic-of-moldova/

Gilstein. (2023). Multilingualism. EBSCO Research Starters. https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/language-and-linguistics/multilingualism

Haynes, H. (2025). A guide to translanguaging in the classroom. WIDA. https://wida.wisc.edu/news/guide-translanguaging-classroom

Lingvobarometrul Chișinău. (2024). https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/lingobarometru_moldova_2024_en.pdf

Minority Rights Group. (2018a). Bulgarians in Moldova. https://minorityrights.org/communities/bulgarians/

Minority Rights Group. (2018b). Roma in Moldova. https://minorityrights.org/communities/roma-20/

Minority Rights Group. (2018c). Russians and Russian-speakers in Moldova. https://minorityrights.org/communities/russians-and-russian-speakers/

Minority Rights Group. (2023). Moldova. https://minorityrights.org/country/moldova/

Minority Rights Group International. (2018). World directory of minorities and indigenous peoples – Moldova: Bulgarians. https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/mrgi/2018/en/65110

Solcan, A. and Burea, S, (2025). Multilingual and multicultural education in Moldova: Policies, practices and pathways to inclusion. Analele Universității din Oradea, Seria Relații Internaționale și Studii Europene, XVII, 189–204. https://doi.org/10.58603/aehd4473

Stocker. (2025). Moldova's EU sprint: Can 2030 be within reach? https://europeanrelations.com/moldovas-eu-sprint-can-2030-be-within-reach/

Szabo, O. K. (2024). United in diversity: Multilingual language policy and democracy building in the EU. https://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/view/18144

UNESCO. (2024). Multilingual education: A key to quality and inclusive learning. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/multilingual-education-key-quality-and-inclusive-learning

Young European Ambassadors (2022) Republic of Moldova's linguistic roots. https://euneighbourseast.eu/young-european-ambassadors/blog/republic-of-moldovas-linguistic-roots/, Accessed: January 5, 2026.

Zappa-Hollman, S. (2025). Linguistic diversity in the classroom: Embracing multilingual perspectives and pedagogies. https://futurumcareers.com/linguistic-diversity-in-the-classroom-embracing-multilingual-perspectives-and-pedagogies

Zemach, D. (2024). What is CLIL? The global trend in bilingual education explained. https://bridge.edu/tefl/blog/what-is-clil/.

https://www.doi.org/10.58603/KKMV8886

Cultural and Educational Integration. National and Ethnic Minorities in Hungary: Identity, Integration, and Diversity After the Regime Change

Tamás Villányi[1]

Abstract
This study provides a comprehensive overview of the situation of national and ethnic minorities in Hungary from the regime change at the end of the 20th century to the present day. It presents the legal and institutional framework of minorities, including the model of cultural autonomy and the system of minority self-governments, which Hungarian regulation introduced in a pioneering manner in Europe. The paper analyzes the demographic characteristics of domestic minorities and the development of their identities, for example the fact that during the 2011 census significantly more people declared themselves to belong to a nationality than in previous censuses. The study also addresses the achievements and challenges of the social integration of minorities. It points out that despite the existence of legal frameworks and institutions, significant differences remain among the various groups: traditional nationalities (e.g. German, Slovak, Croatian, etc.) focus primarily on preserving their culture, while in the case of the largest community, the Roma, disadvantages experienced in education, employment, and living conditions constitute serious social problems. The study emphasizes the achievements of Hungarian minority policy, such as the broad provision of cultural rights and new forms of parliamentary representation, while also highlighting the further steps necessary to achieve full social inclusion, in line with domestic and international human rights norms.

Keywords
nationalities, ethnic minorities, cultural autonomy, social integration, Roma community.

1. Introduction

Throughout its history, the territory of Hungary has always been home to multiple nationalities; however, during the 20th century—especially after the Treaty of Trianon following the First World War—the population became more ethnically homogeneous (Romsics, 1998: 93–98, Kántor, 2014: 21–24). Population exchanges and expulsions after the Second World War, followed by assimilation during the decades of socialism, significantly reduced the

[1] Certified Criminologist, Pest County Police Headquarters. Hungary. E-mail: villanyitamaslaszlo@gmail.com.

proportion of traditional minorities (Kovács, 2001: 7–10, Halász, 2016: 31–34). Nevertheless, Hungary still displays considerable ethnic diversity today. According to the data of the 2011 census, 6.5% of the population (nearly 645,000 people) declared themselves to belong to one of the officially recognized nationalities. According to expert estimates, the actual minority population may be higher, possibly 8–10%, since many people have partially assimilated or did not declare their minority identity in previous censuses (Kemény and Janky, 2005: 223–225, Kántor, 2014: 97–99). The largest minority group is the Roma (Gypsy) community, which numbered more than 315,000 people according to the census, although some researchers estimate their actual number at around 700,000 or even higher (approximately 7% of the total population) (HCSO, 2013: 20–22, Kemény and Janky, 2005: 226–228). Other sizeable groups include the German nationality (nearly 186,000 people), as well as the Romanian, Slovak, and Croatian communities (in the tens of thousands) (HCSO, 2013: 23–26). The remaining historical nationalities—Bulgarian, Greek, Polish, Armenian, Rusyn, Serbian, Slovene, and Ukrainian—number only a few thousand, while the Jewish community is not officially classified as a nationality (as it is primarily defined on a religious basis) (Kovács, 2001: 18–20; Halász, 2016: 87). In recent decades, new non-ethnic groups have also appeared: since the regime change, the number of residents of foreign origin living in Hungary has increased significantly (140,000 in 2011 and already 226,000 by 2023), including Chinese, Arab, and African communities; however, legally they do not fall under the official minority category (HCSO, 2023; Kántor, 2014: 101–102). Following the regime change, the Hungarian state has paid special attention to ensuring the rights of national and ethnic minorities and to preserving their culture. In 1993, the National Assembly adopted the Act on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities, which recognized a broad range of collective minority rights and was considered one of the most comprehensive minority protection laws in international comparison (Halász, 2016: 45–48). The preamble of the Act emphasized that preserving the language and culture of minorities is not only their fundamental right but also an interest of the Hungarian nation and the entire state community. As one of the most important instruments for the enforcement of these rights, the Act designated cultural autonomy and the system of minority self-governments (Dobos, 2011: 19–21). The new Fundamental Law adopted in 2011 and the related nationality legislation further strengthened the status of minorities: Article XXIX of the Fundamental Law states that “every Hungarian citizen has the right to freely assume and preserve his or her national identity,” and the new terminology uniformly refers to the groups previously called national or ethnic minorities as “nationalities” (Fundamental Law of Hungary, 2011, Act CLXXIX of 2011). Currently, 13 nationalities recognized by law live in the country, all of which have been

established in Hungary for more than a century; their members constitute the so-called historical minorities (Halász, 2016: 62–64).

2. Methodology

Our study is qualitative in nature and applies a descriptive–analytical approach (Creswell, 2014: 4-6). It primarily relies on publicly available official sources, including legislation, governmental and international organizational documents, as well as statistical data. In addition, we reviewed key academic works and research reports related to the topic (Halász, 2016: 15-18, Kovács, 2001: 6-9). Within the framework of the analysis, comparative and historical perspectives are also employed: we present the development of Hungarian minority policy after the regime change and highlight the strengths and weaknesses of current practice. Accordingly, the methodology is based on document analysis and a synthesis of the relevant scholarly literature, with particular attention to the domestic implementation of international norms and recommendations (Bowen, 2009: 27-29, OSCE HCNM, 2010: 7-10). The claims are supported by statistical data and credible reports, and for the sake of transparency, precise sources are indicated in every case.

3. Literature Review

The scholarly literature on Hungarian minority protection after the regime change emphasizes that the 1993 Minority Act was exemplary in international compariso. According to an early report by Human Rights Watch, the legislation "on paper provides the most far-reaching guarantees of minority rights in Europe" (Human Rights Watch, 1995: 1-2). The Act introduced a distinctive model of cultural autonomy for minorities, which has been examined by numerous analysts (Kovács, 2001: 12-15). Initially, international experts welcomed this broad recognition of collective rights and the establishment of minority self-governments as a form of minority self-determination (Council of Europe, 1999: 6-8, OSCE, 2000: 3-5). Over time, however, critical voices also emerged, pointing to shortcomings in practical implementation. For example, some studies indicate that several progressive provisions of the law were not fully realized in the case of the Roma community during the 1990s: certain local authorities failed to comply with their statutory obligations, and in some instances even hindered the enforcement of minority rights (Kállai, 2007: 74-77, Human Rights Watch, 1995: 9–11).

A significant portion of the literature addressing the situation of minorities in Hungary focuses on the Roma population, as they constitute the largest and socially most disadvantaged group (Kemény and Janky, 2005: 222-225 Ladányi and Szelényi, 2006: 39-42). Numerous sociological

and human rights studies have documented discrimination against Roma, segregation, and the occasionally inadequate responses of authorities to Roma-related problems in the 1990s and 2000s (Amnesty International, 2010: 17-21, Kállai, 2007: 81-85). In addition, comparative analyses have been conducted concerning Hungarian minority policy and other Central European models. These highlight that Hungary chose a distinctive path by creating non-territorial autonomy, in contrast, for example, to Romania or Slovakia, where greater emphasis has been placed on parliamentary representation of minorities or their territorial distribution (Kymlicka, 2007: 143-147, Kántor, 2014: 110-113).

The functioning of the cultural autonomy model (the system of minority self-governments) has been evaluated in many analyses over recent decades. Balázs Dobos and other researchers have pointed out that although the system provides an institutional framework for minority communities to preserve their identity, their actual influence over decisions affecting them has remained limited - particularly in the case of Roma communities, whose self-governments, due to a lack of resources and competences, have been only marginally able to contribute meaningfully to shaping social inclusion programs (Dobos, 2011: 156-158).

One important finding of research on the demographic processes of minorities is that by the beginning of the 21st century, the number of people identifying themselves as belonging to a minority had increased. According to analyses by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, between 2001 and 2011 the number of individuals who felt affiliation with one of the 13 minorities recognized by law increased by one and a half times (Hungarian Central Statistical Office [HCSO], 2013: 15-18). Particularly strong growth was observed in responses to questions on ethnic affiliation (+77%), while based on family language use, 38% more respondents indicated minority affiliation in 2011 compared to a decade earlier (HCSO, 2013: 34-36). This trend can partly be attributed to changes in survey methodology—specifically, the free declaration of self-identity and the acceptance of multiple identities—and partly to the strengthening identity consciousness and self-organization of minority communities over time (Kántor, 2014: 102-105, Tóth and Vékás, 2014: 368-372).

The phenomenon was analyzed in detail by Ágnes Tóth and János Vékás (2014), who pointed out that the largest proportional increases occurred among the Romanian and Roma nationalities, while some smaller groups (e.g. Slovene, Greek) showed a decline in census data. They emphasize that figures based on self-declaration do not necessarily reflect actual ethnic proportions, but rather the identity that individuals are willing to assume within a given political and social context (Tóth and Vékás, 2014: 385-388). Overall, the literature suggests that Hungary established stable

legal foundations for minorities around the turn of the millennium, and that the expression of minority identity has gradually become normalized; nevertheless, due to persistent social tensions and inequalities in everyday life, the topic remains a relevant field of research today (Halász, 2016: 187-190; Kántor, 2014: 231-233).

