

CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING THE SDGs IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *This paper aims at identifying the main obstacles that Romania faces in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For this, literature review and data collection and analysis were carried out. When it comes to achieving the SDGs, different European countries have made progress to varying degrees, and it can be difficult to compare progress directly because each country faces unique challenges and opportunities. However, Sweden, Denmark and Finland are among the countries that have made the most progress towards achieving the SDGs in Europe. These countries are generally considered to have strong social welfare systems, high levels of public engagement, and progressive policies on sustainability and human rights. However, it's worth noting that even these top-performing countries still have areas where they need to make progress towards achieving the SDGs, particularly in areas such as reducing inequalities, combating climate change, and promoting responsible consumption and production. It's difficult to estimate when Romania could catch up with these countries as it depends on a variety of factors, but it will require a sustained effort over several decades. Romania faces various obstacles in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Some of the key challenges are: (1) economic disparities (particularly between rural and urban areas), (2) environmental degradation (deforestation, water pollution, and air pollution), (3) corruption, (4) lack of social inclusion (particularly for marginalized groups such as the Roma population, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals), (5) limited institutional capacity. Overall, addressing these challenges will require sustained political will, investment in infrastructure and services, and effective partnerships between government, civil society, and the private sector.*

Keywords: *Sustainable Development Goals, Romania, economic disparities, environmental degradation.*

JEL Classification: *Q56*

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 global objectives established by the United Nations to address some of the most pressing challenges

faced by the world. They were adopted in September 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a comprehensive plan aimed at promoting prosperity, protecting the planet, and ensuring social inclusion for all.

The SDGs build upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and represent a more ambitious and universal framework. The concept of "leaving no one behind" is a central principle of the SDGs, emphasizing the need to ensure that progress is inclusive and that no individuals or groups are excluded from development efforts. A valuable analysis of this concept in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is provided by Stuart and Woodroffe in an article published in 2016. The authors compare the concept of "leaving no one behind" with the limitations of the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In contrast, the Millennium Development Goals, which were in place from 2000 to 2015, were criticized for not paying sufficient attention to the disparities and inequalities within and between countries. The MDGs primarily focused on average progress indicators, which sometimes masked the situation of marginalized and vulnerable populations (Stuart&Woodroffe, 2016).

The SDGs encompass a wide range of interconnected issues, including poverty eradication, environmental sustainability, social equality, economic growth, and access to basic services like education, healthcare, and clean water.

Each goal is accompanied by specific targets and indicators that provide a clear roadmap for governments, businesses, and civil society to take coordinated action towards achieving these objectives by the year 2030. These Sustainable Development Goals are presented in the figure below.



Figure no 1. The UN matrix of Sustainable Development Goals

Source: United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals,

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/news/communications-material/> accessed on April 15, 2023

The SDGs acknowledge the interconnectedness of global challenges and emphasize the importance of collaboration among governments, businesses, civil society, and individuals. By working together to implement these goals, the world aims to create a more sustainable, equitable, and prosperous future for all, leaving no one behind.

Methodology

Identifying the main obstacles in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires a robust research methodology that allows for a comprehensive analysis of various factors contributing to the challenges faced. Research methodology for identifying the main obstacles in achieving the SDGs involved several stages, such as:

1. Literature review: A thorough literature review of existing research and publications on the SDGs and related topics was conducted. This helped in identifying key themes and areas of focus for the research. This stage also helped us develop research questions to guide the study.

2. Data collection: Data was collected from a variety of sources, including primary and secondary sources for the purpose of providing a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles to achieving the SDGs.

3. Data analysis: The collected data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods, depending on the research questions and objectives. Qualitative analysis involved coding and categorizing data based on themes and patterns, while quantitative analysis involved statistical analysis of survey data.

4. Stakeholder engagement: Engaging with stakeholders, including government officials, civil society organizations, and community members, can provide valuable insights into the obstacles and challenges facing different groups and regions. This stage focused on interviews and surveys to gather input and feedback.

Stage 3 and 4 are the focus of a different scientific paper.

Literature review

Many scholars are preoccupied by the status of the implementation of SDGs. There are significant differences amongst the countries and some comparisons were made, alongside the elaboration of some reporting standards regarding this status. Some authors have tried to address certain issues regarding the entrepreneurial implication of the SDGs (Moon, 2018). In the same year, Pedersen stated that the SDGs provided a “much clearer set of long-term global priorities with political tail wind” endowing civil society and public sector with more strength in the process of aligning future and present views concerning environmental, social and economic issues (Pedersen,

2018). Also, in 2018 Buhmann et al have revisited the concept of “doing well while doing good”, placing the SDGs, human rights and political CSR theory in a “do no harm and do more good” framework (Buhmann, K., Jonsson, J., & Fisker, M., 2018). The authors revisited the concept of "doing well while doing good" and proposed a framework that placed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), human rights, and political Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) theory in a "do no harm and do more good" framework. This framework aimed to address the potential tensions between pursuing business success (doing well) and simultaneously contributing to societal and environmental well-being (doing good). The "do no harm and do more good" framework is an approach that encourages businesses and organizations to not only focus on minimizing negative impacts on society and the environment (do no harm) but also actively contribute to positive social, environmental, and economic outcomes (do more good) aligned with the SDGs and human rights principles. This more social oriented approach offers new insights regarding the implementation of the SDGs. Kørnøv et al propose a conceptual framework for the liaison between the UN SDGs and environmental assessment (Kørnøv, L., Lyhne, I., & Davila, J. G., 2020). Abeysekera, on the other hand, is proposing “a principle-based sustainability reporting framework” in order to have a common base to assess and compare the implementation status of the SDGs (Abeysekera, 2022). Lesser developed countries are placed under the scope, as well. Certain links between the rural poverty and the medical and social phenomenon of disability in Ethiopia have been established (Raghav Gaiha, Shantanu Mathur, Vani S. Kulkarni., 2022). Another article (Biraghi, C.A.; Carrion, D.; Brovelli, M.A, 2022) highlighted the importance, the impact and the complementary nature of the citizen science in monitoring the SDGs implementation process. In another article an analyze of the SMEs environment from Germany and Poland, as a comparison, in terms of the importance of implementing the SDGs has been made, revealing the crucial role of the SMEs in the process (Sonntag, R.; Lewis, G.J.; Raszkowski, A., 2022).

