



Journal of Community Positive Practices

Year XXI
No. 1/2021

- **Anisur Rahman KHAN, Kopano RATELE** – Men and Covid-19: explicating the need for masculinity analysis
- **Vasile-Teodor BURNAR** – The political annexation of the sports hero in contemporary Romania. The case of Simona Halep)
- **Adina MIHĂILESCU, Mariana STANCIU, Livia ȘTEFĂNESCU, Cristina HUMĂ** – Aspirations, concerns and priorities of families with school-age children
- **John SIRENGO** – The Christian response to poverty: implications for the 21st century churches
- **Sebastian FITZEK** – Problems and solutions of romanian migration in UK, Germany and Austria during 2020
- **Cristina TOMESCU** – *BOOK REVIEW*. Kosher, H. et al. Children's rights and social work. SpringerBriefs in Rights-Based Approaches to Social Work, 2016, p. 75



JOURNAL OF COMMUNITY POSITIVE PRACTICES

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

Director

PhD. **Sorin CACE**, Catalactica Association, Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy

Scientific Committee:

- PhD, Professor* **Cătălin ZAMFIR**, Member of Romanian Academy
PhD, Professor **Asher BEN-ARIEH**, Haruv Institute, Jerusalem, Israel
PhD, Professor **Gary B. MELTON**, University of Colorado, Denver, USA
PhD, Professor **John LUTZKER**, Georgia State University, Atlanta, USA
PhD, Professor **Michael J. PALMIOTTO**, Wichita State University, Kansas, USA
PhD, Professor **Jill KORBIN**, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, USA
PhD, Professor **Jimmy TAYLOR**, Ohio University, Zanesville, Ohio, USA
PhD, Professor **Andrea WIGFIELD**, University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom
PhD, Professor **Elizabeth ECKERMANN**, Deakin University, Victoria, Australia
PhD, Professor **Renwu TANG**, Dean of School of Management, Dean of Academy of Government at Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China
PhD, Professor **Amitabh KUNDU**, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India
PhD, Professor **Claude MARTIN**, Research Director CNRS, Université de Rennes, France
PhD, Professor **Munyae M. MULINGE**, United States International University (USIU), Nairobi, Kenya
PhD, Professor **Manuel Antonio GARRETON**, University of Chile, Santiago de Chile, Chile
PhD, Professor **Renata FRANCO**, Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar, Zagreb, Croatia
PhD, Professor **Asun LLENA BERNE**, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain
PhD, Professor **Nawab Ali KHAN**, Sarrar bin Abduaziz University, Al Kharj, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
PhD, Professor **Mihaela TOMIȚĂ**, Universitatea de Vest, Timisoara
PhD, Professor **Valeriu IOAN-FRANC**, Corresponding Member of Romanian Academy, National Institute of Economic Research, Bucharest, Romania
PhD, Professor **Corina CACE**, Academy of Economy Studies, Bucharest, Romania
PhD, Professor **Mircea ALEXIU**, Western University, Timisoara, Romania
PhD, Professor **Ștefan COJOCARU**, University Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Iași, Romania

Editorial Board:

- Andreia-Nicoleta ANTON**, Catalactica Association
Daniela DANDARA-TĂBĂCARU, Catalactica Association
Vlad I. ROȘCA, Lecturer, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania
Cristina TOMESCU, Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy

Editorial:

- Paula NEACȘU** – publisher
Lumiņa LOGIN – layout and editing
Nicolae LOGIN – cover

Edited by:



Bucharest, Romania

CNCSIS: cod 045/2006

Editor-in-Chief: Valeriu IOAN-FRANC

Editor: Paula NEACȘU

Cover design: Nicolae LOGIN

Design and layout: Lumiņa LOGIN

Phone: 0040-21 318 24 38; Fax: 0040-21 318 24 32;

e-mail: edexpert@zappmobile.ro

License to the Ministry of Culture no. 1442/1992

ASSOCIATION FOR SOCIAL
AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
AND PROMOTION CATALACTICA
Str. Simetriei 18 A, Sector 2, București, România
Tel/ Fax: 0040 31 4381006
Email: office@jppc.ro;
www.catalactica.org.ro;
cacesorin@gmail.com

ISSN 1582-9344 (printed version); ISSN 2247-6571 (electronic version), indexed in

Scopus; Google Scholar; Ideas RePeC; Econpapers; CEEOL; ProQuest; Scipio; Questia; WorldCat

CONTENT

MEN AND COVID-19: EXPLICATING THE NEED FOR MASCULINITY ANALYSIS	3
--	---

Anisur Rahman KHAN, Kopano RATELE

THE POLITICAL ANNEXATION OF THE SPORTS HERO IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA. THE CASE OF SIMONA HALEP	8
---	---

Vasile-Teodor BURNAR

ASPIRATIONS, CONCERNS AND PRIORITIES OF FAMILIES WITH SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN.....	32
---	----

Ađina MIHĂILESCU, Mariana STANCIU,

Livia ŢTEFĂNESCU, Cristina HUMĂ

THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO POVERTY: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY CHURCH	50
--	----

John SIRENGO

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS OF ROMANIAN MIGRATION IN UK, GERMANY AND AUSTRIA DURING 2020	59
--	----

Sebastian FITZEK

<i>BOOK REVIEW</i> . KOSHER, H. ET AL. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND SOCIAL WORK. SPRINGERBRIEFS IN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACHES TO SOCIAL WORK, 2016, P. 75.....	71
--	----

Cristina TOMESCU

INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUTHORS

Authors wishing to publish papers at JCPP are asked to send their manuscripts electronic at <http://jppc.ro/en/index.php/jppc/about/submissions>. For publishing a paper, authors must follow the requirements and conditions set forth below.

Who can publish: Papers can be sent by researchers, academics and professionals with interests related to socio-economic sciences. The main criteria considered by the reviewers are originality, novelty, potential to spark debate and coherent exposure. Documents submitted for publication will be examined by editors before being placed into the process of review.

Fields of interest: Papers in area of Social Sciences including: General Social Sciences, Sociology and Political Science, Social Sciences (miscellaneous).

Requirements for publishing: The paper must be submitted in **English**, by e-mail, as attached **Word** file in a single document which will include all images and tables. Minimum requirements must be met on the following:

- **Size:** the paper should contain a maximum of 15 pages including biography. 4000-6000 words
- **Paper title:** should be concise and summarize the most appropriate contents of the paper
- **File format:** Microsoft Word
- **Text format:** Times New Roman 12, 1 line spacing, with diacritics if the text is in Romanian
- **Information about the author/ authors (a maximum of 250 words):** for each author it must be mentioned the academic title, current position, institution to which it belongs, contact details – telephone and e-mail. For the selected authors, all this information will be made public. The submission of a manuscript implies that the author certifies that the material is not copyrighted and is not currently under review for another publication. If the article has appeared or will appear in another publication, details of such publication must be disclosed to the editors at the time of submission.
- **Abstract:** will present shortly the purpose, field of application, research methods, results and conclusions of the paper. It should have a maximum of 250 words and will be written in English.
- **Key-words:** are designed to provide a rapid classification of the paper. The key-words must be written in English, separated by semicolon (;) and placed below the abstract.
- **Tables:** as simple as possible, with explanatory titles, numbered in the order they appear in the text. The source of the data must be mentioned below each table (Times New Roman 10, italic, aligned left).
- **Graphs:** should be made in Excel, in black and white and must be inserted and numbered in the order of appearance in the text. Each graph should have an explanatory title and the source of the data should be mentioned below the graph (Times New Roman 10, italic, aligned left).
- **Footnotes:** are inserted in the text and numbered with Arabic numbers. Their size should be reduced by bringing clarification on the text.
- **References:** should be cited as follows: the name of the author, year of the publication and page, all in parentheses (Ritzer and Goodman, 2003, p. 93) or if the name of the author is mentioned within a sentence it should be included as follows: ..Ritzer and Goodman (2003, p. 93). At a first citation containing from three to five authors, all names are mentioned, afterwards, it is used [the first author] “et al.”. If more than one paper by the same author, from the same year is cited, the letters a, b, c etc. should included after the year of publication. The citation of a paper available online should be performed following the same rules as for a book or a magazine specifying the electronic address where it was consulted.
- **Bibliography:** the full list of the references cited in the text must be presented at the end of the paper, below annexes, in alphabetical order of the names of the authors and in a chronological order for a group of references by the same author. The order is the following: name of the author/ authors, year of appearance, title, publisher, city; for example:
Rea, A., Tripier, M. (2008). *Sociologie de l'immigration*. Paris: La Decouverte
Koh, H. K. (2010). A 2020 vision for healthy people. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 362(18), 1653–1656

The process of review: Papers are reviewed by two specialists. Depending on their recommendations, the editors decide whether publish/ reject the paper or make suggestions for improvement to the author/ authors. The editors have the right to make minor editorial changes to submitted papers, including the correction of grammatical mistakes, punctuation and writing, as well as modify the format of the paper, but no major changes will be performed without the approval of the author. If major changes are needed, the paper is returned to the author for him to make the necessary changes. Authors are informed by e-mail on the status of the papers sent in no more than 6 weeks from their receipt.

Papers accepted for publication are sent to authors for accept printing. Authors are asked to respond to the editorial board within 7 days. Authors submitting papers to the editorial board implicitly declare their publishing agreement in these conditions.