4. Theoretical Framework

The concept of national and ethnic minorities is defined through a variety of approaches; however, in Hungary the legal framework precisely delineates which groups fall into this category (Kymlicka, 2007: 143-147). Pursuant to Article XXIX of the Fundamental Law and Act CLXXIX of 2011 on the Rights of Nationalities, nationalities are communities that have been present on the territory of the country for centuries, possess their own language, culture, and traditions, and have preserved a sense of collective identity (Fundamental Law of Hungary, 2011, Art. XXIX, Act CLXXIX of 2011: 1-2). The Act officially recognizes 13 such nationalities (Bulgarian, Greek, Croatian, Polish, German, Armenian, Roma/Gypsy, Romanian, Rusyn, Serbian, Slovak, Slovene, and Ukrainian) and stipulates that members of these groups - provided they are Hungarian citizens - may exercise collective rights (Halász, 2016: 62-64; Kántor, 2014: 60-62). It is important to emphasize that Hungarian regulation links the exercise of minority rights to citizenship; thus, only persons holding Hungarian citizenship may belong to a nationality recognized by law (Kovács, 2001: 18-20). Through this approach, the legislator sought to protect historical communities; at the same time, this also means that newly immigrated groups (e.g. Chinese, Arab, African communities) and other groups wishing to define themselves as minorities (such as the Jewish community in Hungary) do not benefit from the collective rights provided by the nationality law, unless they become officially recognized as a nationality through a specific recognition procedure requiring 1,000 supporting signatures (Kántor, 2014: 101-102). (It should be noted that leaders of the Jewish community explicitly oppose acquiring nationality status, defining their identity primarily in religious terms) (Kovács, 2001: 18-20).

In international comparison, the Hungarian approach corresponds to generally accepted criteria of national minorities (shared cultural-linguistic characteristics, a distinct identity differentiable from the majority society, and long-term presence) (Council of Europe, 1995, Arts. 3-5, OSCE HCNM, 2010: 7-10). Hungary is a party to the most important international minority protection conventions and has signed and ratified the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Council of Europe, 1995). The provisions of the Fundamental Law and the nationality legislation essentially transpose the principles of the Framework Convention

into domestic law (Halász, 2016: 85-88). Article XXIX (1) of the Fundamental Law declares the right to the free choice and preservation of identity, while the cardinal nationality law elaborates rights related to language use, culture, education, and self-government. The lawmakers guaranteed individual rights—such as the free use of one's mother tongue in private life and, under certain conditions, in official procedures, as well as rights to minority education and name usage—while also recognizing collective rights that serve the preservation of collective identity (Kántor, 2014: 72-75). One such collective right is cultural autonomy, the essence of which lies in enabling nationality communities to independently maintain institutions (schools, cultural institutions, media), establish associations and self-governments, and receive state support for the preservation of their cultural heritage (Dobos, 2011: 19-23). Cultural autonomy is not territorial in nature (unlike territorial autonomies), but follows the principle of personal autonomy—meaning that minority rights apply to members of the community throughout the country, regardless of where they live (Kymlicka, 2007: 129-131).

From the perspective of the theoretical framework, the issue of political participation and representation is also crucial. According to classical democratic theory, the protection of minority interests is most effective when these groups have institutionalized influence over public affairs (Lijphart, 1999: 25-27, Kymlicka, 2007: 129-131). The Hungarian model offers two main mechanisms for this purpose: minority (nationality) self-governments and parliamentary representation (Halász, 2016: 160–165). Minority self-governments are discussed in detail in the following chapter; here it is sufficient to note that they function as forums of self-organization and instruments of cultural interest representation, providing communities with a certain degree of self-administration (Dobos, 2011: 73–75). Parliamentary presence is realized in such a way that, from the 2014 elections onward, nationalities may establish national lists; if they obtain a sufficient number of votes, they may—based on the principle of positive discrimination—secure a preferential mandate and send a representative to the National Assembly, or, failing this, delegate a nationality spokesperson. This arrangement ensures that minority interests can also appear in the legislature, although spokespersons do not possess voting rights (Kántor, 2014: 214-216). Currently, the German nationality has a representative with a preferential mandate in Parliament (since 2014), while the other 12 nationalities are represented by spokespersons (Hungarian National Assembly, 2023). The system of nationality representatives and spokespersons is novel in Europe and serves as a form of institutional guarantee that direct information and opinions on minority issues reach decision-makers (Halász, 2016: 168-170).

The theoretical foundations of Hungarian minority protection rest on the recognition of collective rights and the idea of cultural autonomy, in line with—and in some respects extending beyond—international norms (Halász, 2016: 187-190). The emphasis is placed on preserving minority identities (national self-identification, mother tongue, protection of cultural values) and on autonomy compatible with social integration (Council of Europe, 1995, Arts. 5–6, Kántor, 2014: 220-223).

Legal and Institutional Framework of Nationalities in Hungary

Hungary's constitutional and legal environment firmly enshrines the rights of nationalities and provides an institutional system for the enforcement of these rights. The most important pillars are the nationality-related provisions of the Fundamental Law, Act CLXXIX of 2011 on the Rights of Nationalities, and the system of minority self-governments (Halász, 2016: 55-58).

Constitutional foundations: The National Avowal of the Fundamental Law recognizes the nationalities living together with Hungarians as communities forming part of the country and emphasizes that their language and culture enjoy protection (Fundamental Law of Hungary, 2011, National Avowal). Article XXIX - as already noted - guarantees the free assumption and preservation of identity and declares that Hungary ensures the right of nationalities to community self-government (self-administration) (Fundamental Law of Hungary, 2011, Art. XXIX). These principles are elaborated in the nationality law.

Main provisions of the nationality law: The 2011 nationality law comprehensively regulates minority rights. It introduced unified terminology, replacing the previously separate concepts of national and ethnic minorities by referring to all groups as nationalities (Halász, 2016: 59-61). The law lists the 13 recognized nationalities and stipulates that any other group may obtain nationality status only if it meets the law's strict criteria (at least 100 years of historical presence, a distinct culture and language, and either 10,000 persons or 1% of the population—though at least 1,500 persons—who declare affiliation, with recognition initiated by a civil organization before the National Assembly) (Kántor, 2014: 64-66). The law defines the collective rights of nationalities across many areas of life, including:

Main provisions of the nationality law: The 2011 nationality law comprehensively regulates minority rights. It introduced unified terminology, replacing the previously separate concepts of national and ethnic minorities by referring to all groups as nationalities (Halász, 2016: 59–61). The law lists the 13 recognized nationalities and stipulates that any other group may obtain nationality status only if it meets the law's strict

criteria (at least 100 years of historical presence, a distinct culture and language, and either 10,000 persons or 1% of the population—though at least 1,500 persons—who declare affiliation, with recognition initiated by a civil organization before the National Assembly) (Kántor, 2014: 64-66). The law defines the collective rights of nationalities across many areas of life, including:

• **Language use rights:** Nationalities may use their mother tongue in both private and public life. In certain municipalities - where a significant proportion of the population belongs to a nationality - they have the right to conduct affairs with local authorities in their mother tongue, display bilingual place-name signs and inscriptions, and request officials who speak their language. The law and its implementing regulations also allow for bilingual forms and civil registers in affected municipalities at the request of the local nationality self-government (Halász, 2016: 92-96). These rights constitute important symbolic and practical guarantees of linguistic rights, although their actual implementation often depends on the initiative of communities and the cooperation of authorities (Council of Europe, 2016: 18-20).

• **Educational and cultural rights:** Every nationality has the right to learn and teach its mother tongue. The state may maintain nationality schools (bilingual or mother-tongue instruction institutions) or transfer their maintenance to nationality self-governments. In many locations, nationality kindergartens and schools operate - such as German-, Slovak-, or Romanian-language institutions - and there is also the possibility of nationality language-teaching schools, where the minority language and culture are taught alongside majority education (Kántor, 2014: 78-82). The law declares the principle of cultural autonomy: nationalities have the right to establish and operate their own cultural institutions (theatres, museums, folk houses, cultural centers, etc.) and to receive state support for this purpose (Dobos, 2011: 21-24). Accordingly, Hungary today has nationality theatres, museums, as well as national nationality libraries and media centers (Halász, 2016: 103-106).

• **Media and publicity:** Public service media are legally obliged to provide airtime for nationality-language programming. National nationality self-governments may determine the proportion and timing of mother-tongue or nationality-related broadcasts on radio and television (Act CLXXIX of 2011, §§ 21–23). The law guarantees regular programming slots for all 13 nationalities (Council of Europe, 2016: 21–22). In addition, nationality press outlets receive support; some national publications have appeared for decades (Kántor, 2014: 83-85).

• **Freedom of association and identity preservation:** Nationalities have the right to establish associations, civil organizations, and tradition-preserving groups. Numerous nationality cultural associations, dance groups, and choirs operate throughout the country, enjoying legal protection and financial support through grant schemes (Halász, 2016: 107–109).To coordinate and represent the exercise of these rights, the Hungarian system established nationality self-governments as the institutional custodians of cultural autonomy (Dobos, 2011: 25–27).

• **System of nationality self-governments:** Since 1993, nationalities have been able to establish their own self-governments through local and national elections. The system is multi-tiered:

• **Local (municipal) nationality self-government:** May be established in any municipality where at least 25 persons declared affiliation with the given nationality in the most recent census. Members are elected in separate elections by registered nationality voters. Local nationality self-governments cooperate with municipal authorities in performing cultural and educational tasks (Act CLXXIX of 2011: 56–61).

• **Territorial (county-level) nationality self-government:** May be established if at least ten municipalities in the given county (or the capital) have functioning local nationality self-governments. The territorial level performs coordination and interest-representation functions (Dobos, 2011: 68-70).

• **National nationality self-government:** Each recognized nationality is entitled to establish a national self-government, whose members are elected through an electoral (delegate) system by local representatives. The national self-government represents the highest level of nationality representation. Its tasks include maintaining institutions of national importance, consulting with the government on nationality matters, and nominating the parliamentary nationality spokesperson. Currently, all 13 nationalities have national self-governments; 12 of these cooperate within a joint federation (Kántor, 2014: 118–121).

Nationality self-governments have a special legal status: they are not general-purpose administrative bodies but public-law entities endowed with specific rights (Halász, 2016: 118–121). They do not levy taxes or perform classical administrative functions; however, they possess co-decision, consent, or consultative rights in all matters affecting the preservation of the given nationality's identity (Dobos, 2011: 73–75). For example, the reorganization or closure of a nationality school requires the consent of the relevant nationality self-government (Halász, 2016: 132). Local governments are obliged to cooperate with municipal nationality self-governments and ensure their operating conditions (office space, support). National

nationality self-governments maintain regular contact with the government: the National Assembly has a Committee on Nationalities, in which, alongside nationality spokespersons, the presidents of national nationality self-governments participate with consultative rights (Halász, 2016: 165–168). This ensures continuous dialogue between the legislature and nationality representatives (Kántor, 2014: 214).