Obstacles in achieving the SDGs in Romania

Different European countries have made progress in achieving the SDGs to varying degrees, and it can be difficult to compare progress directly because each country faces unique challenges and opportunities. However, according to the SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2021, the countries that have made the most progress towards achieving the SDGs in Europe are:

1. Sweden
2. Denmark
3. Finland

4. France
5. Germany

These countries are generally considered to have strong social welfare systems, high levels of public engagement, and progressive policies on sustainability and human rights. However, it is worth noting that even these top-performing countries still have areas where they need to make progress towards achieving the SDGs, particularly in areas such as reducing inequalities, combating climate change, and promoting responsible consumption and production.

In their work, Kuc-Czarnecka et al have identified, based on a sensitivity analysis approach, certain synergies and trade-offs for the SDGs implementation process in EU countries. Their paper resulted in a collection of composite indicators being able to provide an image of the SDGs implementation at the level of the EU countries (Kuc-Czarnecka, Markowicz, & Sompolska-Rzechuła, 2023).

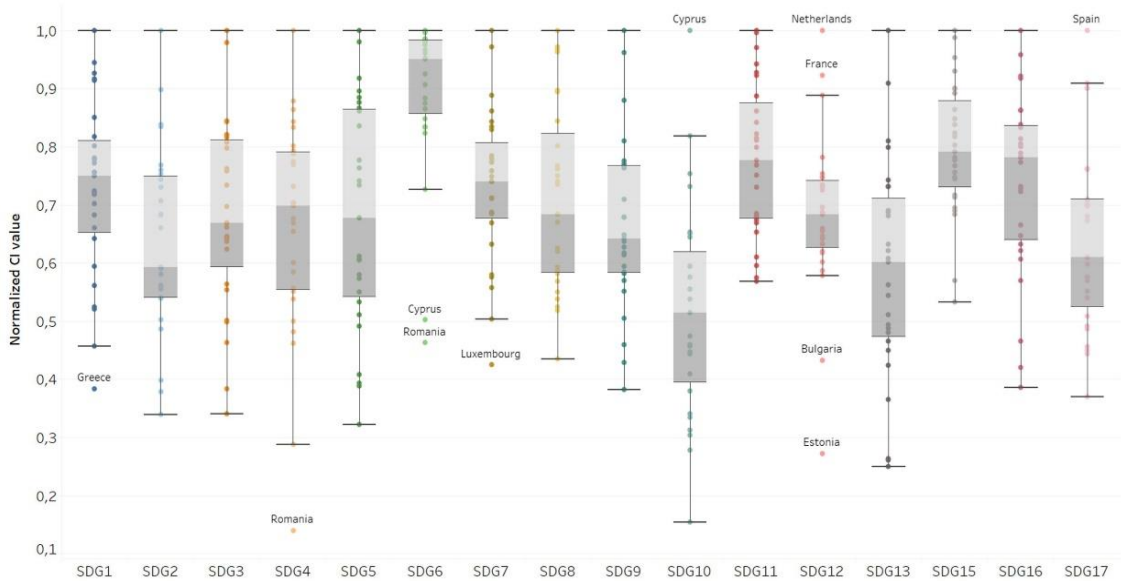


Figure no 2. The status of the implementation of SDGs in the EU countries - 2023

Source: (Kuc-Czarnecka, Markowicz, & Sompolska-Rzechuła, 2023)

As it can be seen from the image above, Romania is not so well placed among the EU countries regarding the quality of the SDGs implementation process. Romania faces various obstacles in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Some of the key challenges are:

1. Economic disparities: Despite some progress in recent years, Romania still faces significant economic disparities, particularly between rural and urban areas. This can hinder progress towards achieving the SDGs related to poverty reduction, health and well-being, and education.

2.Environmental degradation: Romania faces significant environmental challenges, including deforestation, water pollution, and air pollution. These issues can undermine progress towards achieving the SDGs related to sustainable cities and communities, clean water and sanitation, and climate action.

3.Corruption: Corruption remains a significant challenge in Romania, and it can undermine progress towards achieving many of the SDGs, including those related to reducing inequalities and promoting inclusive economic growth.

4.Lack of social inclusion: Romania faces significant challenges related to social inclusion, particularly for marginalized groups such as the Roma population, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals. These challenges can hinder progress towards achieving the SDGs related to reducing inequalities and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies.

5.Limited institutional capacity: Romania has made progress in implementing the SDGs, but there are still significant gaps in institutional capacity and coordination. This can make it difficult to effectively implement policies and programs to achieve the SDGs.

In conclusion

Overall, addressing these challenges will require sustained political will, investment in infrastructure and services, and effective partnerships between government, civil society, and the private sector.

It's difficult to provide an exact timeline for when Romania may catch up with Finland or Austria as it depends on a variety of factors, including economic and social policies, investment in infrastructure and education, and external factors such as global economic trends. However, it's worth noting that Finland and Austria have significantly higher levels of economic development and human development than Romania, so catching up may require a sustained effort over several decades. Romania has made progress in recent years, particularly in reducing poverty and increasing access to education, but there is still a long way to go to reach the levels of development seen in Finland or Austria.

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