MEN AND COVID-19: EXPLICATING THE NEED FOR MASCULINITY ANALYSIS

Anisur Rahman KHAN¹
Kopano RATELE²
DOI: 10.35782/JCPP.2021.1.01

***Abstract:** There are important gender determinants to both men's and women's susceptibility to COVID-19. Emerging findings confirm men are dying disproportionately at a higher rate than women. Such gender differences in deaths have informed scholars to widen their analytical look through a critical masculinity lens. As the practices to respond to the context of the gendered burden of disease are still inadequate and nearly absent on men's health, it is suggested to specifically focus on men's vulnerability to COVID-19 with appropriate interventions.*

***Keywords:** COVID-19, gender, masculinity, men's health, domestic violence, suicide*

Introduction: Men's vulnerability to COVID-19

The COVID-19 has brought an unusual type of outbreak and complexities for which the world was not prepared. The pandemic, and the incredible speed at which the virus is spreading, has prompted us to call for academic and policy analyses and interventions using critical masculinity lenses given that the disease outbreak is not gender-neutral: it affects women and men differently (Durant, 2020). Assessing the jolt of the COVID-19 pandemic on at-risk groups, coupled with a masculinity perspective, is indispensable for establishing efficient and responsive policies and interventions (Wenham, Smith & Morgan, 2020). Understanding the interface between men's gender socialisation and masculinity ideologies in relation to their health-related risks and protective factors could provide useful messages in prevention initiatives (Garfield, Isacco & Rogers,

¹ Department of Sociology, East West University, Dhaka-1212, Bangladesh; e-mail: arkhan@ewubd.edu; phone: +8801939240971

² Masculinity and Health Research Unit, South African Medical Research Council-University of South Africa/ Institute for Social and Health Sciences, University of South Africa, Cape Town, South Africa; e-mail: kopano.ratele@mrc.ac.za

2008). And yet, when it comes to men's health and perspectives, policies and interventions to respond to the context of the gendered burden of disease are still inadequate and, in some countries, absent (Purdie et al., 2020). A mistaken assumption that policies and programs to address gender issues should predominately encompass women's perspectives and concerns persist (Nkangu, Olatunde & Yaya, 2017).

Although global sex-disaggregated data on COVID-19 is still not uniformly available, country-specific sources, including those from the shifting epicenter of the outbreaks, namely China, Italy, Spain, USA and UK, indicated that men are dying at a higher rate than women (Baker, 2020; Purdie et al., 2020; Jin et al., 2020; Mooney, Kaplan & Denis, 2020). Global Health 50/50 (as of 28 May 2020) has shown that whilst there is no clear pattern regarding whether women or men are more likely to be infected by COVID-19, evidence reveals that more men than women are dying from COVID-19 in all countries. Men appear to be 50% more likely than women to die after being diagnosed with COVID-19 positive (Global Health 50/50, nd.). It is noteworthy that men's higher morbidity was also evident during the earlier outbreaks such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) (Purdie et al., 2020), and Ebola (Nkangu et al., 2017).

Male Norms in Action

The reasons for men's higher susceptibility to dying from COVID-19 remain unclear (World Bank Group, 2020). However, the complexities and interactions associated with biology (i.e., sex) and social practice (i.e., masculinity) appear to be strongly associated with men's elevated susceptibility (Global Health 50/50, nd; van Osch, 2020). While biological factors such as stronger immune systems appear to give women more protection than men, several factors associated with masculinity practices make men more vulnerable during disease outbreaks (van Osch, 2020; World Bank Group, 2020). Masculinity as a sociological concept does not entail any fixed entity embedded in bodies or behavioral traits. It differs across economic, cultural and temporal settings, tied to prevailing social gender relations in place (Connell & Messerschmitt, 2005). Usually, it refers to certain physical, behavioral and attitudinal qualities that are essential to be a man in a particular historical, social and cultural milieu (Mason-Grant, 2000). Men's health problem is a part of their gender role socialisation, as men who hold more traditional masculine norms are more likely to be involved in health-impeding behaviors and less likely to be involved in health-promoting behaviors (Garfield et al., 2008). Men tend to involve in high risk-driving behaviors such as higher levels of drug, alcohol and tobacco consumption. They also tend to hide their vulnerability and are reluctant in self-care and medical/professional help-seeking (Mahalik, Burns & Syzdek, 2007). Conversely, women's gender role socialisation supports them to involve in more health-promoting behaviours than men and maintain more healthy lifestyles. Such practice conceivably ensures more prevention and protection for women during health-related adversities (Courtenay, 2000b), and at the moment, a lower risk than men to death from COVID-19 pandemic.

Specific Evidential Impacts

Such restrictive expectations and role deviations could be health-damaging for men, but could also be disastrous for women, children and other members of the family. Emerging data indicate that domestic violence against women has increased during this global pandemic – a situation that is called by UN Women “a shadow pandemic” (UN Women, 2020). Domestic violence reflects unjust patriarchal and harmful gender norms. Some men are experiencing pressures and difficulties with their power dynamics because of being at home under lockdown. At the same time, in times of high stress and uncertainty, patriarchal gender constructions and dynamics can be disrupted. As a result, patriarchal men can resort to violence against intimate partners (Molano, 2020). Perpetuating violence is a longstanding method of demonstrating or reinstating manhood or masculinity (Hearn, 1998). Therefore, promoting nonviolent nonpatriarchal masculinities has been indicated as a key item on the violence prevention agenda during COVID-19 period (UN Women & WHO, 2020). Engaging men and boys in critical discussions during this period is expected to play an important role in promoting healthy and non-violent behaviors (Betron, Gottert, Pulerwitz, Shattuck & Stevanovic-Fenn, 2020).

An area of special concern is the nexus between COVID-19 pandemic and male suicide. Emerging research reports also confirm men are dying at a higher rate than women from suicide during the Covid-19 pandemic (Thakur & Jain, 2020; Mamun & Ullah, 2020). Several direct and indirect triggering factors such as financial and future insecurities, fear of infections, social stigma, anxiety and excessive regulations, among others, stand behind male suicidality during COVID-19 (Thakur & Jain, 2020; Mamun & Ullah, 2020; Khan, Ratele & Najuwa, 2020). Globally suicide is considered as a masculine act (Cleary, 2012). There is a striking gender difference in suicide rates worldwide, with men accounting for higher deaths by suicide than women. Male suicide rates are at 15.6 persons per 100 000 population, whereas females are at 7 persons per 100 000 population (Naghavi, 2019). Given the sexed/gendered nature of suicidal behaviours, during and following COVID-19 crisis suicide prevention efforts ought to pay specific attention to the heightened male vulnerability because male suicidal behavior is often embedded in deepest emotions and despairs resulting from masculine deficiencies or inadequacy associated with the traditional masculine role expectations (Khan, Ratele, Helman, Dlamini, & Makama, 2020). Furthermore, the risks associated with male suicidality are always higher as men feel restrained to disclose disturbing feelings and emotional pains to family members, peers and health care professionals due to adherence to strong traditional masculine norms (Cleary, 2012).

Conclusion: Way Forward

While there is no evidence as of yet, it could be that it is especially those men who subscribe to hegemonic socio-cultural ideas and presumptions of cisgender construction who are likely to suffer during COVID-19 pandemic and possibly in the immediate post-COVID-19 pandemic future. At the same time, some men who subscribe to traditional masculinity may be putting themselves at risk through engaging in risky behaviors such as disregarding social distancing, hand-washing, and mask-

wearing rules, among others. What is slowly emerging from news media across the world is that while those in occupations in which working from home or online is possible may survive, occupations traditionally associated with masculinity are also being swiftly worn away during the coronavirus catastrophe. There are massive job losses globally. There are reports of increased poverty and hunger rates in countries from the Global South and even from the Global North. Consequently, the status of being the primary breadwinner for the family will be put under even more pressure.

Therefore, extensive efforts are needed to minimise the implications of men's traditional masculinity practices that will give them more social, economic and health-related immunity during COVID-19. This crisis can be taken up as an opportunity to topple the trouble, expectation and burden associated with men as head of household and breadwinner through promoting shared caregiving roles and responsibilities between women and men with equal importance (Betron et al., 2020). It is imperative to promote notions of positive masculinity through a range of media and digital platforms and make drives against restrictive male-female gender dichotomisation. There is no alternative during this crisis to create space for men to speak out of their sufferings and trauma, and to break the shackle of traditional masculinity. Policy interventions must aptly recognise men's needs, sufferings and diversities and measures must be in place to eliminate the barriers men face in accessing services during the COVID-19 pandemic (Betron et al, 2020).

References

- Baker, P. (2020). Call for global evidence on gender and COVID-19. Retrieved from <https://www.menshealthforum.org.uk/news/call-global-evidence-gender-and-covid-19>.
- Betron, M., Gottert, A., Pulerwitz, J., Shattuck, D. & Stevanovic-Fenn, N. (2020): Men and COVID-19: Adding a gender lens. *Global Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2020.1769702>
- Cleary, A. (2012). Suicidal action, emotional expression, and the performance of masculinities. *Social Science & Medicine*, 74(4), 498-505. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.08.002>
- Connell, R.W. & Messerschmitt, J.W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinities: Rethinking the concept. *Gender and Society*, 19(6), 829-859. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02F0891243205278639>
- Courtenay, W. H. (2000b). Constructions of masculinity and their influence on men's well-being: a theory of gender and health. *Social Science & Medicine*, 50(10), 1385-1401. [https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1016/S0277-9536\(99\)00390-1](https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1016/S0277-9536(99)00390-1)
- Durant, I. (2020). COVID-19 requires gender-equal responses to save economies. Retrieved from <https://unctad.org/en/pages/newsdetails.aspx?OriginalVersionID=2319>.
- Garfield, C. F., Isacco, A., & Rogers, T. E. (2008). A review of men's health and masculinity. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*, 2(6), 474-487. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1559827608323213>
- Global Health 50/50 (nd). COVID-19 sex-disaggregated data tracker. Retrieved from <https://globalhealth5050.org/covid19/>.
- Hearn, J. (1998). *The violences of men: How men talk about and how agencies respond to men's violence to women*. London, UK: SAGE.
- Jin, J-M., Bai P., He, W., Wu, F., Liu, X-F., Han, D-M, Liu, S., & Yang, J-K., (2020). Gender differences in patients with COVID-19: focus on severity and mortality. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 8, 152. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2020.00152>