The financing of minority self-governments is guaranteed by the state budget. Each year, a separate allocation is provided for the operation and tasks of nationality self-governments (Halász, 2016: 176). The funding system has expanded in recent years: between 2014 and 2018, annual state support increased significantly, and institutional funding was doubled for each nationality. However, the distribution of funding remains a subject of debate, as it is partly based on the maintenance of institutions rather than on population size, which paradoxically disadvantages the largest Roma community (having fewer institutions and thus receiving less support despite their large numbers) (Dobos, 2011: 156–158). This problem has been highlighted by nationality leaders and international observers alike, who have called for a fairer allocation formula to strengthen Roma self-governments (Council of Europe, 2016: 35–36).

Overall, Hungary's minority legal framework is forward-looking even by European standards. The nationality law provides a broad range of cultural autonomy rights, and the system of nationality self-governments offers an institutionalized form for exercising collective rights (Halász, 2016: 187–190, Kántor, 2014: 220–223). Over recent decades, many elements of the system have proven viable: there are successful examples of nationality self-governments taking over the maintenance of schools, organizing vibrant cultural life, and effectively representing community interests at local or national forums (Dobos, 2011: 201–205). At the same time, the system is not free of challenges—particularly resource constraints, shortages of qualified professionals (e.g. nationality teachers), and the sometimes paternalistic attitude of politics, which can hinder the work of self-governments.

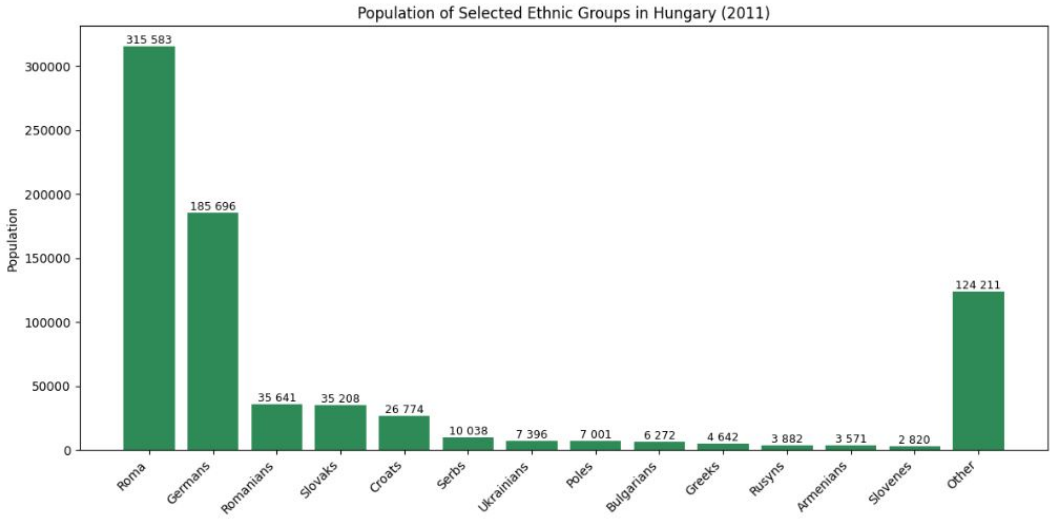
5. Demographic Conditions and Identity

Population data and distribution: The most recent census, conducted in 2011, provided a detailed picture of the nationalities living in Hungary. According to official data, 6.5% of the total population—644,524 people—declared themselves to belong to a recognized nationality (Hungarian Central Statistical Office [HCSO], 2013: 16–18). Among respondents, the Roma (Gypsy) community constituted the largest group, with more than 315,000 people, followed by Germans with approximately 186,000 (HCSO, 2013: 20–23). The population size of the other nationalities is significantly lower: the

Romanian and Slovak communities each number around 35,000, Croatians about 26,700, Serbs around 10,000, while the Ukrainian, Polish, Bulgarian, Greek, Rusyn, Armenian, and Slovene communities are each in the range of only a few thousand (HCSO, 2013: 24–30).

It should be noted that the census was based on voluntary self-identification and allowed the indication of multiple (dual) identities—many respondents chose to declare both Hungarian and nationality affiliation. As a result, the statistically recorded number of persons belonging to minorities increased compared to previous censuses (Tóth and Vékás, 2014: 368–371, HCSO, 2013: 15).

Figure 1: *The population size of individual ethnic groups in Hungary according to the 2011 cens(us, based on data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH)*



(Source: The chart was prepared by the author on January 10, 2026)

The chart shows the population size of the largest nationality communities. It clearly illustrates that the Roma community stands out (315,000 people), Germans occupy second place with nearly 186,000, while the remaining nationalities are considerably smaller: Romanian and Slovak communities around 35,000, Croatians around 26,000, and the rest (Serbian, Ukrainian, Polish, Bulgarian, Greek, Rusyn, Armenian, Slovene) numbering only a few thousand (HCSO, 2013: 20–30). The category "other, not recognized" (124,000 people) includes, for example, Jewish, Russian, Chinese, Arab, and other communities in Hungary that do not possess official nationality status (HCSO, 2013: 31, Kántor, 2014: 97).

These data highlight that the Roma minority is by far the largest ethnic minority in Hungary. The actual proportion of the Roma population is widely debated: while the census identified it as 3.2%, some sociological surveys

estimate their share at around 7–8% (Kemény and Janky, 2005: 223–225; Ladányi and Szelényi, 2006: 41–43). This discrepancy is partly due to the fact that a significant portion of Roma are Hungarian-speaking (Roma in Hungary speak Hungarian as their primary language, with only some - mainly older generations - using Romani or Beás), and many refrain from declaring Roma identity in official contexts out of fear of discrimination (Kemény, Janky and Lengyel, 2004: 56–59; Tóth and Vékás, 2014: 372). At the same time, recent decades have witnessed a strengthening of Roma identity, with increasing numbers—especially among younger generations—openly and proudly embracing their background (Kállai, 2007: 88–90).

The non-Roma nationalities (Germans, Slovaks, Romanians, Croatians, etc.) experienced a sharp decline in numbers during the second half of the 20th century due to assimilation; however, following the regime change an "identity renaissance" has been observed (Kántor, 2014: 102–105). In the 1990s many people became aware of their family roots and began to revive their nationality culture. For example, in the 2011 census the number of people declaring German nationality was three times higher than in 1990, as many previously assimilated or concealing individuals chose to acknowledge their identity (HCSO, 2013: 22; Tóth and Vékás, 2014: 375). Similar trends can be observed among the Romanian and Serbian communities (Kántor, 2014: 108). At the same time, some small communities—particularly where demographic renewal is weak—have shown decline; for instance, census data for the Slovene and Greek minorities indicated decreasing trends compared to 2001 (HCSO, 2013: 28–29).

Language loss poses a serious challenge for almost all nationalities: among younger generations, many no longer speak their ancestors' language fluently and communicate primarily in Hungarian. The extent of assimilation is illustrated by the fact that in 2011 only about 13% of those with nationality affiliation indicated the minority language as their mother tongue (HCSO, 2013: 34–36). Most—especially Roma—are primarily Hungarian-speaking, with their connection to the minority expressed mainly through cultural identity (Kemény and Janky, 2005: 226–228).

Territorial distribution and communities: The vast majority of nationalities in Hungary live in dispersed settlement patterns, meaning there are no contiguous territories predominantly inhabited by a single nationality (unlike in Slovakia or Romania, where larger regional minority blocks exist) (Kántor, 2014: 110–112; Halász, 2016: 92–95). There are a few exceptions at the local level: among Serbs, Lórév is the only village where they form a majority (Halász, 2016: 94); Slovenes live in a more compact community in the western border region known as the Vendvidék (around Szentgotthárd) (Kántor, 2014: 113–114); Croatians form notable groups in

some southwestern villages (e.g. in the Ormánság) (Halász, 2016: 96); and Romanians are traditionally present mainly along the eastern border (in Békés and Hajdú-Bihar counties) (HCSO, 2013: 26–27). Germans (Swabians) and Slovaks are found across many parts of the country - well-known examples include Swabian villages in Baranya, Tolna, and Pest counties, as well as Slovak villages in the Pilis region and Békés county - but they, too, generally live as minorities within their settlements (Kántor, 2014: 115–118).

The Roma population, relative to its size, is likewise not concentrated in a single contiguous area, although its proportion is higher in poorer regions of northeastern Hungary and southern Transdanubia, where in some villages Roma may even form a majority (Kemény and Janky, 2005: 229–231, Ladányi and Szelényi, 2006: 57–60). Nationally, approximately 60–70% of Roma live in villages, often in segregated streets or settlements, reflecting the geographical dimension of social exclusion (Kemény, Janky and Lengyel, 2004: 71–74; Kállai, 2007: 101–103).

Identity and assimilation: Education and family socialization play a decisive role in preserving nationality identity (Kántor, 2014: 123–125). Where nationality education has been successfully maintained (e.g. German, Slovak, Croatian schools), linguistic and cultural identity tends to be stronger (Halász, 2016: 141–143). At the same time, mixed marriages and urbanization significantly accelerate assimilation (Tóth and Vékás, 2014: 378–380). In large cities - especially Budapest - all nationalities are present, but primarily in the form of cultural associations: nationality clubs, dance houses, and study groups in the capital play an important role in sustaining identity within a predominantly Hungarian-speaking environment (Kántor, 2014: 128–130).

The Jewish community deserves special mention: although it is not officially recognized as a nationality, Budapest has a substantial Jewish population whose identity is organized on religious and cultural grounds (Kovács, 2001: 18–20). They, too, form part of Hungary's diversity, with their own institutional system (schools, cultural centers), but they do not fall under the scope of the nationality law (Halász, 2016: 88).

In demographic terms, the proportion of minorities in Hungary is relatively small, yet their social and cultural significance is considerably greater (Kántor, 2014: 131). The historical nationalities constitute an integral part of the country's cultural heritage, and their traditions enrich national culture (one may think of Swabian folk music, Slovak and Palóc traditions, or Serbian Orthodox monuments) (Halász, 2016: 201–203). The Roma community represents one of the largest Roma populations in Europe, and its integration is not only a domestic issue but also a challenge on a

European scale (Council of Europe, 2016: 11–13). In the following section, issues of social integration will be discussed in greater detail, with particular attention to Roma-related challenges and minority policy measures.

6. Social Integration and Challenges

In the field of social integration of minorities in Hungary, a mixed picture emerges: on the one hand, there are well-functioning practices and positive examples, while on the other hand, in certain areas—especially in the case of the Roma population—significant disadvantages and tensions persist (Kántor, 2014: 218–223; Council of Europe, 2016: 7–9). This chapter first reviews the general situation and the integration experiences of nationality communities, and then addresses the challenges of the Roma minority in a separate subsection, as these issues form a deeper and more complex problem area.

In general, it can be stated that the integration of traditional nationality communities (Germans, Slovaks, Croatians, Romanians, etc.) into Hungarian society has mostly taken place peacefully and without major conflict (Halász, 2016: 185–188). Members of these groups are typically bilingual and possess a dual identity: they are at the same time loyal Hungarian citizens and proud of their nationality heritage (Kántor, 2014: 224–226). In most cases, serious discrimination does not arise in everyday life. According to international and domestic surveys, a large part of the Hungarian population views the "historical nationalities" positively and tends to regard their presence as a form of cultural enrichment (Council of Europe, 2016: 12–13). Cooperation between minority self-governments and majority local governments is typically constructive; in many settlements they jointly organize cultural festivals and commemorations (Halász, 2016: 190–192).

At the same time, the integration of these communities is influenced by assimilation and demographic decline. Over recent decades, state policy has primarily focused on guaranteeing cultural rights, while economic integration has received comparatively less attention (Kántor, 2014: 229–231; Council of Europe, 2016: 14).

The Situation of the Roma Minority and Integration Challenges

The integration of the Roma population in Hungary is one of the most complex and pressing social problems. Roma communities lag behind the majority population in education, employment, housing, health, and social perception, creating a cumulative and self-reinforcing disadvantage (Kemény & Janky, 2005: 232–235; Ladányi & Szelényi, 2006: 39-44). Numerous government strategies have been launched to address these issues, with

mixed effectiveness (Government of Hungary, 2011: 7-9; European Commission, 2020: 10-12).

Education and segregation: Roma pupils are overrepresented in disadvantaged and segregated schools. In Horváth and Kiss v. Hungary, the European Court of Human Rights established that Roma children were systematically misclassified as having mild intellectual disabilities, constituting discrimination (ECtHR, 2013, §§ 102–108). Although segregation is prohibited by law and policy measures were introduced, de facto segregation persists due to residential patterns and free school choice (Council of Europe, 2016: 24–26). Educational attainment has improved slowly, but early school leaving remains widespread, especially after the compulsory schooling age was lowered to 16 (European Commission, 2020: 17–19).

Employment and poverty: Roma employment rates remain substantially below the national average. Despite improvements during the 2010s, the employment gap remains around 20–25 percentage points (European Commission, 2020: 21–23). Poverty rates are extremely high: 75–80% of Roma in Hungary live below the poverty threshold or experience severe material deprivation (FRA, 2016: 32–35). Public employment schemes provided short-term income but rarely resulted in sustainable labor market integration (Council of Europe, 2016: 27–28).

Discrimination and prejudice: Discrimination remains a major barrier to Roma integration. EU-wide surveys confirm widespread discrimination in employment, housing, and access to services (FRA, 2016: 39–41). The Council of Europe has expressed concern about persistent anti-Roma stereotypes and stigmatizing public discourse, warning that such rhetoric undermines trust and social cohesion (Council of Europe, 2016: 15–16).

Housing and health conditions: A significant share of Roma live in segregated settlements with substandard housing and inadequate infrastructure. These conditions contribute to poorer health outcomes and lower life expectancy (FRA, 2016: 44–47). Despite EU-supported housing and settlement programs, progress remains limited and structural disadvantages persist (European Commission, 2020: 26–27).

Integration policy and programs: Over the past decade, the Hungarian government has sought to apply an integrated approach to Roma inclusion. The already mentioned National Social Inclusion Strategy (2011–2020) provided the overarching framework, encouraged by the EU Roma Framework Strategy (Government of Hungary, 2011: 5–8; European Commission, 2011). Its implementation was supported by a multi-level governance mechanism: the Roma Coordination Council - bringing together

Roma self-government and civil organizations - was established to monitor progress, and an Inter-Ministerial Committee for Social Inclusion coordinates Roma-related issues across ministries (Government of Hungary, 2011: 12–15). From 2017 onward, nine thematic working groups (education, employment, health care, etc.) were created to develop proposals (European Commission, 2020: 13–14). Numerous concrete programs have been implemented: scholarships for Roma students (Útravaló program), labor market training (ROMA ERNYŐ projects), and community development initiatives (e.g. Sure Start Children's Houses for early childhood development) (European Commission, 2020: 18–20). In 2011, the government also concluded a cooperation agreement with the National Roma Self-Government (Government of Hungary, 2011: 16).

Despite these efforts, experts point out that the institutional system is overly bureaucratic, fragmented, and not always effective at the local level (European Commission, 2020: 29–31; Council of Europe, 2020: 9–11). The National Roma Self-Government itself has not always proven effective in representing Roma interests, due to internal political divisions and limited competences (Council of Europe, 2020: 21–22). As noted earlier, Roma self-governments primarily focus on cultural tasks and lack direct influence over social or economic development decisions (Halász, 2016: 176–178). Consequently, the role of civil society remains crucial: numerous Roma civil networks monitor integration programs and draw attention to shortcomings when necessary (European Commission, 2020: 32).

Positive developments: Alongside the challenges, it is important to highlight some achievements. In recent years, the proportion of Roma intellectuals has increased; today there are many Roma teachers, doctors, engineers, as well as police officers and soldiers—previously a rarity (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016: 52–54). The number of Roma students in higher education is slowly rising, partly due to Roma colleges for advanced studies and mentoring programs (European Commission, 2020: 24–25). Successful Roma figures (artists, athletes) have also appeared in public discourse, which may help reduce stereotypes (FRA, 2016: 55). Integration models such as the Tanoda programs (after-school support for disadvantaged children) have proven in many settlements that personalized attention can improve Roma students' performance and chances of further education (European Commission, 2020: 19–20). Within the police, the establishment of a Roma liaison network (involving Roma police officers) has helped prevent some conflicts and strengthen community policing (Council of Europe, 2020: 18).

In international comparison, Hungary actively participates in EU Roma integration initiatives and regularly reports on progress (European Commission, 2020: 6–7). At the same time, international monitoring bodies

(e.g. the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and the Council of Europe) continue to urge lasting structural changes. In its most recent (fifth) report, the Council of Europe's Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention noted that although an extensive institutional system exists to promote Roma integration, its effectiveness is questionable: the large number of programs and bodies can be opaque, insufficiently coordinated, and inadequately measurable (Council of Europe, 2020: 10–12). The report emphasized that Roma self-governments should be more strongly involved in social policy decision-making, as they currently lack direct influence precisely in the most critical areas (employment creation, housing) (Council of Europe, 2020: 22–23).

Roma integration in Hungary is a long-term, intergenerational process. While there are encouraging signs (improving employment indicators, stronger civil society presence, the reduction of certain segregation practices), substantial efforts are still required (European Commission, 2020: 33–34). Without the social inclusion of the Roma community, Hungarian society as a whole cannot develop harmoniously; therefore, this remains a strategically important field for the future (Council of Europe, 2020: 25).

7. Conclusions

The situation of national and ethnic minorities in Hungary has undergone significant changes over the past three decades. In terms of legal and institutional frameworks, the country has developed an exemplary system: the nationality law and related measures guarantee a broad range of collective minority rights, cultural autonomy, and special forms of political interest representation (Halász, 2016: 185–190, Kántor, 2014: 219-223). The conditions for preserving the mother tongues and cultures of the 13 recognized nationalities are in place -nationality schools, media outlets, and self-governments exist, all of which contribute to ensuring that these communities' identities endure as integral parts of the Hungarian nation (Halász, 2016: 140–145). Coexistence between minorities and the majority population has been largely peaceful and constructive over recent decades, without serious conflicts (Council of Europe, 2016: 7–9). This is also due to the fact that Hungarian society has accepted and integrated these communities: today they are natural components of the country's diverse cultural fabric (Kántor, 2014: 224–226).

At the same time, the study has shown that formally existing rights and institutions do not always resolve practical problems. The sustainability and real influence of the system of minority self-governments present a mixed picture—while for some nationalities (such as Germans or Croatians) self-governments successfully operate schools and cultural institutions, in

the case of the largest community, the Roma, self-governments are unable to make a substantial contribution to addressing severe social problems (Halász, 2016: 176–178, Council of Europe, 2020: 21–23). This raises structural questions in minority policy: there may be a need for a carefully considered expansion of competences and resources where needs are greatest (for example, in Roma social inclusion), potentially even in the form of positive discrimination (Kántor, 2014: 230–232).

Demographic trends indicate that the proportion of minorities within society is slowly increasing or stabilizing, thanks to the growing prevalence of open identity declaration (Tóth and Vékás, 2014: 385–388). This is a positive development insofar as the more open embrace of diversity enriches the nation and mitigates the effects of forced assimilation experienced in the past (Halász, 2016: 201–203). The education and upbringing of younger generations are crucial, as an integrated and tolerant outlook can only be strengthened in this way. Continuous sensitization of the majority society is also necessary - for example, the values of nationalities living in Hungary should be incorporated into educational curricula so that all students can learn to recognize and appreciate them (Council of Europe, 2016: 16–17). Steps have been taken in this direction, but according to experts, further efforts are still needed (European Commission, 2020: 33–34).

The issue of Roma integration is particularly critical and cannot be postponed. Improving the situation of Roma is not only a human rights obligation but also an economic and social interest—it is increasingly recognized that the successful education and employment of Roma youth can alleviate labor shortages in certain sectors and enhance economic performance (European Commission, 2020: 5–6; FRA, 2016: 52–55). Achieving this, however, requires complex and sustained programs that support disadvantaged families from early childhood onward, continue through school years, and extend into the labor market (European Commission, 2020: 17–27). While the current framework of integration policy exists, strengthening monitoring and evaluation is essential to improve effectiveness (Council of Europe, 2020: 10–12). It would also be important to involve representatives of the Roma community more closely in the planning and implementation of programs, ensuring better alignment with real needs (Council of Europe, 2020: 22–23).

In conclusion, it can be stated that Hungary has developed a stable and, by European standards, advanced system of minority rights over recent decades. The idea of a multi-national Hungary is now a natural part of constitutional identity - nationalities are equal members of the Hungarian political community (Halász, 2016: 187–190). Overcoming remaining social and economic challenges will be a longer-term process, but trends indicate progress (Kántor, 2014: 231–233). To strengthen social cohesion, continued

dialogue between the majority and minorities, as well as the promotion of tolerance and mutual respect, remain indispensable (Council of Europe, 2016: 18–19). If Hungary is able to capitalize on its cultural diversity - the linguistic skills, international connections, and creative values of nationalities - it will benefit the entire nation (European Commission, 2020: 6). In the coming years, the goal should be to ensure that, alongside legal guarantees, the vision of "harmonious coexistence of nationalities with the majority nation" is realized in everyday reality as a shared national value and a cornerstone of social peace.

Bibliography

Act LXXVII of 1993 on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities.

Act CLXXIX of 2011 on the Rights of Nationalities. pp. 1–4; 21–23; 56–61; 80–82; 81; 114; 148–150.

Act XXXVI of 2013 on Electoral Procedure. pp. 12–14.

Fundamental Law of Hungary. (2011). Relevant parts: National Avowal; Article XXIX (1)–(2).

Council of Europe. (1999). Opinion / Report on Hungary's implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Strasbourg. pp. 6–8.

Council of Europe. (2016). Fourth Opinion on Hungary. Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Strasbourg. pp. 7–9, 11–13, 16–19, 18–22, 24–28, 33–38.

Council of Europe. (2020). Fifth Opinion on Hungary. Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Strasbourg. pp. 9–12, 18, 21–23, 25.

European Commission. (2011). An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020. Brussels.

European Commission. (2020). Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies – Hungary. Brussels. pp. 5–7, 10–12, 13–14, 17–27, 29–34.

European Court of Human Rights. (2013). Horváth and Kiss v. Hungary (Application no. 11146/11). pp. 102–108.

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2016). Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II): Roma. Luxembourg. pp. 32–35, 39–41, 44–47, 52–55.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, High Commissioner on National Minorities. (2010). The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies. The Hague. pp. 7–10.