- Khan, A., Ratele, K., & Arendse, N. (2020). Men, Suicide, and Covid-19: Critical Masculinity Analyses and Interventions. *Postdigital Science and Education*, 2(3), 651-656. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-020-00152-1>
- Khan, A. R., Ratele, K., Helman, R., Dlamini, S., & Makama, R. (2020). Masculinity and Suicide in Bangladesh. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 0030222820966239. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222820966239>
- Mahalik, J. R., Burns, S. M., & Syzdek, M. (2007). Masculinity and perceived normative health behaviors as predictors of men's health behaviors. *Social Science & Medicine*, 64 (11), 2201–2209. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.02.035>
- Mamun, M., & Ullah, I. (2020). COVID-19 suicides in Pakistan, dying off not COVID-19 fear but poverty? – the forthcoming economic challenges for a developing country. *Brain, Behaviour, and Immunity*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbi.2020.05.028>
- Mooney, C., Kaplan, S., & Denis, B. (2020). All across the United States, the coronavirus is killing more men than women, data show. *The Washington Post*, April 05. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/04/04/coronavirus-men/>. Accessed 29 May, 2020
- Molano, S. (2020). Men, masculinity, violence and care in times of Covid-19. Retrieved from <https://www.defyinggenderoles.org/master-in-love/2020/4/16/men-masculinity-violence-and-care-in-times-of-covid-19>.
- Naghavi, M. (2019). Global, regional, and national burden of suicide mortality 1990 to 2016: Systematic analysis for the global burden of disease study. *British Medical Journal*, 364, 194. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.l94>
- Nkangu, M.N., Olatunde, O.A., & Yaya, S. (2017). The perspective of gender on the Ebola virus using a risk management and population health framework: A scoping review. *Infectious Diseases of Poverty*, 6 (1), 135. doi:10.1186/s40249-017-0346-7
- Purdie, A., Hawkes, S., Buse, K., Onarheim, K., Aftab, W., Low, N., & Tanaka, S. (2020). Sex, gender and COVID-19: disaggregated data and health disparities. *Blog BMJ Global Health*. Retrieved from <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmjgh/2020/03/24/sex-gender-and-covid-19-disaggregated-data-and-health-disparities/>.
- Thakur, V., & Jain, A., (2020). COVID 2019-Suicides: A global psychological pandemic. *Brain, Behaviour, and Immunity*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbi.2020.04.062>
- UN Women (2020). Violence against women and girls: the shadow pandemic. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>.
- UN Women & WHO (2020). Violence Against Women and Girls: Data Collection during COVID-19. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/vaw>.
- van Osch, T. (2020). The gender impact of Coronavirus: How to move to an economy that cares for people and the planet. Retrieved from <https://wideplus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-gender-impact-of-Corona-Virus.pdf>.
- Wenham, C., Smith, J., and Morgan, R. (2020). COVID-19: the gendered impacts of the outbreak. *The Lancet*, 395, 846-848. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30526-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30526-2)
- World Bank Group (2020). Gender dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Retrieved from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33622/Gender-Dimensions-of-the-COVID-19-Pandemic.pdf>.

THE POLITICAL ANNEXATION OF THE SPORTS HERO IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA. THE CASE OF SIMONA HALEP

Vasile-Teodor BURNAR¹
DOI: 10.35782/JCPP.2021.1.02

Abstract: *The present article aims to highlight the ways in which the sports hero in Romania is “annexed”, ie used and instrumentalized by the political power, represented by public institutions, political parties and / or politicians. The case study analyzes the ceremonies and awards bestowed upon the tennis player Simona Halep, the most prominent sports figure of Romania in the past decade, by a number of local authorities in the country (Buşteni, Constanţa, Călăraşi, Bucharest, Cluj) and by the Romanian Presidency, from late 2013 to the present day. We scrutinize the reasons behind such feats of public homage and the media coverage it entailed, while also trying to explain why sport, and tennis in particular, is courted assiduously by politicians in the country – and what this reveals about the standing of the sports hero in Romanian society and political legitimization strategies. We also explore the reasons why apparently similar political strategies of gaining political kudos through association with a sport hero work brilliantly for one Romanian politician and dramatically backfire for another. Last but not least, we take a look at the way the sports hero was instrumentalized during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Keywords: *political annexation, sports hero, sports and politics, Simona Halep, COVID-19*

Preamble and Objectives

This article aims to analyze the ways in which the sports hero in contemporary Romania is “annexed” and used by the political power, using as a case study the public honors bestowed upon tennis player Simona Halep, who in the past 6 years has become one of the most influential Romanians from outside the political sphere, gaining, by virtue of the performances achieved in her sport, wide social recognition and popular sympathy (Express Press, 2015). Since this kind of recognition of the great champions

¹ PhD student, Faculty of History, University of Bucharest, e-mail: vasile.teodor.burnar@drd.unibuc.ro

in Romanian sport has become customary, and their annexation by the political factor along with other interested parties is a recurring reality (GSP, 2011; HotNews, 2018b), we intend to analyze the way in which a series of public institutions in Romania (the town halls of Bușteni, Constanța, Călărași, Bucharest; the city of Cluj - through the Cluj County Council, but especially through the mayor Emil Boc; the Romanian Presidency) put it in practice and legitimized themselves overtly, by associating with Simona Halep.

The general objective of this article is to review the ways in which the sports hero (Simona Halep) is publicly mythologized and glorified. In this sense, we will define the sports hero, then we will review a series of public festivities that had as a protagonist the tennis player from Constanța, focusing on the most publicized of them. Last but not least, we aim to analyze the significance of the athlete in the hierarchy of heroes accepted by the public, and the analysis of the place that the sports hero holds in the legitimizations of the political factor.

Our analysis seeks to answer the following questions: a) What are the ways and strategies by which Romanian political institutions and politicians exploit / annex a sports celebrity / a sports hero? Can it be compared with other cases, from other sports or other geographical and cultural areas?; b) What is the concrete way in which the athlete is honored as a public hero and what are the image benefits that political forums and politicians want to obtain from that homage?; c) what was the reaction of the public opinion and the mass media in Romania towards the instances in which the sportswoman Simona Halep was the protagonist of an “annexation” (or attempt of) by politicians? Was there a double standard in evaluating these “seizures”?; d) by whom does a sports hero nowadays accept to be “annexed”, and why?

Heroism and Heroes

"The human inclination to commemorate heroes" and to celebrate their achievements "seems to be a universal feature of human culture" (Becker & Eagly, 2004, p. 163), which spans history: from oral traditions in Antiquity and medieval poems, to contemporary society, where heroes are honored "not only in literature, but also in film, television and journalism" (ibid.). Hook (1945) says that the hero is as old as history, while Fishwick (1975) sees in heroes «the mirrors of time»: "Every hero mirrors the time and place where he lives. He must reflect the most intimate hopes and beliefs in a public way". In general, Becker and Eagly (2004, p. 163) note that "heroes and heroism are defined in terms of courage and risk of one's life as well as noble purpose". A common denominator of the various theoretical orientations regarding heroism seems to be its inclusion in the broader category of prosocial or helpful behaviors (ibid., p. 164), "accepting the risk to one's own life being the one that (...) transforms prosocial behavior into heroism".

Sport as a repository of moral values

Sports heroes are central to modern sport. For Holt et al. (cited in Lines, 2001), "sport without a hero is like Hamlet without a Prince". The question is whether sport "can revitalize the moral spirit, without which the community risks becoming an empty

abstraction" (Smart, 2005, p. 4). To paraphrase Inglis (cited in Smart, 2005), sport used to be a repository of ideas «that were central to our morality» (ibid., p. 5). The special moral quality attributed to sport and to its practitioners, amateurs or professionals, would therefore be the bridge between heroism *lato sensu* and sports heroism. Sport "has been credited with the ability to nurture "the natural impulses of generosity, elation, heroism, grace, [and] decorum" (Inglis, cited in Smart, 2005).

For some authors, however, the influences and (media, financial) pressures to which sport and athletes were increasingly subjected during the twentieth century "eroded, if not completely undermined the moral value of sport and the prospect of «authentic» sporting heroism" (Hoch, cited in Smart, 2005). It is obvious that heroism has been substantially changed by the rigors and boom of contemporary media.

Without sharing the finality of the classic, martial hero – if we do not consider sport a surrogate of war, as Orwell (2000) proposed, the sports hero serves a similar function (Norwood, 1982, p. 12), heroes and sports legends being held in high esteem by contemporary society and press (ibid., p. 13).

The modern sports hero

According to Barney and Barney (1989), athletes become heroes because of their consistent and remarkable long-term performance, as well as because of their morality, proven social responsibility, and intellectual abilities. Smith (1973) says that modern sports heroes have special physical abilities, maintain a standard of excellence year after year, overcome obstacles, and display individual flair or charisma. Modern sports heroes, notes Wenner,

are models of athletic competence and of social values who are admired for their outstanding and skillful sporting performance, their courage, expertise, perseverance, assertiveness, generosity, social ideals, dependability, honesty and character. (Lawrence A. (ed.), 1998, p. 138).

Writing in *Dilema Veche* magazine, Coman (2010) distinguishes between stars, celebrities and heroes. The first category is allegedly a meteoric one and maintained by the media, the second is recommended by artistic, sporting, economic performances etc., which "enjoy public recognition and intense media coverage". Heroes, writes Coman, "remain in the collective consciousness for a remarkable deed, usually one with a larger purpose" marking the history of a community, which would also extend to sporting achievements. It remains to be seen whether Simona Halep is just a transient national hero (Dumitriu, 2018, p. 30) - it is certain that she enjoys, at this moment, the status of sports hero and a lasting celebrity.