Government of Hungary. (2011). National Social Inclusion Strategy 2011–2020. Budapest. pp. 5–9, 12–16.

Hungarian Central Statistical Office. (2013). 2011 Population Census: Nationalities. Budapest: pp. 15–36.

Hungarian National Assembly. (2023). Nationality representatives and spokespersons. Budapest. Parliamentary cycles 2014–2022.

Dobos, Balázs. (2011). Minority self-governments in Hungary. Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Institute for Minority Studies. pp. 19–27, 68–70, 73–75, 156–158, 201–205.

Halász Iván. (2016). Nationalities and minority rights in Hungary. Budapest: Dialóg Campus. pp. 15–18, 45–48, 55–61, 88–96, 103–109, 118–121, 132, 140–145, 160–170, 176–190, 201–203.

Kántor Zoltán. (2014). Minority policy in Hungary. Budapest: Nemzetpolitikai Kutatóintézet. pp. 52–55, 60–66, 78–85, 97–113, 118–121, 214–223, 218–233.

Mátyás, Szabolcs. (2020). The Talent Geography of the Carpathian Basin. Debrecen.

Kemény, István, Béla Janky, and Gabriella Lengyel. (2004). The Roma of Hungary. Budapest: Gondolat. pp. 56–59, 71–74.

Kymlicka, Will. (2007). Multicultural odysseys: Navigating the new international politics of diversity. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 129–131, 143–147.

Ladányi János, and Iván Szelényi. (2006). Patterns of exclusion: Constructing Roma ethnicity. Boulder: East European Monographs. pp. 39–44.

Lijphart, Arend. (1999). Patterns of democracy: Government forms and performance in thirty-six countries. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. pp. 25–27.

Romsics Ignác. (1998). Hungary in the twentieth century. Budapest: Corvina.

Amnesty International. (2010). Roma in Europe: Violations of human rights. London. pp. 17–21.

Amnesty International. (2010). Hungary: Violent attacks against Roma. London.

Bowen, Glenn A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. Qualitative Research Journal, 9(2), 27–40. https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027

Creswell, John W. (2014). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications. pp. 4–6.

Human Rights Watch. (1995). Hungary: Minorities under pressure. New York. pp. 1–2, 9–11.

Kállai Ernő. (2007). Roma identity and public policy in Hungary. Budapest: L'Harmattan. pp. 74–77, 81–85, 88–90, 101–103.

Kemény István, and Béla Janky. (2005). Roma population of Hungary 1971–2003. Demográfia, 48(2–3), 222–245. pp. 222–235.

Kovács Nóra. (2001). National minorities in Hungary. Regio – Minority, Politics, Society, 12(4), 5–29. pp. 6–9, 12–15, 18–20.

Tóth Ágnes, and János Vékás. (2014). Changes in minority identification in Hungary between 2001 and 2011. Demográfia, 57(4), 365–390. pp. 368–372, 385–388.

Tóth Judit. (2012). Minority protection and citizenship in Hungary. Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe, 11(2), 1–22.

https://www.doi.org/10.58603/LPRJ8099

Inclusivity as a Property of Waste Management

Michelle Nica[1]

Abstract
This article explores inclusivity as a core feature of environmental governance design, using waste management in Romania as a case study. Although the European Union has developed an extensive waste policy framework, compliance remains uneven across member states. Romania's repeated infringement procedures are often explained by weak administration or low environmental awareness. This article offers a different interpretation. Drawing on constructivist theory, it argues that non-compliance can result from governance models that overlook everyday differences in capacity, access, and infrastructure. When such assumptions are imposed on diverse contexts, exclusion becomes a structural outcome. The article contrasts these failures with the relative success of Romania's deposit–return system (SGR) for beverage packaging. By embedding participation into routine practices and attaching a direct economic incentive to recycling, the SGR system has enabled broad engagement, including by informal and marginalized actors. The findings suggest that inclusivity is best achieved through governance design that lowers participation barriers, rather than through enforcement or awareness-raising alone.

Keywords
Waste management, inclusivity, constructivism, deposit-return system, environment

1. Introduction and Methodology

Inclusivity is a central concern of European public policy, most visibly in relation to migration, minority rights, and social cohesion. Far less attention, however, has been paid to the ways in which inclusivity is implicitly governed through environmental policy, particularly in technically framed domains such as waste management. Waste systems do more than regulate materials; they structure everyday practices, allocate responsibility, and define who is able to participate meaningfully in sustainability transitions. As such, they constitute an important but underexplored site of social governance. Within the European Union, waste management is governed through an extensive body of legislation and policy instruments

[1] PhD candidate at Babes Bolyai University, Faculty of European Studies. E-mail: michellenica26@gmail.com.

that articulate ambitious sustainability objectives. Yet compliance with these objectives remains uneven across member states. Romania has been subject to multiple infringement procedures related to landfill use, recycling targets, and separate collection systems. These persistent compliance gaps are often attributed to administrative weaknesses, insufficient public awareness, or inadequate enforcement. While not inaccurate, such explanations obscure a more fundamental issue: the implicit assumptions about social capacity and participation embedded in waste governance itself.

This article argues that inclusivity failures in Romanian waste management can emerge not from resistance to sustainability norms, but from rigid governance imaginaries. The objective is to examine how these imaginaries have the power to shape waste management inclusivity, using the example of the SGR deposit-return system. A further objective is to reconceptualize environmental compliance as potential signal of inclusivity gaps in governance design. Methodologically, the article seeks to demonstrate the value of a constructivist, interpretive approach for understanding how environmental norms are translated into everyday practice. The scope of the article is limited to waste management inclusivity, using as example the SGR deposit-return system. EU waste policy often assumes a socially homogeneous landscape characterized by stable infrastructure, institutional trust, and equal access to services. When these assumptions are projected onto heterogeneous contexts, governance systems risk excluding those who do not fit the imagined ideal policy subject (Iacoboaea et al. 2025). In such cases, non-compliance becomes a structural outcome rather than an expression of opposition. At the same time, not all waste-related interventions in Romania have followed this trajectory. The recent introduction of the SGR deposit–return system for beverage bottles offers a striking example. By attaching a direct monetary value to returned packaging and embedding return points into everyday commercial spaces, the SGR system has generated rapid and widespread participation. Notably, it has also enabled informal actors such as homeless and economically marginalized individuals to take an active role in waste collection, transforming discarded materials into a source of income and social participation.

The contrast between persistent infringement in conventional waste management domains and the relative success of the SGR system provides a valuable lens through which to examine inclusivity in environmental governance. Rather than treating inclusivity as an auxiliary social objective, this article conceptualizes it as a property of governance design. By taking a look at the everyday functioning of the SGR system, the article contributes to debates on norm compliance, policy design, and the social dimensions of sustainability transitions. It argues that inclusivity is not achieved through

communication or enforcement alone, but also through governance arrangements that recognize difference and embed participation into material practice. By focusing on the everyday functioning of the SGR system, the article contributes to debates on EU norm diffusion, environmental compliance, and the social dimensions of sustainability transitions. The article does not aim to provide a comprehensive empirical evaluation of all Romanian waste policies, nor does it claim that the SGR system alone can resolve structural deficiencies in waste governance. Its contribution lies instead in offering a conceptual reframing of compliance and infringement as potential indicators of inclusivity gaps in governance design. By doing so, the article seeks to open space for a more socially attuned, flexible and creative understanding of environmental governance opportunities.

2. Inclusivity, Governance Imaginaries and Waste Policy

In environmental policy, inclusivity tends to remain implicit and assumed, rather than articulated. Waste management provides a particularly instructive domain in this respect. Although commonly framed as a technical and logistical issue, waste governance embeds assumptions about who can comply, who bears responsibility, and whose everyday practices are recognized as legitimate. These assumptions shape not only policy outcomes but also discourse and patterns of participation and exclusion.

From a constructivist perspective, the world and its reality are socially constructed and able to change through interaction and meaning (Wendt 1995). Agency and structure are not independent, but are constituted through their ongoing interaction (Theys 2018). In this context, policies can have the power to shape discourse, beliefs, encode meanings, norms, and expectations about appropriate conduct. Waste systems can function as sites of norm production and social ordering. Through rules on separation, collection, payment, and sanctions, these systems implicitly define the responsible environmental subject and risk to marginalize alternative forms of engagement. Inclusivity, in this sense, is not an external add-on to policy design, but a property of the governance imaginary that supports it.

There is a growing body of literature focusing on the social dimensions of waste governance throughout the world, highlighting how environmental norms are translated into everyday practice. Oguntoyinbo (2012) notes that ignoring informal workers in Nigeria reduces both environmental efficiency and social opportunity, while Sembiring and Nitivattananon (2010) highlight that formal recognition of these actors enhances system performance and creates income-generating opportunities. Similarly, global initiatives and policy briefs emphasize that inclusive approaches such as integrating waste

pickers into municipal operations, providing training, and offering fair compensation support both social justice and environmental objectives (WIEGO 2023; UNDP Vietnam 2025; ICLD 2025). These interventions illustrate the principle that inclusivity should be embedded into system design, rather than applied as a post hoc social program. Beyond the informal sector, accessibility, infrastructure, and incentive mechanisms have been identified as critical for inclusive participation. Urban waste management frameworks that rely on complex administrative requirements or assume access to formal collection points risk excluding marginalized populations (C40 Knowledge Hub 2023; ESCAP 2025). In contrast, systems that integrate low-barrier participation, such as decentralized collection points or material incentives, reduce social and cognitive barriers to engagement and can normalize recycling behaviours across diverse populations (The Climate Drive 2025; C40 2023). These examples demonstrate that inclusivity emerges not only from policy mandates but also through material arrangements and infrastructural logic.

In the context of waste management, inclusivity can have multiple touchpoints. Brie outline principles of inclusive governance such as respect for diversity, partnership, positive discrimination, cultural identity preservation, and multicultural integration, which can be analogously applied to the design of waste management systems to ensure broader participation and equity (Brie 2025, 7–14). First, governance frameworks have to recognize and acknowledge social heterogeneity, including differences in income, language, ethnicity, religion, housing conditions, mobility, and the prevalence of informal practices. Second, they must take into account the practical capacities of individuals and groups to comply with policy requirements within their specific social and material contexts. Finally, inclusivity depends on the availability, accessibility, flexibility and usability of infrastructural arrangements that enable meaningful participation in waste systems. Even in ways that form organically, during or after implementation, the way it happened with Romania's SGR, a guaranteed return system for beverage containers.

EU waste policy, particularly as articulated through directives and implementation guidelines, tends to operate with a universalist logic. Participants are assumed to have stable access to housing, standardized waste containers, proximity to collection points, and the cognitive, educational and temporal resources necessary to follow increasingly complex sorting rules. While such assumptions may hold in certain contexts, they become problematic when projected onto socially uneven environments. Where recognition, capacity, or access is lacking, non-compliance emerges not as a direct deviance towards environmental protection but as an outcome of structural misalignment (Iacoboaea et al. 2025).

This perspective challenges explanations that attribute waste governance failures primarily to deficits in environmental awareness or civic responsibility. Instead, it directs attention toward the ways in which policy design implicitly governs inclusion and exclusion. The question, therefore, is not simply whether citizens accept sustainability goals, but whether governance systems are constructed in ways that allow diverse social actors to enact those goals in practice and whether they leave enough space for creative and inclusive compliance to appear.

The concept of governance imaginaries is useful for capturing the shared assumptions, expectations, and representations that underpin policy design. The European Union recognizes its peoples' diversity and is actively working towards building upon the „united in diversity" motto. These imaginaries shape how problems are defined, spoken about, which solutions are considered legitimate, and who is envisioned as the target of intervention. In the field of waste management, dominant imaginaries often prioritize efficiency, standardization, and behavioural correction, while marginalizing informal or non-institutional forms of engagement. However, norms do not travel intact from one governance level to another, especially in such a various constellation of cultures and peoples such as that of the EU. Instead, they are interpreted, translated, and contested as they move from the EU to national and local contexts. Norm internalization depends not only on legal transposition but also on the resonance between policy expectations and everyday social realities. Where such resonance is absent, compliance mechanisms tend to rely increasingly on sanctions and enforcement both on state actors and citizens, often with limited success. In this sense, persistent infringement procedures can be understood as symptoms of deep governance mismatches and lack of imaginary to translate them into national or local policies. Rather than meaning outright resistance to EU norms, they reflect the failure of policy frameworks to align with the lived conditions of their intended subjects. Inclusivity failures thus emerge not from opposition to sustainability objectives, but from governance imaginaries that insufficiently account for social diversity and vulnerability and lack enough flexibility and creativity.

Waste management systems operate at the intersection of material infrastructure and normative order. Collection points, containers, deposit machines, and pricing mechanisms are not neutral tools. They have the power to actively shape behaviour by enabling certain practices while discouraging others. The materiality of waste governance is therefore central to understanding how inclusivity is produced or undermined. Systems that rely heavily on moral appeals, complex sorting rules, or punitive sanctions presuppose high levels of institutional trust and individual capacity. By contrast, systems that embed participation into everyday routines and

provide immediate, tangible feedback tend to lower the threshold for engagement. From a constructivist standpoint, such systems facilitate norm internalization by making desired behaviour both meaningful and feasible. This distinction is crucial for the analysis that follows. By comparing conventional waste governance domains where Romania has faced repeated infringement with the operation of the SGR deposit–return system, the article aims to show how different governance imaginaries translate into different inclusivity outcomes. The focus, therefore, shifts from abstract compliance metrics to the social conditions under which environmental norms become part of everyday life regardless of social status, housing or education.

3. EU Waste Governance Inclusivity and Romania's Trajectory

The European Union has developed one of the most comprehensive regulatory frameworks on waste management globally, grounded in the principles of prevention, reuse, recycling, and landfill diversion. Through binding directives, quantified targets, and monitoring mechanisms, EU waste policy seeks not only to reduce environmental harm but also to harmonize sustainability practices across member states. Compliance with these norms, however, has proven uneven. Romania represents one instructive case, having been subject to repeated infringement procedures related to waste management since its accession to the Union. These infringement processes are often interpreted as indicators of administrative incapacity, delayed infrastructure development, or insufficient enforcement at the national and local levels. While such factors are undoubtedly relevant, the present paper argues that there is a more complex picture to take into consideration. Romania's persistent compliance difficulties point not merely to implementation gaps, but to deeper tensions between governance imaginary and the social and material conditions under which waste policy operates domestically.

EU waste policy is primarily structured around the Waste Framework Directive, which establishes the waste hierarchy as a guiding principle and mandates separate collection for key waste streams (European Commission 2025). Complementary directives regulate landfilling, packaging waste, and specific material flows, while circular economy action plans increasingly frame waste as a resource within wider sustainability goals aligned with the EU Green Deal. Governance within this framework relies on a mix of legal obligation, performance monitoring, and normative alignment. Member states are expected to transpose directives into national law, develop infrastructure to meet collection and recycling targets, and foster behavioural change among citizens. Implicit in this architecture is the assumption that regulatory clarity, combined with adequate enforcement,

will lead to convergence in practice. However, this model requires relatively uniform social conditions, stable municipal governance, high levels of trust in public institutions, and populations able to comply with increasingly differentiated waste sorting requirements regardless of social status, income, housing, education, ethnicity, and so on. Where these conditions are unevenly distributed, the translation of EU norms into everyday practice becomes considerably more fragile when met with a rigid imaginary.

Since accession, Romania has faced multiple infringement procedures related to excessive reliance on landfilling, failure to close non-compliant waste sites, insufficient separate collection, and underperformance in recycling targets. Official explanations for these infringements tend to emphasize technical deficits, such as delayed infrastructure investment or fragmented institutional responsibilities. Public discourse often adds a moral dimension, attributing failure to low environmental awareness or weak civic culture. Both narratives, however, obscure the social assumptions embedded in the governance model itself. In many Romanian localities, waste governance has been introduced into contexts characterized by socio-economic inequality, informal housing arrangements, and uneven access to services. Requirements for separate collection, fee structures based on household registration, and standardized bins presuppose forms of stability that do not universally exist. In such a context, infringement becomes less a matter of unwillingness to comply and more a structural outcome of misaligned and uncreative governance expectations.

Policies that rely on rigid compliance mechanisms tend to privilege those with stable housing, regular income, and predictable routines, while disadvantaging the poor, the mobile, and those operating in informal economic spaces (Oguntoyinbo 2012). These groups are not explicitly excluded by policy design, yet they are often implicitly governed out of participation. The EU infringement framework itself reinforces this dynamic by focusing on aggregate performance indicators rather than differentiated social outcomes. Compliance is assessed through metrics such as recycling rates or landfill diversion, without systematic attention to who is able to participate in the system and under what conditions. As a result, governance failures are framed as technical or administrative shortcomings, rather than as signals of deeper inclusivity gaps. This compliance centered logic also shapes national responses. Faced with infringement pressure, authorities might tend to prioritize rapid legal transposition and enforcement intensification, often through fines and sanctions. While such measures may improve formal compliance, they risk worsening exclusion by placing additional burdens on those least able to adapt. Inclusivity failures, in this sense, are reproduced rather than resolved.

Romania's experience shows that EU waste norms are formally accepted but unevenly embedded in everyday practice, resulting in partial, context-dependent implementation rather than full internalization. At the national level, policy discourse can embrace EU sustainability objectives, while at the local level implementation is shaped by practical constraints and social realities. This multi-level dynamic creates spaces of friction where norms lose coherence as they travel downward. Local authorities may also formally comply with national legislation while lacking the capacity to operationalize it inclusively. Citizens, in turn, may accept the legitimacy of environmental goals while finding existing systems inaccessible or burdensome. In such cases, non-compliance does not reflect norm rejection, but rather norm displacement. Understanding infringement through this lens allows for a more nuanced interpretation of Romania's waste governance challenges. Rather than treating infringement as evidence of weak social acceptance, this article interprets it as a potential indicator of governance frameworks that insufficiently account for inclusive participation.

The persistence of infringement in conventional waste management domains stands in sharp contrast to the relative success of Romania's deposit–return system for beverage packaging. Unlike traditional waste policies, the SGR system embeds participation directly into everyday economic practices, lowers cognitive and infrastructural barriers, and recognizes informal actors as legitimate participants. This contrast is analytically significant. It suggests that inclusivity is not an automatic outcome of sustainability-oriented policy, but a consequence of how governance is designed, materialized, and socially embedded. The following section therefore turns to the SGR system as an example of governance arrangement, examining how its infrastructural logic enables broader participation and facilitates norm internalization beyond the ideal policy subject.

4. The SGR Deposit–Return System as an Inclusive Model

While Romania's broader waste management framework has been marked by persistent compliance gaps and infringement procedures, the introduction of the national deposit–return system, or SGR, for beverage packaging represents a notable departure from this trajectory. The scheme launched at the end of 2023 and in short period of two years it has become one of the most complex networks in the country (Popoviciu 2025). RetuRO is a company managed by three private representative associations of beverage producers and the Romanian State as shareholders, working on a not for profit principle but with the aims to reinvest into the further development of the SGR system (RetuRO 2025). It is currently the largest

circular economy project in Romania, involving actors from the entire life-cycle of a bottle: from the producer to its end user, local authorities and as it turns out, even informal users such as homeless people or waste collectors, boosting inclusivity. Its aim is to help Romania reach the EU recycling targets for PET, aluminium and glass recycling targets. When purchasing a beverage bottle marked with the SGR symbol, a 0.50 RON deposit is attached to each container. In order to recover the deposit, the bottles need to be returned with the SGR symbol visible and intact, to any collection point now widely available in stores throughout the country, either to the cashier or to an automated reverse vending machine. The returned beverage packaging is then recycled.

In 2024 Romania still scored the lowest rate of recycling in the EU (Eurostat 2025). However, according to the preliminary reports released for the year 2025, more than 80% of the total number of SGR bottles -plastic, metal and glass - released last year, surpassing one billion pieces, have been returned (Raportare preliminara RetuRO, 2025). According to the same reports, the recycling rate of said SGR bottles in 2025 reached 74% for all three categories. Unlike conventional waste policies, which rely heavily on formal compliance mechanisms and municipal infrastructure, the SGR system operates through a materially embedded, incentive-based governance logic. This section highlights the SGR system as a model that showcases how inclusivity can be structurally integrated into environmental governance design. Traditional waste management policies implicitly construct an ideal policy subject: a registered household, with stable residence, access to standardized infrastructure, and the cognitive and temporal capacity to comply with differentiated sorting rules. The SGR system disrupts this model by decoupling participation from formal household status and administrative compliance. By attaching a fixed monetary value to each returned bottle or can, the system reframes waste as something that, first, does not get unlinked from the user as soon as the bottle is empty, and second, transforms a regulatory obligation into an immediately legible economic transaction. Participation does not require registration, prior knowledge of waste hierarchies, or interaction with municipal authorities. Instead, it relies on universally accessible retail spaces and automated return infrastructure. In doing so, the SGR system lowers both social and cognitive barriers to participation, enabling engagement across socio-economic and demographic divides. From a constructivist perspective, this design shift is significant. Norms of recycling are not imposed through instruction or sanction, but enacted through everyday practice. The act of returning packaging becomes normalized not because it is mandated, but because it is materially rewarded and socially visible.

One of the most distinctive features of the SGR system is its capacity to incorporate actors typically excluded from formal waste governance. Homeless individuals, economically marginalized persons, and informal waste collectors have become visible participants in the system, collecting discarded packaging and exchanging it for monetary compensation. These dynamic questions traditional distinctions between formal and informal waste management. Rather than being treated as a problem to be regulated or eliminated, informality is functionally integrated into the system's operation. Discarded bottles acquire value independent of their original owner, enabling secondary collection and redistribution. The value is not so high as to negatively impact everyday consumers, however, it is significant enough to incentivise people's creativity. For vulnerable groups, this creates an opportunity for income generation without bureaucratic mediation, while simultaneously contributing to environmental objectives. This inclusion is not explicitly articulated as a social policy goal, yet it emerges as an outcome of governance design. Inclusivity here is not achieved through targeted outreach or compensatory measures, but through infrastructural arrangements (Iacoboaea et al. 2025) that also recognize difference without stigmatization. The system does not ask who the participants are; it only responds and works based on what they do.