The politics-sports relationship. The political annexation of the sports hero

It has been argued (Hoberman, 1977, p. 82) that, based on historical evidence, "sport is not an ideologically neutral entity". If we looked at it as a mere physical activity,

exclusively utilitarian, it would be "really harmless". However, the appropriation of sport (and especially of its heroes) by "ideological observers of all kinds: political figures, writers, sociologists" etc. invalidates the thesis of neutrality. Sport, therefore, "gives rise to meanings, including ideological" appropriation, "only when an observer thinks of it" (ibid.). Moreover, sport has been transformed, countless times throughout history, into a policy instrument, "being appropriated by observers with ideological interests (Paddick, 1984) and integrated into a political Weltanschauung" (Hoberman, 1977, p. 83).

As sport is a popular leisure activity and has a "liquid quality" (Edwards, 1973, cited in Paddick, 1984, p. 61), which makes it "ideologically innocent" (Hoberman, 1977, p. 80), it is common for politicians to use sports and sports figures as a resource, for a variety of political purposes. Sport provides politically useful resources, and modern sport in particular has been "rarely free from political influence" (Horne et al., 1999, cited in Lin et al., 2008).

Like religion and show business, sports offer the politician association with something non-political that large numbers of people are attracted to. Not only do politicians use the rhetoric of sports for political purposes, they also express their interest in sports to dramatize their commonality. Candidates campaigning for office attend sporting events, mention the local team, and seek the endorsement of famous athletes. Endorsement-seeking illustrates how the politics seeks out popular culture. The endorsement of a famous athlete somehow gives the aspiring politician a kind of popular status and humanity he might not enjoy otherwise. The athlete is the embodiment of both material and moral success on the playing-field, and the politician seems to think that with the association some of the heroic magic might rub off. And this is nothing new: both Al Smith and Herbert Hoover sought the endorsement of Babe Ruth in 1928! (Combs, 1984, p. 67)

In the last century, the danger of exploiting sport for commercial and political purposes has increased (Pedersen, 2013), as the resonance of the phenomenon and of sports heroes in society "exploded". The Nazi Reich, fascist Italy and Peronist Argentina (Rein, 1998) each used sport for ideological purposes, while communist countries such as the GDR and the USSR (Riordan, 1977 cited in Paddick, 1984, p. 59) "have invested heavily in sports, often to support nation-building and to use international success, especially Olympic success, to demonstrate the superiority of communism over capitalism" (Houlihan, 2007). However, not only authoritarian systems resort to sport, but also politically stable and economically advanced states: the opportunity to strengthen national identity through sports success and to do diplomacy and country marketing via sport, as a soft power resource, is far too tempting to ignore (ibid., pp. 3472-3476). It should also be noted that in the scheme proposed by American sociologist Orrin E. Klapp, which explains the appearance of a popular hero, public recognition and formal honors represent the second stage (Klapp, 1949), out of a series of five that lead to the "hero cult".

For the purposes of this analysis, as the terminology related to the instrumentalization of sport and sports heroes is diverse, the terms "annexation", "exploitation", "appropriation", "instrumentalization" will be used alternately, but always with the same meaning, that of using sport and sports heroes for an ideological purpose, to advance a political message or to improve the image of the politician / entity associated with the sports hero in order to "annex" his / her celebrity.

An object of the political annexation we analyze, celebrity has become a defining feature of our media society. Ubiquitous in the mainstream media and the tabloid press, in advertising and activism (Driessens, 2013, p. 641), it has profoundly affected many areas, especially politics, as "celebrity has become a valuable resource to use in power struggles" (ibid., pp. 641-42). Celebrity status gives those who enjoy it discursive power and a voice that cannot be ignored (Marshall, 1997, cited in Driessens, 2013, p. 642) and is supposed to function as a general mark of success (Bell, 2010, cited in Driessens, 2013, p. 642). Celebrity culture, notes Cashmore (2006, p. 6), "affects (...) not just passionate fans, but entire populations". Indeed, the social and cultural impact of celebrity is obvious - what has been conceptualized as *celebritization* (Driessens, 2013, p. 643). One interpretation of this phenomenon is that it denotes the versatility of celebrities within media and entertainment (Lewis, 2010, cited in Driessens, 2013) and their "migration" to areas not traditionally associated with fame. A celebrity who supports a politician or even becomes one is a common example.

The link between the media, the entertainment industry (to which sport can be ascribed) and politics has generated the phenomenon known as "celebrity politics" (Agyepong, 2017). It has its historical origins in the United States, where the Kennedy era and Ronald Reagan's election were seen as the point of convergence between "celebrity production lines and politics" (Turner, 2004, p. 18). It is noteworthy that the literature on politicians and other decision-makers who use celebrities, either trying to become celebrities themselves or using celebrities to legitimize their policies, is limited compared to those dealing with the involvement of celebrities in politics.

In a typology developed by Marsh, 't Hart and Karen Tindall, the authors supplement the existing framework with a new category, that of the *politician who uses others' celebrity*, described as „office holder who uses specific celebrities and others' fame to endorse their own candidature, party or policies" (Marsh et al., 2010, p. 327). The typology of celebrity politics proposed by Marsh et al. also includes "celebrity advocate", "celebrity activist / endorser", "celebrity politician" and "politician celebrity" (ibid.). It is in the novel category of this typology that we will include the politicians who "annexed" (or tried to annex) the celebrity and the success of the sports hero Simona Halep, in cases that we will analyze.

The persuasive effect of famous activists and supporters seems to be more pronounced when certain conditions are met. 't Hart and Tindall (2009, cited in Marsh et al., 2010) argue that the political and charitable activities of celebrities will be seen as more significant and successful the more the initial source of their fame is based on merit, the greater the social prestige of the cultural field in which the celebrity gained fame; the longer the fame; and the wider (geographically and numerically) and more open (relative to social classes and cultural groups) is the extent of fame. All the boxes seem to be

ticked in the case of Simona Halep, one of the most popular contemporary Romanian athletes (DigisportRo, 2019).

The political annexation of sports heroes around the world

The phenomenon of the annexation of sport by politics is not, as we mentioned at the beginning, by far a Romanian one. Congratulating, nominating and honoring sports heroes with distinctions or special ceremonies are practiced all over the world.

For example, on the occasion of the World Cup held in Russia in 2018, the controversial Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov granted the honorary citizenship of the country to the Egyptian national star, Mohamed Salah, taking advantage of the fact that the "Pharaohs" set camp in the Republic. According to The Guardian (2018), dictator Kadyrov vehemently denied using Salah's presence in Grozny to generate positive publicity. Even so, the quoted source notes, Kadyrov made sure that a series of photos of him with Salah were made public.

Other footballers have also become honorary citizens of some localities – among them the Portuguese Luis Figo (The Portugal News, n.d.), the Argentine Diego Maradona (La Stampa, 2017) or the German Philipp Lahm (BeSoccer, 2019).

Tennis too attracts public honors. In August 2014, the most successful player in Bulgaria, Grigor Dimitrov, received the title of honorary citizen of the city of Varna, with unanimous votes (Novinite 2014). That same year, the famous tennis player Rafael Nadal, born on the Spanish island of Mallorca, received the title of "adopted son" of Madrid, the highest distinction of the city, from the mayor Ana Botella (Dawn, 2014). Another Iberian tennis player, Carlos Moya, was honored in 2004 with the honorary citizenship of the Croatian city of Umag, receiving a special medal from Croatian President Stjepan Mesić (Croatia Open Tournament History, n.d.).

In women's tennis, the Hungarian player Timea Babos was among the eight athletes, artists and scientists rewarded by the Budapest Municipal Assembly in 2018 because "through their activities, served the development of Budapest and the growth of its reputation" (Babos, 2018). The award consisted not only of honorary citizenship, but also of a financial incentive (ibid.). The first Japanese to become a world leader in the WTA circuit, Naomi Osaka, was congratulated in January 2019 by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who thanked her for her victory at the US Open, purportedly giving Japan energy and excitement in difficult times (The Guardian, 2018). And the success of Halep's opponent in the final of Roland Garros 2017, the Latvian Jelena Ostapenko, was publicly exploited, with the youngster becoming the star of a video presentation of her hometown, Riga (Focus on Travel News, 2018).

It should be noted, however, that politicians do not always "blindly" consent to the annexation of a popular sports figure. This was the case of the Polish tennis player Agnieszka Radwanska, who was nominated in 2019 for the honorary citizenship of Krakow, her hometown, but did not receive the distinction. "Honorary citizenship (...) is not a medal for sports achievements, but for achievements for the city, for the

development of a certain field in the city. Something we haven't seen yet", explained a public official, Rafa Komarewicz (Afaae, 2019).

Politics and tennis on harmonica tones

In the recent history of Romania, the use of sports heroes by the political factor is a common practice: because sport enjoys a unique social impact, an important sporting performance is rarely ignored by politicians. The famous party at the Golden Blitz restaurant (ProSport, 2018a), featuring, in April 2006, the then president of Romania, Traian Băsescu, who came to congratulate the footballers of Steaua Bucharest for qualifying for the UEFA Cup semifinals, is a classic case of "annexation" of the sport.

As we have shown, the association with sport has political utility. Additionally, "as sports figures become popular embodiments of heroic success, their celebrity status can become a resource for successful political recruitment" (Combs, 1984, p. 68). For example, in Liberia, former footballing great George Weah won the chair of president in 2017 largely due to his status as a national hero (IICRR, 2018). However, "the transfer of magic is not guaranteed": in 1976, the US presidential candidate, Gerald Ford, was supported by a plethora of athletes, which, however, did not bring him the success he craved (Combs, 1984, p. 67). The National Union for Romania's Progress party (UNPR) built its communication campaign in the 2019 European elections on the sporting successes of two former glories, Ilie Năstase (tennis) and Anghel Iordănescu (football), who opened the electoral list (Știripesurse, 2019). However, the strategy of annexing the two big names in sports failed miserably (GSP, 2019b).