The rapid uptake of the SGR system suggests a high degree of norm internalization, despite Romania's historically uneven performance in recycling-related compliance. This internalization, however, differs qualitatively from the one through traditional waste policy instruments. Rather than appealing to environmental responsibility or European obligations, the SGR system aligns sustainability norms with immediate personal benefit. Over time, repeated participation reinforces behavioural routines, embedding recycling into daily consumption practices. The visibility of return machines in supermarkets and the circulation of returned bottles in public space further contribute to the social normalization of the practice. In line with constructivist perspectives, these norms are most effectively internalized when they are enacted rather than explained. The SGR system exemplifies this principle by translating abstract environmental goals into concrete, routinized and extremely simplified actions to anyone. Importantly, this process does not require uniform motivation. Participants may engage for environmental, economic, or pragmatic reasons, yet the overall effect aligns with EU and national sustainability objectives.

The contrast between Romania's infringement-prone waste management domains and the relative success of the SGR system underscores a central analytical claim of this article: inclusivity is not necessarily a matter of communication, awareness, or enforcement, but of infrastructural design as well. Where conventional waste governance relies

on layered administrative coordination and citizen compliance, the SGR system operates through direct material interaction. Infrastructure here performs governance functions by shaping behaviour, allocating responsibility, and enabling participation without presupposing social homogeneity. This insight has broader implications for EU and national environmental policy. It suggests that compliance failures should not be interpreted solely as deficits of capacity or willingness, but as indicators of governance models insufficiently attuned to social diversity. Systems that embed participation into everyday material practices seem to be more likely to achieve both environmental effectiveness and social inclusivity.

The SGR system does not resolve all of Romania's waste management challenges, nor does it eliminate the structural causes of infringement in other domains. However, it demonstrates that alternative, creative and flexible governance imaginaries are possible within the same national context. By recognizing participation as heterogeneous and embedding norms into accessible infrastructures, the SGR system mitigates the very exclusions that often underpin non-compliance. This suggests that future EU waste governance efforts, especially in member states facing persistent infringement, could benefit from shifting emphasis away from compliance centered models toward design centered inclusivity. In this sense, the SGR system functions not merely as a technical instrument, but as an empirical intervention into debates on norm diffusion, governance legitimacy, and the social dimensions of sustainability transitions. It reveals that when governance imaginaries align more closely with lived social realities, inclusivity and effectiveness can become mutually reinforcing rather than competing objectives.

5. Inclusivity and Waste Management Design

The analysis presented in the preceding sections invites a broader reconsideration of how inclusivity operates within waste governance. Rather than treating inclusivity as a normative aspiration or a corrective social add-on, the SGR case illustrates that inclusivity is fundamentally shaped by the design logic of instruments themselves. Persistent infringement procedures and uneven compliance cannot be fully understood without examining the governance imaginaries that structure participation, responsibility, and legitimacy in waste management systems.

From a constructivist perspective, EU waste governance exemplifies a hierarchical model of norm diffusion. Sustainability norms are articulated at the European level, codified through directives, and expected to cascade downward through national legislation and local implementation. The infringement procedure functions as a corrective mechanism within this architecture, identifying deviations and applying pressure for alignment.

However, this model assumes that norms retain their meaning and feasibility as they travel across governance levels. In practice, norms are reinterpreted and reshaped as they encounter diverse social and material contexts. Where governance design does not accommodate this diversity, compliance becomes fragile and enforcement increasingly coercive.

The SGR system demonstrates an alternative pathway through which environmental norms can be internalized. Rather than relying on abstract legal obligations or moral appeals, the system embeds recycling norms into material infrastructure and everyday routines. Participation is enabled through direct interaction with return machines, standardized deposits, and universally accessible retail spaces. This design minimizes the need for prior knowledge, institutional trust, or formal inclusion within municipal systems. Inclusivity emerges not because the system explicitly targets vulnerable groups, but because it refrains from excluding them through design. The absence of registration requirements, the uniform deposit value, and the visibility of return points create conditions under which diverse actors can participate on equal terms. This comparison reveals an important insight: governance systems that rely on compliance with administratively complex rules implicitly privilege socially advantaged groups, while those that operate through simple, material incentives are more likely to accommodate heterogeneity. Inclusivity, in this sense, is not achieved through additional policy layers or compensatory measures, but through governance arrangements that lower thresholds for engagement. The SGR system illustrates how infrastructural design can perform social governance functions by enabling participation without surveillance, sanction, or moral judgment.

Importantly, this does not suggest that incentive-based systems are universally superior or that all waste governance can be reduced to deposit schemes. Rather, it highlights the need for reflexivity in policy design. When governance instruments assume uniform capacities and conditions, they risk producing exclusion as an unintended outcome. Conversely, when systems are designed with flexibility and openness to multiple forms of participation, inclusivity can emerge organically. The Romanian SGR case thus challenges dominant compliance centered approaches in EU environmental governance and stresses the value of design centered inclusivity.

6. Conclusions: Inclusivity as a Property of Environmental Governance

This article has argued that inclusivity in waste management should be understood not as a supplementary social objective, but as a core property of environmental governance design. Through an analysis of

Romania's success of the SGR deposit–return system in contrast to the persistent infringement in conventional waste management domains, the article has shown how governance imaginaries can creatively shape who is able to participate meaningfully in sustainability transitions.

Romania's experience with EU waste governance illustrates the limits of hierarchical, compliance-driven models of norm diffusion. Repeated infringement procedures do not necessarily signal resistance to environmental norms, nor a lack of public legitimacy. Instead, they may reflect deeper mismatches between policy assumptions and social realities. Waste governance systems that presuppose stable housing, formal registration, and uniform capacity risk excluding precisely those groups whose participation is necessary for achieving aggregate sustainability targets. Under these circumstances, non-compliance becomes a structural outcome rather than a behavioural failure. The SGR system offers a compelling counterpoint. By embedding environmental norms into accessible infrastructure and everyday economic practices, it enables participation across socio-economic divides without requiring formal inclusion or normative alignment. Its capacity to incorporate informal actors demonstrates that inclusivity can emerge as an unintended but powerful effect of governance design. Rather than correcting behaviour through enforcement, the system reshapes the conditions under which behaviour occurs. This shift from compliance enforcement to participation enablement is central to its effectiveness.

The broader implication for EU environmental governance is that inclusivity and effectiveness need not be competing objectives. On the contrary, governance systems that recognize social heterogeneity and embed participation into material practice may achieve higher levels of norm internalization and compliance precisely because they lower barriers to engagement. In this sense, infringement should be reinterpreted not only as a legal problem, but as an analytical signal pointing to inclusivity gaps within governance imaginaries. Future waste governance efforts, particularly in member states facing persistent compliance challenges, would benefit from moving beyond standardized policy templates toward more reflexive, design-sensitive approaches. While the SGR system cannot be mechanically replicated across all waste streams, it demonstrates that alternative governance imaginaries are possible within existing EU frameworks. Recognizing inclusivity as a constitutive element of environmental governance creates new opportunities for understanding how sustainability transitions can be both socially legitimate and environmentally effective.

Bibliography

Brie, Mircea (2025). *Inclusivity*. No. 1, Research Center EuroINCLUS, Editura Universitatii din Oradea, 7–14. Accessed January 6, 2026. https://doi.org/10.58603/XQZT9578.

C40 Knowledge Hub (2023). "Inclusive Waste Management in Cities." Accessed January 6, 2026. https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Inclusive-waste-management-in-cities?language=en_US.

Emenda Sembiring and Vilas Nitivattananon (2010). "Sustainable Solid Waste Management toward an Inclusive Society: Integration of the Informal Sector." *Resources, Conservation and Recycling* 54, no. 11: 802–809. Accessed January 6, 2026. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2009.12.010.

ESCAP (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) (2025). "10 Principles to Create Inclusive Waste Management Systems and Reduce Marine Plastic Pollution." Accessed January 12, 2026. https://www.unescap.org/blog/10-principles-create-inclusive-waste-management-systems-and-reduce-marine-plastic-pollution.

European Commission (2025). "Waste Framework Directive." *Environment (European Commission)*. Accessed December 23, 2025. https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/waste-and-recycling/waste-framework-directive_en.

Eurostat (2025). "Over 12 % of Materials in the EU Come from Recycling." *Eurostat News*, November 19, 2025. Accessed December 28, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20251119-1.

ICLD (2025). "Inclusive Waste Management Policy Brief." Accessed January 7, 2026. https://cdn.icld.se/wp-content/uploads/20250922105859/icld_policybrief_17_web.pdf.

Iacoboaea, Cristina, Andrei Damian, Ioana Nenciu, Mihaela Aldea, Oana Luca, Mihai Șercăianu, Ancuța Neagu, and Emanuel Răuță (2025). "Towards Inclusive Waste Management in Marginalized Urban Areas: An Expert-Guided Framework and Its Pilot in Reșița, Romania." *Sustainability* 17 (11): 5070. Accessed January 7, 2026. https://doi.org/10.3390/su17115070.

Oguntoyinbo, O. (2012). "Informal Waste Management System in Nigeria and Barriers to an Inclusive Modern Waste Management System: A Review." *Public Health* 126, no. 5: 441–447. Accessed January 6, 2026. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2012.01.030.

Popoviciu, Andrei (2025). "'We Like It a Lot': How Romania Created Its Hugely Popular Deposit Return Scheme." *The Guardian*, November 27, 2025. Accessed December 29, 2025. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/nov/27/we-like-it-a-lot-how-romania-created-the-largest-deposit-return-scheme-in-the-world.

RetuRO (2025). "About RetuRO." *ReturoSGR*. Accessed December 28, 2025. https://returosgr.ro/en/about-returo.

RetuRO (2025). "Raportare preliminara RetuRO, Decembrie 2025 - 15.01.2026." *RetuRO*. Accessed January 15, 2026. https://returosgr.ro/sites/default/files/2026-01/Raportare%20preliminara%20RetuRO%2C%20Decembrie%202025%20%20-%2015.01.2026.pdf.

The Climate Drive (2025). "Advance Urban Circularity through Inclusive Waste Management." Accessed January 12, 2026. https://www.theclimatedrive.org/action-library/advance-urban-circularity-through-inclusive-waste-management.

Theys, Sarina (2018). "Introducing Constructivism in International Relations Theory." *E-International Relations*, February 23, 2018. Accessed December 28, 2025. https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/23/introducing-constructivism-in-international-relations-theory/.

UNDP Vietnam (2025). "Scaling Integrated and Inclusive Waste Management Models through Empowering Informal Sector and Fostering Circular Economy Phase 2." Accessed January 12, 2026. https://www.undp.org/vietnam/projects/scaling-integrated-and-inclusive-waste-management-models-through-empowering-informal-sector-and-fostering-circular-economy-phase-2.

Wendt, AlexandeR (1995). "Constructing International Politics." *International Security* 20 (1): 71–81. Accessed December 23, 2025. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2539217?origin=JSTOR-pdf.

WIEGO (2023). "There is No Circularity Without Waste Pickers." Accessed January 11, 2026. https://www.wiego.org/blog/there-is-no-circularity-without-waste-pickers/.

BOOK REVIEWS

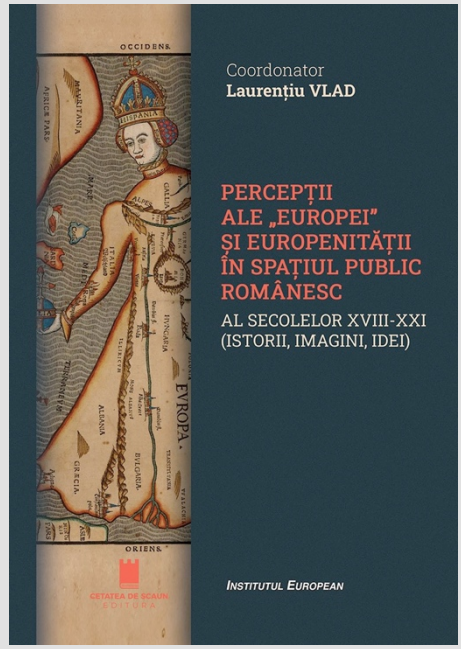
https://www.doi.org/10.58603/XKTL6092

Book Review of: Laurențiu Vlad (Editor)

Perceptions of Europe and Europeanness in the Romanian Public Space. From the 18th to the 21st Century. (Histories, Images, Ideas)

Cetatea de scaun Publishing House, Institutul European, Târgoviște, 2024, 399p

ISBN 978-606-537-706-6,
ISBN 978-606-24-0389-8



Review by *Laurențiu Petrila*[1]

The work coordinated by Professor Laurențiu Vlad brings to our attention several themes and topics that require deeper reflection on the perception of Europe and European identity within the Romanian context. Examining this work from a historical didactic viewpoint reveals its significant value, particularly in the current context where Europe confronts numerous challenges related to identity and the restoration of values (Petrila, 2014:106-121). This is especially pertinent given the often-unproductive discourse surrounding regions that tend to create divisions rather than foster unity (Stoica, 2022:267-277). Taking into account both the geographical location and the cultural framings and non-framings of Romania, this deeper exploration of the topic serves as a response to a necessity related to cultural positioning and the restoration of national identity. In a different context, the paper demonstrates that the Romanian identity was strengthened through the processes of Europeanisation fostered by education (Marino, 2005:195-235) and intellectual discourse acquired from the West (Dutu, 1999:237-250).

The first section of the volume focuses on aspects relating to synchronicity, values, frameworks, or various perspectives and representations of the university's culturality and identity. In addition to the

[1] PhD. Lecturer, University of Oradea, Department of International Relations and European Studies, E-mail: laurentiu.petrila@didactic.uoradea.ro.

challenges of academic training, there was also a constant weighing of identities (Șerbănescu, 2005:51-70). Professor Nicoară addresses, in his characteristic, rigorous manner, the phenomenon of French civilization, which has occasionally become a benchmark for societal paradigms. For the emerging Romanian intellectuals, who pursued their studies in France during this era, the French system served as a model of cultural allure that they attempted to politically advocate through initiatives linked to diverse approaches regarding values and culture.

Professor Platon from Iasi proceeds by delving into the understanding and development of the European mentality, characterizing the process of civilisation as fundamentally an intrinsic Europeanisation. Although we observe a greater emphasis on elements associated with Romanian identity, or more accurately, the traits of Romanians across various regions, it is essential to remember that just as we have adopted European influences, the European identity has likewise been shaped by contributions from its cultural peripheries (Tartler, 2005).However, this transformation does not occur through procedural mechanisms; as per the documents referenced (such as diaries and other correspondence), Europeanisation should be viewed through the lens of sentimental anthropology. Typical attitudes and behaviours contribute to a mannerism defined in a broader, rather than merely cultural, sense. At the onset of the 19th century, Romanian society began to embrace certain behaviours characteristic of the West, even though it was frequently apparent from the letters and diaries of foreigners that the habits of a less civilised populace were still firmly established (Fligstein et al., 2011).

The work continues with highlights on the perspective of the Transylvanians regarding the realm of European civilization. They believed, among other aspects, that Europe serves as the foundation of science and education, outshining all other regions of the world. In a biblical analogy, civilized Europe was perceived as being within, while the barbarians were seen as being outside, akin to how darkness is regarded as external according to the Gospels.

An important point that arises from the insightful work examined in this review is that, among the many Transylvanian-Romanian students who were studying throughout Europe during that time, most were found in Budapest and Vienna, while others found themselves in Leipzig, Berlin, Rome, or Paris, where Romanian youth pursued their education with considerable enthusiasm and optimism. It is also significant to mention that more than a quarter of these students were offspring of farmers. Indeed, Transylvania has consistently assumed an unusual role in the Europeanisation process due to its confessional and ethnic diversity (Polgar, 2020).

The second part of the work introduces a range of initiatives during the inter-war period, when discussions about Romanians as part of European culture began to emerge. Cultural projects, such as the *European Idea*, prompted Romanian society—particularly in Transylvania—to engage in reflections and substantial writings that indeed intertwined us with the cultural and historical heritage from which we originated. Subsequently, history textbooks began to reference the grandeur of European culture and the aspirations of young individuals to alter, transform, and enhance the Romanian identity as an essential component of the broader European culture. These references marked the inception of the early signs of the contemporary European project. Titulescu asserted that Europe must achieve unity through the spiritualization of its borders. It can be argued that this spiritualization of borders has contributed to the current state of Schengen. In the context of discussions among Romanian historians regarding the present European project, Professor Pecican succinctly illustrates the increasing focus on territorial and continental boundaries and reorganizations. In addition to Europe's external challenges, historian Alina Stoica highlights, through a case study from the Crișana region, that Europe faced internal difficulties, particularly following the Peace Treaties, which resulted in various forms of diplomatic complexities and challenges.

The third section of the work, covering the years 1940 to 1980, presents a collection of analyses that reveal various aspects regarding the understanding of Europeanness within Romania. This includes contributions from notable individuals, such as Adrian Marino, or refers to the literary and cinematic filters imposed by the infamous regime. It required a discerning eye to differentiate between censorship and propaganda and to comprehend the challenges involved in untangling a culture that had been ambitiously constructed since the days when Romanian youth were exploring ideas in Vienna, Leipzig, and beyond. Those young individuals ultimately left their ancestors behind to uphold their European aspirations at home. Following the 1940s, Romania faced numerous challenges characterized by a series of isolations and dangers that increasingly drove many Romanians to seek a better life. Consequently, during this period, the prominent Romanian elite found themselves in exile. From this position, they endeavored to communicate with their compatriots, who were subjected daily to hunger and censorship, through various lobbying efforts and via Radio Free Europe, proclaiming that freedom was attainable (Korkut, 2006:131-155).

The concluding section of the study, which aligns with the post-Communist era, highlights several prominent themes. These range from the obstacles and challenges related to the Euro-Atlantic pathway, to debates surrounding monarchy and republic, and extending to discussions about

the European Union or the United States of Europe (a conversation that not only remains incomplete, but I also question if it ever truly commenced), as well as minority concerns and even the rise of populist and Eurosceptic movements. The topic of cultural diversity and cultural identity is discussed from various perspectives, not in a contentious manner, but rather in a thoughtful effort to comprehend the factors that unite us (Brie, 2012).

Professor Cioroianu examines the topic of monarchy versus republic within the framework of the European idea, a subject that has been extensively analysed in academic literature (Wiszowaty, 2023:1-19). The subsequent text authored by Professor Dogot addresses the phenomenon of populism following the events of 1989 in Romania. Regrettably, both Romania and Hungary are not unique instances of populism emerging after the fall of the USSR; this trend is also observable in nations with more established democracies and traditions, such as the Netherlands, France, Germany, and even in the context of Brexit (Popescu et al., 2022:13-22). The cultural factors contributing to populist voting can be associated with shifts in value systems, which literature describes as a gradual transition in Western society's values from conservative to liberal. The latter encompasses issues such as gender equality, a subject explored in the recent study presented in the paper, where Professors Míscoiu, Gherghina, and Șamșudean discuss orthodoxy, sexual minorities, and the acceptance of diverse partnerships and lifestyles. Addressing populism is imperative. Populism diminishes life opportunities by promising a return to a glorified past that never existed. It also heightens the risk of conflict with neighbouring countries. Populism has various underlying causes that require attention, yet there are numerous more effective solutions to these challenges if they are deliberated with the public (Aiginger et al., 2020).

I can confidently assert that the study pursues a natural, organic, and entirely unforced progression of perceptions, mentalities, and developments pertaining to Europe within the Romanian context. It is my belief that if such studies were more extensively disseminated or even concisely presented, Romanians would gain a far clearer understanding of the complexities involved in establishing a culture, a framework of thought, and ultimately, a freedom of conscience that allows one to maintain their identity, even when interlinked with others through technical and bureaucratic frameworks.

Bibliography

Aiginger, K., Andor, L., Collier, P., Fetzer, T., Halikiopoulou, D., Passari, E., & Pianta, M. (2020). The rise of populism: Case studies, determinants and policy implications. *Review of European Economic Policy, 55*(1). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10272-020-0860-x.

Brie, M., Polgár, I., & Chirodea, F. (2012). *Cultural identity, diversity and European integration-Introductory study*. In M. Brie, I. Polgár, & F. Chirodea (Eds.), *European Union: Identity, diversity and integration* (pp. 7-20). *Analele Universităţii din Oradea, Seria Relaţii Internaţionale şi Studii Europene* (Supliment).

Duțu, A. (1999). *Ideea de Europa și evoluția conștiinței europene*. All.

Fligstein, N., & Polyakova, A. *European integration, nationalism, and European identity*. https://irle.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/European-Integration-Nationalism-and-European-Identity.pdf.

Korkut, U. (2006). *Nationalism versus internationalism: The roles of political and cultural elites in interwar and communist Romania*. *Nationalities Papers, 34*(2), 131-155. https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990600617698.

Marino, A. (2005). *Pentru Europa: Integrarea României. Aspecte ideologice și culturale* (2nd ed.). Polirom.

Petrila, L. (2014). *A new beginning for Europe through rediscovering and prioritizing the European identity and values?*, *Online Journal Modelling the New Europe*, (13). https://neweurope.centre.ubbcluj.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Online-Journal-No.-13-December-2014.pdf.

Polgár, I. (2020). *A brief outlook over the ethnical and confessional diversity of Transylvania and the role of it in the European integration process.* In F. Chirodea et al. (Eds.), *Europe in a changing world: Opportunities and challenges* (In honorem Professor Ioan Horga). Oradea University Press; Debrecen University Press.

Popescu, F. A., & Petrila, L. (2022). The effects of Brexit on the UK's economic, social and legal system. *Analele Universităţii din Oradea. Relaţii internaţionale şi Studii europene, 14*(14), 13-22.

Șerbănescu, A. (2005). *Identitate națională și identitate europeană: O perspectivă psihosociologică*. Lumen.

Stoica, M. (2022). *European identity as a cornerstone of regionalism perceptions on the future of Europe*. In *Transylvanian Review, 31*(Suppl. 2), 267-277. https://centruldestudiitransilvane.ro/magazine/vol-xxxi-supplement-no-2-2022/.

Tartler, G. (2005). *Identitate europeană*. Cartea Romînească.

Wiszowaty, M. M. (2023). *The concept of mixed monarchy and the monarchical principle in the study of modern state systems*. In *History of European Ideas*, 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2023.2233069.