Simona Halep's star has attracted, through its growing brilliance, the Romanian political parties and Romanian politicians of recent years. One of Simona Halep's first political "annexations" took place in December 2013 (GSP, 2014a; Actualitatea Prahoveană, 2014), after the 23-year-old athlete at the time, star of Romanian tennis, had a remarkable year in the WTA circuit, winning no less than six tournaments (GSP, 2014b). To the surprise of some, the one who decided to publicly honor Halep was not the mayor of Constanța, her hometown, Radu Mazăre, who had publicly expressed his reservations about the value of tennis (Libertatea, 2018), but, the mayor of the mountain town of Bușteni, Emanoil Savin. He granted the young sportswoman the title of honorary citizen of the locality, a distinction to which a 500-square-meter plot of land was later added (Jurnalul Prahovean, 2014b), for which Halep signed the paperwork two months later.

"Bușteni will become the capital of Romanian tourism in the future and it seems natural to me that all the great Romanian personalities will have a house in this resort, where they will retire in their old age, a kind of neighborhood of champions. On the other hand, Bușteni supports the sporting performance and it seems natural to me to reward [Halep] properly", mayor Savin defended his gesture, according to Adevărul (2013).

An article published in February 2014 on an online information platform by Bușteni City Hall noted (IloveBusteni, 2014) that "Simona Halep was welcomed today, according to tradition, with bread and salt and huge bouquets of flowers by the mayor of Bușteni, Emanoil Savin, at the Bușteni City Hall". The same piece of news pointed

out that the ceremony was attended by the future neighbors of Halep, the judoka Alina Dumitru, gold medalist at the Olympic Games in 2008, and the fighter Ionuț Iftimoaic, in turn rewarded by Emanoil Savin's mayor's office in previous years (Adevărul, 2014), as a part of a euphemistically called "tradition" – in fact a well-developed tourism marketing strategy by the officials of the institution from Bușteni, meant to increase the visibility of the town (Adevărul, 2013) and presumably to promote the mayor. No less than 50 personalities from various fields had been rewarded at that time by the Busteni City Hall and the mayor Emanoil Savin with the title of honorary citizen of the locality, the mayor talking about the creation of a "Champions Quarter" in Bușteni. The article went on to note that "Simona was dealt a big surprise, prepared especially for her by Emanoil Savin, namely two huge cakes, one in the form of a tennis racket and the other representing the trophy won in Doha" (IloveBusteni, 2014. *Please note that the underlinings in both quoted paragraphs belong to us and want to highlight the self-laudatory, sometimes hyperbolic rhetoric practiced by Bușteni City Hall and Emanoil Savin at the award ceremony in honor of Simona Halep*).

More interesting than the honors themselves – in fact, typical and practiced all around the world for exceptional achievements in a field of activity - was the ceremony staged for Halep. A filming of the event (Ziua de Constanta, 2014) shows how, at the entrance to the Bușteni City Hall, the sportswoman is greeted by Mayor Savin with the two festive cakes. The score is provided by a harmonica player hired by the town hall, who performs the couplet:

*With respect and value
The honorary citizen
Made her life beautiful
The tennis player from Constanța!*

*She has no worries or care
World number 7, aye,
And I'll win game after game,
'cuz I also wanna win a Grand Slam!*

The association of Bușteni with Simona Halep, who announced her intention to build a house in the city (Libertatea, 2014), was just beginning to take shape. In the summer of the same year, after the final played at Roland Garros, the new honorary citizen was congratulated by the local mountain rescuers. "The Princess of the Carpathians", as she was nicknamed ad hoc by the local press (Jurnal Prahovean, 2014a), was honored by the authorities with a huge banner raised over 2300 meters high, under a symbolic place, the Monument of Heroes – the Cross of Caraiman. On the banner, an onlooker could read, in huge letters, "Thank you Simona Halep!".

In the summer of 2017, right after surprisingly losing the final at Roland Garros to Jelena Ostapenko, Halep returned to Bușteni where, according to press, she was received with honors (Fanatik, 2017) by local officials represented by Mayor Irinel Ghiță and Deputy Mayor Nae Savel. It should be noted that the former mayor,

Emanoil Savin, who had opened the series of honors towards Simona Halep, had meanwhile become a senator.

In October 2017, a message from the parliamentarian for the newly crowned world leader received publicity. "Unlike others, Emanoil Savin knows a champion when he sees one" an article in the national press stated (Republika News, 2017). "He greeted most of Romania's great athletes in Bușteni, when he was mayor of the Prahova resort. One of the biggest, obviously, is Simona Halep", the source noted.

In December 2017, just two months after securing the world number 1 position, a premiere in Romanian women's tennis, Halep received, also from Bușteni, a rare accolade, being honored with an occasional postage stamp, valid on the spot for only one day, and also with a postcard. The initiative belonged to the same Savin, this being a joint venture by the Bușteni City Hall, the Bartoc Cultural Foundation, the Bucharest Philatelists' Association and the national postal services operator, Poșta Română (Observatorul Prahovean, 2017). The stamp contained the inscription "WORLD NUMBER 1 IN THE 2017 WTA RANKING", and the postcard showed Simona Halep next to the globe. The reverse of the illustration marked the connection between Bușteni and Halep, emphasizing that the latter, "HONORARY CITIZEN OF BUȘTENI, BECAME ON OCTOBER 7, 2017, IN BEIJING, THE LEADER OF WORLD TENNIS", with the text being superposed on an image of the mountain city. 500 copies of the postcard were put on general sale.

Bușteni City Hall's desire to "capitalize" on Simona Halep's success was also evident in the summer of 2018, less than a month after her triumph at Roland Garros. Then, the mayor's office officials issued and released for circulation a new limited series of 400 postcards, inscribed with the face of Simona Halep and the Roland Garros trophy, a gesture occasioned by the Bușteni City Days. The postcard portraying Halep served, *inter alia*, "to mark the 110th anniversary of the first documentary attestation of Bușteni". Observers noted that the tribute was normal, as another world number one in Romanian tennis, former glory Ilie Năstase, had also enjoyed it (ProSport, 2018b).

The road opened by Bușteni was followed by other public institutions and officials from Romania. In June 2014, on the very day when Halep climbed to 5th place in the world, the local councilors from Constanța, together with the mayor Radu Mazăre, finally offered her in absentia the distinction of honorary citizen and the key of the city, as well as a land of about 500 square meters in the locality (Digi24, 2014). "Of course, there are some who will say that they proposed to make her an honorary citizen a few months ago and I said that she must grow. I see it stimulated her and she grew very fast. Once again, congratulations! ", mayor Mazăre was quoted as saying. A local councilor, Stelian Gima, noted that Halep brings international notoriety to Constanța, likening its reputation to that of the well-known summer resort of Mamaia (ibid.).

"Many in Călărași wonder why Halep is an honorary citizen"

One of the cases of political annexation of Simona Halep that raised the most eyebrows took place in Călărași, on November 28th, 2018 (Observator de Călărași, 2018).

Coming after an exceptional year, the leader of the WTA hierarchy accepted the invitation of the local officials, led by mayor Daniel Ștefan Drăgulin, to pay them a visit to receive the title of honorary citizen of Călărași municipality. It is interesting to note that the invitation was issued through the Călărași Branch of the Romanian Aromanian Community, which also organized a special event in her honor. According to Romanian media (Fanatik, 2018), about 700 Aromanians lived in Călărași at the time. Faced with doubters of its honesty, the organization was quick to motivate its approach: "The grandparents from the father's side, Halep Stere and Zoica, grandparents Halep Nicolae and Sirma, as well as grandparents from the mother's side, Pufleanu Dumitru and Chirața, and grandparents Pufleanu Pana, emigrated to Cadrlater in 1932, locating in Rahman-Asiclar commune, Călărași county, passed through Călărași on arrival, frequented Călărași municipality through their preoccupations and so connected with Călărași" (Jurnalul de Calarasi, 2018).

On a blizzard, Halep arrived in Călărași, where the workers fought with the snow all morning to pave way. "There has been no such mobilization since the elections", was the extremely expressive comment of one of the workers (Sport.ro, 2018). The festive agenda included a visit to the office of the mayor Drăgulin, the presence at a show honoring the champion, the handing over of the title of honorary citizen by the mayor, press statements and an autograph session.

Of interest for the present analysis is the way in which the initiators of the event justified their gesture and exploited the moment in the media. Thus, Mayor Drăgulin declared: "Why Simona Halep? Because she is Romanian. Why Simona Halep? Because Romania lacks models. She is a model of work, ambition, perseverance, effort. All this is embodied in this golden lump that Romania has and which is called Simona Halep. We are a small community, around 68,000 inhabitants, who I am convinced are following Simona. Why Simona Halep? Because she is ours and, although she does not have a Călărași ID, we adopted her, and I am honored that I am her contemporary". The same Drăgulin promised a tennis complex in Călărași that was to be named after the tennis player (Ediția.ro, 2018). Taking advantage of Halep's presence in Călărași, the mayor then seemed to validate his own public policies (Marsh, 2010, p. 327), stating that "Today is a time when, slowly, slowly, Călărași sits (sic!) on the map of Romania as a city where things are done, step by step, so that the citizens of this city feel ever closer to home" (Observator de Călărași, 2018).

This time too, the media highlighted the ritual staged for Simona Halep: the tennis player " was greeted with bread and salt" by two children in traditional Romanian costumes (Actualitatea de Călărași, 2018) and was received in the office of the mayor Daniel Ștefan Drăgulin, signing in the book of honor and also on a miniature flag" (Ziua de Constanța, 2018).

Not all the people of Călărași welcomed the invitation extended to Halep, however. In a video dedicated to the event, Pro TV news remarked, with transparent irony, that "in Călărași there is no tennis court and many people in the city wonder why Halep is an honorary citizen", given that "she never had any connection with this city" (Sport.ro, 2014). In an article titled "Tennis player from Constanța, Simona Halep, will receive the title of honorary Călărași. This is why ... ", the journalist Marian Pîrloagă, from the

publication *Atitudinea din Călărași*, ironically commented on the whole approach, suggesting that it represented a sample of political opportunism (*Atitudinea din Călărași*, 2018).

The most acid comment regarding the distinction given to Halep in Călărași came, however, from the local journal *Realitatea din Călărași*, in an article entitled, suggestively, "*Sula¹ ... the Prefecture... Drăgulin... the Press Office and Simona Halep!*", that catalogued the event as a "masquerade" with the "sole purpose" of promoting the mayor:

We believe that the great champion Simona Halep has nothing to do with the city of Călărași. Our newspaper refuses to take part in this masquerade with the sole purpose (...) to promote the image of Daniel Ștefan Drăgulin, on the advice of some councilors paid with public money, who have no idea what world they live in. (*Realitatea din Călărași*, 2018)

A successful annexation: Emil Boc

Another Romanian politician and mayor, the former prime minister Emil Boc, currently the mayor of Cluj-Napoca, had a clearly superior media coverage regarding the association with Simona Halep. Over time, Boc, a regular of appearances next to athletes and singers (*Antena 3*, 2011), stood out as a supporter of the Fed Cup (women's tennis) team of Romania – which he hosted in Cluj in 2016, twice in 2018 (when he met Simona Halep at the airport), and in 2020 respectively. Moreover, in 2018, Boc was warmly embraced by Simona Halep at the end of the match with Patty Schnyder, a gesture that made the rounds around Romania. "Surely no mayor in the world will have this honor," Boc said at the time, according to *Fanatik* (2018).

In February 2019, when Romania played again with the Czech Republic, this time away, in the quarterfinals of the Fed Cup, Mayor Boc made his way abroad, where he was leader of the fans and drummer-in-chief, being noticed and praised, for his efforts, by Halep (*Pal*, 2019). It is noteworthy that the group of supporters from Transylvania displayed a banner in Ostrava on which was written "Cluj-Napoca supports the Romanian team" (*Andrei*, 2019).

Two months later, in the Fed Cup semi-final against France, played in Rouen, Emil Boc "relapsed", stepping once again in the spotlight as leader of the Romanian fans who went to the Hexagon, with the mayor being singled out for praise by the non-playing captain of Romania, Florin Segărceanu (*Monitorul*, 2019a). According to *Gazeta Sporturilor*, which interviewed him on that occasion, the "ultras" Boc "was a one-man show at the confrontation France - Romania 3-2, from the Fed Cup semifinals. The mayor led the supporters in the stands, acting like a real supporter during the two days of the competition" (*Dinu*, 2019).

The frequent appearances at Romania's tennis matches and his friendship with Simona Halep seem to have benefited Emil Boc and Cluj, the mayor being labeled by the press

¹ Expletive with sexual connotations, in Romanian.

as "a big fan of tennis", which allowed him to talk about the possibility of Cluj hosting a WTA tournament. The move would further increase the prestige of the Transylvanian city, which in recent years has stood out through the electronic music festival UNTOLD (Prodan, 2015). In his turn, the businessman Ion Țiriac, a close friend of Halep, confirmed that he will discuss with Emil Boc on this topic (GSP, 2019a). Moreover, the press speculated that Boc's presence on Romania's trips was part of a communication strategy developed to lobby a future indoor tournament in Cluj, which was to be organized from 2020 (Sport.ro, 2019; Media9, 2019a). Some local journalists were not at all convinced of the sudden passion for tennis of Boc and his men. Commenting on the presence of a real squadron from Cluj Municipality at the match in Rouen, a publication sarcastically shouted, referring to "Simona Halep's directors' gallery": "Come on Romania! We are locking the City Hall!" (Media9, 2019b).

In June 2019, Halep returned to Cluj, with the city hosting (with the direct support of the Cluj County Council), for the second year in a row, Sports Festival (Ziare.com, 2019), where the tennis player starred in an exhibition. Again, the good relations between Emil Boc and Simona Halep came to light: during the exhibition, Halep invited Boc on the court, lent him the racket and played for him the role of a ball girl, provoking him to a „duel” with her father. Simona Halep even bowed to Mayor Boc (Burnar 2019a), to the thunderous ovations of 10,000 spectators. Conjecturally, it can be speculated that Boc earns political kudos from his association with Halep: the tennis player publicly expressed, on the same occasion, her gratitude to the mayor (in obvious contrast to her snubbing of Bucharest mayor Gabriela Firea on the National Arena – see Conțescu, 2018) and her endorsement of a WTA tournament in Cluj, an event that would further increase the city's fame and, consequently, the already high approval rating of Mayor Boc (Monitorul, 2019b; Monitorul, 2019c).

Gabriela Firea and the failed annexation in Bucharest

What worked for Emil Boc and Cluj turned, however, spectacularly against another Romanian politician, namely Gabriela Firea, the general mayor of Bucharest between 2016 and 2020. She had her first contact with Halep in February 2018, when the politician awarded her with the title of honorary citizen at the Excelsior Theater (GSP, 2018a), "as a sign of recognition of sporting merits", as shown in an internal act of the Bucharest Municipality (CGMB, 2018). In June 2018, immediately after Halep won the final in Paris, the Bucharest Municipality was asked by the champion and her staff to organize a meeting with the fans, to present a replica of the trophy (GSP, 2018b). After recriminations that the Municipality marginalizes the event (DC News, 2018), the agreed place was the National Arena, the largest stadium in Romania (capacity: 55,634), and the date was set for June 11. In context, two days before, a Social Democratic Party (PSD) rally "against judicial abuses" had taken place in Bucharest, attended by about two hundred thousand supporters of the political party of which Gabriela Firea was a member (Hotnews, 2018a). She made a speech in front of the crowd, followed by the PSD leader, Liviu Dragnea, who opened his speech by urging people to congratulate Simona Halep because "she brought us joy after 40 years". PSD supporters present in Victoriei Square reacted with loud applause.

Two days later, according to the press, "at the opening of the ceremony, the general mayor of Bucharest, Gabriela Firea (PSD)", wearing the tricolor scarf on her chest, "offered Simona Halep the symbolic key to the city and tried briefly to talk, but was booed off stage by the 20,000 people in the stands, who then chanted the sportswoman's name. Firea left the Arena before the end of the ceremony, at which point the boos turned even more intense" (Acum TV, 2018). As a result, "after this incident Gabriela Firea wrote on her Facebook page that the boos came from teams of hateful citizens, who came well organized, strategically placed among decent people" (Știrile TVR, 2018). The mayor lamented that "no good deed goes unpunished" and accused "the Soros' propaganda apparatus" and "its press henchmen", "fake news", "malicious comments" or "money received from dubious NGOs to transform Bucharest into a city under siege. Faced with an avalanche of insults and other critical comments, which accused her of "using Simona's image for some political capital" (Vice, 2018) Firea had to shut down her Facebook page three times in just twenty hours (Newsweek, 2018).

But it was not only the appearance of Gabriela Firea next to Simona Halep and the fact that she preceded her in the order of speeches that infuriated people. After the ceremony,

a set of collages and videos designed in PSD laboratories, accredits the idea that tennis player Simona Halep, winner of the Roland Garros tournament, cheered on Sunday on the National Arena by tens of thousands of Bucharest residents, especially families with children, would have been, in fact, the booed one and not the general mayor of PSD Gabriela Firea (...). The materials, which would make Goebbels' propaganda apparatus envious, were conceived, as revealed by the former president of PSD Victor Ponta, by a certain George Harabagiu from Neamț, brought along at the PSD headquarters in Bucharest by Liviu Dragnea, president of PSD. The materials were disseminated by the PSD organizations Giurgiu, Mehedinți, Tulcea, Constanța, Bucharest, Ilfov, Vâlcea (...). He distributed at 20:01 the piece which was then taken over by many PSD county organizations, and wrote «Alert the organizations and dissemination groups in the counties. Maximize the impact of the posting. Divide into groups!» (Acum TV, 2018).

Harabagiu, the coordinator of PSD's online campaigns, was fired by the then PSD president, Liviu Dragnea, after the controversial campaign (Digi24, 2018), which outraged a good part of the Romanian media and public (Dobrescu, 2018). Through many of its members, PSD admitted that it had mismanaged the entire event, apologizing to Halep and its fans and eating humble pie for the "unforgivable blunder". "Simona Halep deserved neither the faking of the meaning of the Monday night festivity, nor the use of her name in an unintelligent manner. We have an obligation to apologize for this gesture. I personally do it", wrote the social democrat Ionuț Vulpescu, former Minister of Culture, on his Facebook page (Eremita, 2018).

Mayor Firea also issued a mea culpa, following the wave of public criticism, stating after a few days that, based on her experience as a former journalist, she believed that "this is how it happens all over Europe, this is how it is done in America" (Țopescu, 2018).

In the Romanian media, the event was front page material for days in a row, generating a unanimously negative stance against the actions of the politician and condemning the political intrusion in sports (Dumitrescu, 2018). The general note was to qualify the appearance of the mayor next to Halep as a major blunder, a huge communication and political marketing error by the Municipality and especially by Firea personally. Covering the topic, Vice noted that "Simona Halep's victory at Roland Garros is about the only joy that the Romanian people still have today. Thus, it did not escape without being stained by the political dirt we are in" (Roşu, 2018).

Halep herself sought to distance herself from the scandal created around the moment, declaring: "I don't do politics, I don't say anything, I just went to share this joy of showing people the trophy. I went there strictly for the people, I do not want to comment on this topic" (Sport.ro, 2018).

Significant for our discussion is that what happened in Bucharest in June 2018 led the debate in another direction, some observers (Cartianu, 2019) wondering why a similar approach aimed at Halep, that of Mayor Emil Boc in Cluj (in the many cases previously described), worked in Transylvania, but failed dramatically for Gabriela Firea. The explanations can be neither categorical nor final, being rather a combination of factors: the public image of each of the mayors (generally good for Boc, seen as a progressive politician, in contrast to Firea, allegedly an impostor in politics), the political affiliation of each (an anti-PSD wave in Romanian society for the past five years being detrimental for the mayor of Bucharest), the positive promotion of Cluj in the mainstream press, unlike that of Bucharest, and so forth. A member of the National Audiovisual Council, Radu Herjeu, commented that the attitude of the press and public opinion in the case of Firea and Boc's association with Halep reeks of double standards and "propaganda": "Aha, I finally understood what propaganda wants to say! It's awful, even an electoral mess, to hand over the key of the capital city to the world number 1 in tennis, but it's a great and praiseworthy human refinement, totally apolitical on top, to go with the drum (!!!) to tennis matches and sneak in all the pictures with our players!" (DC News, 2019).

Climbing up the political ladder: when Halep received the Presidential award

The President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis, in turn awarded public honors to Halep, in July 2019, after she had won the Wimbledon tournament. As a result of her triumph, the sportswoman then received the highest decoration of the State: The National Order "Star of Romania" in the rank of Knight (Burnar 2019b). The ceremony was hosted by the Union Hall of the Cotroceni Palace, bordered by stained glass windows depicting the great historical figures of the Romanians, from Basarab I to Constantin Brâncoveanu. "Thank you on behalf of Romanians for the way you promote Romanian sport" the President told the tennis star (Digi 24, 2019), with the two also discussing the possibility of a match, which would have been televised. Halep would later countermand the match, "advised by relatives not to enter political games" (Coţescu, 2020).

Interestingly, Simona Halep's political "annexation" came not only from politicians, but also, surprisingly, from fans. In August 2018, a fan of Halep from the diaspora took advantage of her presence at a match in Montreal to criticize, through an invective, the ruling party in Romania (PSD), being then imitated by other spectators (Dobrescu, 2018). In the end, Halep asked her fans to refrain from such actions (Chiujea, 2018). A speculative explanation for choosing Simona Halep's match as an outlet for political frustrations, as a site of political protest, must take into account the high visibility of the event and the (self-) portrayal of the Romanian diaspora as a spokesman for the democratic aspirations of Romanians as a whole.

The political use of Simona Halep as a vaccination vector during the COVID-19 outbreak

Yet another instance in which Halep was used by Romanian politicians arised during the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020. At the start of the pandemic, when the situation was tense and Romanian authorities urged people to follow the health guidances they issued to curb the transmission of the virus, Halep was one of the celebrities who recorded a Public Service Announcement-type video message which was meant to inform about the risks of the pandemic, in March 2020 (GSP, 2020).

Subsequently, at the beginning of 2021, Halep was coopted by the Health Ministry of Romania to help the Romanian State in its propaganda effort to convince the general public of the effectiveness of the new vaccines that were just starting to be rolled out and administered against COVID-19. On January 5th, 2021, the Facebook page of the Ministry ran an image of Halep, containing a short quote: "Yes, I will surely take the vaccine jab", a photo which was accompanied by the caption:

Simona Halep is not only a sportswoman we admire, but also an example of responsibility to follow. After conquering COVID-19, Simona wants to get the vaccine, now she knows how the disease feels like.

"Yes, I will surely take the jab when possible, because I want this pandemic to end once and for all", Simona said. We all want it to end as soon as possible. To get back to the things and people we love. To our favourite sports. For that, we need to be responsible, to be like Simona. #RoVACCINATION (Ministerul Sănătății, 2021)

Although one can say that this is not an instance where a particular politician has taken credit for showing up next to Halep, we argue that this is another case of political instrumentalization, as the Romanian State is a political actor per se on the continental and the world stage, and on this occasion it plainly aimed to use Halep to inject life into a floundering vaccination effort (Onciu, 2021), which goes to show the sports hero's value for politics in this day and age, as his / her platform reaches millions of people, in some cases much more than a politician or a group of politicians will ever be able to. To put things into perspective, the Romanian elections of 6 December 2020 drew to the ballots only circa 6 million people (Rezultatevot.ro, 2020), less than one in three voters. It was the lowest turnout after the Romanian Revolution of 1989 (Prelipceanu, 2020), and it showed that Romanian people are disenchanted with politics, while

Romanian politicians suffer from a lack of legitimacy. Hence, the use of sporting greats to endorse the contentious (at least, in the early stages) vaccination program.

Conclusions

As early as 2013, Simona Halep started to be appealing to Romanian politicians. The pioneer of Simona's public recognition was the mayor of Bușteni, the first mayor in Romania to award the Constanța native the diploma of honorary citizen, amid disinterest in Halep by other public authorities. From that moment on, alongside continuous improvements in the WTA rankings for Halep, the acts of homage coming from politicians began to multiply. Although the public honors practiced by officials towards a sports hero are commonly practiced worldwide, both the Romanian media and public have denounced in select cases the lack of legitimacy of certain initiatives, criticizing the said politicians as opportunists. In some cases, one can speak of a faulty application of an established communication strategy or a wrong judgment of the context by the organizers. Other politicians have not suffered the same fate, receiving preferential treatment from both Halep and the public and the media. This analysis, combining theories about the instrumentalization of sportspeople by politics with empirical research and the analysis of journalistic discourse, did not aim to provide definitive answers or issue verdicts on the legitimacy, morality or immorality of these public actions. Future studies have the mission to enrich our approach and to reveal the motivations of political actors in relation to the honored athletes.

References

- Actualitatea de Călărași, (2018). Simona Halep a dansat pe ritmuri armânești, după ce a primit titlul de cetățean de onoare al municipiului Călărași. Actualitatea de Călărași [online]. 28 November 2018. [Viewed 14 January 2020]. Available from: <https://actualitateacalarasi.eu/simona-halep-a-dansat-pe-ritmuri-armanessti-dupa-ce-a-primit-titul-de-cetatean-de-onoare-al-municipiului-calarasi/>
- Actualitatea Prahoveană, (2014). Recunoaștere: Simona Halep a primit un teren în Bușteni, în calitate de cetățean de onoare al orașului. [online]. actualitateprahoveana.ro. [Viewed 27 November 2019]. Available from: <http://www.actualitateprahoveana.ro/editia-electronica/actual/recunoastere-simona-halep-a-primit-un-teren-in-busteni-in-calitate-de-cetatean-de-onoare-al-orasului-11629>
- Acum TV, (2018). Gabriela Firea, primarul Bucureștiului (PSD), a fost huiduită la o ceremonie în onoarea Simonei Halep. Acum TV [online]. 13 June 2018. [Viewed 05 March 2020]. Available from: <https://acum.tv/articol/81027/>
- Adevărul, (2013). Cartierul campionilor la Bușteni. Tenismena Simona Halep, cetățean de onoare al stațiunii [online]. adevarul.ro. [Viewed 1 December 2019]. Available from: https://m.adevarul.ro/index.php/locale/ploiesti/tenismena-simona-halep-cetatean-onoare-orasului-busteni-1_52a4a805c7b855ff568d20da/index.html
- Adevărul, (2014). Halep, apreciată în toată România. Simona a fost recompensată de Primăria Bușteni pentru performanțele sale [online]. adevarul.ro. [Viewed 2 December 2019]. Available from: https://adevarul.ro/news/sport/halep-apreciata-romania-simona-fost-recompensata-primaria-busteni-performantele-sale-1_530c6f64c7b855ff56a520d2/index.html
- Afaae., (2019). Agnieszka Radwaska Will Not Be an Honorary Citizen Of Krakow. [online]. afaae.com. [Viewed 20 September 2019]. Available from: <https://afaae.com/poland/agnieszka-radwaska-will-not-be-an-honorary-citizen-of-krakow-board-member-family-related-to-pis-politics/>

- Agvepong, L., (2017). Understanding the concept of celebrity capital through an empirical study of the role of celebrity political endorsements in 2008 and 2012 Ghana election campaigns. [Viewed 15 September 2019]. Available from: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Understanding-the-Concept-of-Celebrity-Capital-an-Agvepong/279f56790b43edaf980cd7a9c5069c8267e925be>
- Andrei, M., (2019). Emil Boc s-a dus în Cehia să le susțină pe Halep & Co în meciul din Fed Cup VIDEO. Știri de Cluj [online]. 09 February 2019. [Viewed 30 January 2020]. Available from: <https://www.stiridecluj.ro/sport/emil-boc-s-a-dus-in-cehia-sa-le-sustina-pe-halep-co-in-meciul-din-fed-cup-video>
- Antena 3, (2011). Emil Boc - sportiv, cântăreț, muncitor, prim-ministru. Doar la popularitate mai are de recuperat. Antena 3 [online]. 31 July 2011. [Viewed 18 January 2020]. Available from: <https://www.antena3.ro/politica/emil-boc-sportiv-cantaret-muncitor-prim-ministru-doar-la-popularitate-mai-are-de-recuperat-132271.html>
- Babos, T., (2018). Timi Became Honorary Citizen Of Budapest [online]. Babostimea.Hu. [Viewed 3 August 2019]. Available from: <https://babostimea.hu/en/timi-became-honorary-citizen-of-budapest/>
- Bădică, P., (2018). Fîrea și-a reînchis pagina de FB a treia oară în 20 de ore. Newsweek [online]. 13 June. Updated 13 June 2018, 11:28. [Viewed 06 March 2020]. Available from: <https://newsweek.ro/politica/firea-si-a-redeschis-pagina-de-facebook-dupa-ce-a-sters-miile-comentarii-negative>
- Barney, R.K. & Barney, D.E. (1989). *Night of heroes: Flags, flowers, and last hurriames*. Paper presented at the meeting of the North American Society for Sports History, Clemson, SC in Wenner, L.A. (ed.), *Mediasport*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 138.
- Becker, S. W., & Eagly, A. H. (2004). The heroism of women and men. *American Psychologist*, 59(3), 163-178. [Viewed 20 June 2019]. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.59.3.163>
- BeSoccer., (2019). Lahm Elected Honorary Citizen Of Munich [online]. BeSoccer. [Viewed 25 June 2019]. Available from: <https://www.besoccer.com/new/lahm-elected-honorary-citizen-of-munich-572543>
- Bocai, M., (2018). Simona Halep a dansat la Călărași și pe ritmurile melodiei închinată ei (video). Ziua de Constanța [online]. 30 November 2018. [Viewed 14 January 2020]. Available from: <https://www.ziuaconstanta.ro/stiri/monden/o-fata-cu-har-ce-a-iesit-din-neamul-armanesc-simona-halep-a-dansat-la-calarasi-si-pe-ritmurile-melodiei-inchinate-ei-video-677885.html>
- Burnar, V. T., (2019a). Video recording made during Sports Festival 2019. June 2019. Author's personal collection.
- Burnar, V. T., (2019b). Per aspera ad astra: Simona e, oficial, Steaua României. Lead.ro [online]. 30 July. [Viewed 30 July 2019]. Available from: <https://lead.ro/per-aspera-ad-astra-simona-e-oficial-steaua-romaniei/>
- Cartianu, G., (2019). Cheia și toba. De ce e Fîrea huiduită și Boc apreciat? Nu oricine e binevenit în preajma Simonei Halep!. Ziaristii.com [online]. 12 February 2019. [Viewed 01 April 2020]. Available from: <https://ziaristii.com/cheia-si-toba-firea-huiduita-boc-apreciat-nu-oricine-e-binevenit-preajma-simonei-halep/>
- Cashmore, E. (2006). *Celebrity / Culture*, Routledge, New York.
- CGMB, (2018). Hotărâre privind conferirea titlului de "Cetățean de onoare al Municipiului București" sportivei Simona Halep [online]. București: CGMB. [Viewed 03 March 2020]. Available from: https://api.pmb.ro/storage/CetateniOnoare/H497_17.pdf
- Chiujea, S., (2018). Reacția lui HALEP, după ce mai mulți români au strigat M.E PSD în timpul FINALEI de la Montreal. Arbitrul a cerut LINIȘTE. Gândul.ro [online]. 13 August. Updated 25 March 2019, 18:41. [Viewed 17 April 2019]. Available from: <https://www.gandul.ro/stiri/reactia-lui-halep-dupa-ce-mai-multi-romani-au-strigat-me-psd-in-timpul-finalei-de-la-montreal-arbitrul-a-cerut-liniste-17413264>

- Coman, M. (2010). Vedete, Eroi și Celebrități. Dilema Veche [online]. December 2010. [Viewed 15 July 2019]. Available from: <https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/tema-saptamanii/articol/vedete-eroi-si-celebritati>
- Combs, J. E. (1984). *Polpop: Politics and Popular Culture in America*. Bowling Green University Popular Press, Ohio.
- Conțeșcu, (2018). Simona Halep n-a vrut să iasă de mână cu Gabriela Firea. Culisele evenimentului de pe „Arena Națională”. Libertatea [online]. June 2018. [Viewed 25 February 2020]. Available from: <https://www.libertatea.ro/sport/simona-halep-n-a-vrut-sa-iasa-de-mana-cu-gabriela-firea-2290862>
- Conțeșcu, D., (2020). De ce nu s-a mai disputat meciul demonstrativ de tenis dintre Simona Halep și președinte. ”Nu i-a mai răspuns la telefon lui Iohannis!”. Jocul urma să fie transmis de TVR. Libertatea [online]. 11 January. [Viewed 20 January 2020]. Available from: <https://www.libertatea.ro/sport/simona-halep-klaus-iohannis-meci-amical-amanat-2839948>
- Croatia Open, (n.d.). Tournament History [online]. croatiaopen.hr. [Viewed 1 August 2019]. Available from: <https://www.croatiaopen.hr/en/tournament/tournament-history/>
- Dawn., (2014). Nadal Named Adopted Son Of Madrid [online]. dawn.com. [Viewed 1 August 2019]. Available from: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1104360>
- DC News, (2018). Simona Halep, motiv de scandal între Gabriela Firea și Nicușor Dan. DC News [online]. 11 June 2018. [Viewed 03 March 2020]. Available from: https://www.dcnews.ro/simona-halep-motiv-de-scandal-intre-gabriela-firea-i-nicu-or-dan_596058.html
- (2019). Radu Herjeu, comparație între Firea și Boc: În sfârșit am priceput și eu. DC News [online]. 11 February. [Viewed 13 March 2020]. Available from: https://www.dcnews.ro/radu-herjeu-comparatie-intre-firea-si-boc-in-sfarsit-am-priceput-si-eu_636561.html
- Digi 24, (2014). Simona Halep, premiata în lipsă. Sportiva a primit titlul de onoare, cheia orașului și un teren [online]. digi24.ro. [Viewed 3 January 2020]. Available from: <https://www.digi24.ro/regional/digi24-constanta/simona-halep-premiata-in-lipsa-sportiva-a-primit-titulul-de-onoare- cheia-orasului-si-un-teren-259990>
- (2018). Liviu Dragnea spune că l-a concediat pe George Harabagiu, presupusul autor al postărilor denigratoare despre Simona Halep [online]. digi24.ro. Updated 13 June 2018, 16:22. [Viewed 7 March 2020]. Available from: <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/liviu-dragnea-spune-ca-l-a-concediat-george-harabagiu-presupusul-autor-al-postarilor-denigratoare-despre-simona-halep-946592>
- (2019). Simona Halep, decorată de Klaus Iohannis: „A fost mai mult decât un meci, a fost o lecție de concentrare, de forță fizică și psihică”. Digi 24 [online]. 30 July. [Viewed 30 July 2019]. Available from: <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/sport/tenis/simona-halep-decorata-de-klaus-iohannis-a-fost-mai-mult-decat-un-meci-a-fost-o-lectie-de-concentrare-de-forta-fizica-si-psihica-1166710>
- DigisportRo., (2019). FCSB și Simona Halep, cele mai populare branduri sportive românești pe Facebook. Cum arată Top 5 [online]. DigisportRo. [Viewed 10 October 2019]. Available from: <https://www.digisport.ro/special/fcsb-si-simona-halep-cele-mai-populare-branduri-sportive-romanesti-pe-facebook-cum-arata-top-5-603554>
- Dinu, R., (2019). VIDEO „Ultrasul” Emil Boc, interviu în exclusivitate pentru GSP.ro după show-ul de la Fed Cup: „Toți românii au de învățat de la Simona Halep” » Cum a descris meciul cu Garcia + ce l-a uimit la Rouen. Gazeta Sporturilor [online]. 23 April 2019. [Viewed 03 February 2020]. Available from: <https://www.gsp.ro/sporturi/tenis/video-ultrasul-emil-boc-interviu-in-exclusivitate-pentru-gsp-ro-dupa-show-ul-de-la-fed-cup-toti-romanii-au-de-apparat-de-la-simona-halep-cum-a-descri-s-match-cu-garcia-ce-la-uimit-la-rouen-565548.html>
- Dobrescu, P., (2018). Din tribune s-a strigat ”M..e PSD!” în timpul meciului Simonei Halep cu Sloane Stephens! Cine e ”vinovatul”. Libertatea [online]. 12 August. Updated 13 August 2018, 08:02.

- [Viewed 23 June 2019]. Available from: <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/din-tribune-s-strigat-m-e-psd-timpul-mecului-simonei-halep-cu-sloane-stephens-cine-e-vinovatul-2361718>
- Dobrescu, P., (2018). Revoltător! Mai multe filiale PSD susțin că Simona Halep a fost cea huiduită, nu Gabriela Firea!. Libertatea [online]. 12 June. Updated 13 June 2018, 08:35. [Viewed 10 March 2020]. Available from: <https://www.libertatea.ro/sport/revoltator-mai-multe-filiale-psd-sustina-ca-simona-halep-a-fost-cea-huiduita-2291439>
- Driessens, O. (2013). The celebrityization of society and culture: Understanding the structural dynamics of celebrity culture. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 16(6), 641-657.
- Dumitrescu, V., (2018). Așa se întâmplă când amesteci sportul cu politica! Gabriela Firea, huiduită pe Arena Națională, după ce a urcat pe scenă alături de Simona Halep. VIDEO. DePrahova.ro [online]. 12 June. [Viewed 17 March 2020]. Available from: <https://deprahova.ro/national/2655-asa-se-intampla-cand-amesteci-sportul-cu-politica-gabriela-firea-huiduita-pe-arena-nationala-dupa-ce-a-urcat-pe-scena-alaturi-de-simona-halep-video.html>
- Dumitriu, D. L. (2018). Media construction of sport celebrities as national heroes. *Revista Română de Comunicare și Relații Publice*, 20(2), 21-33.
- Eremia, R., (2018). PSD își pune cenușă-n cap după gafa cu Halep. Adevărul [online]. 14 June. [Viewed 12 March 2020]. Available from: https://adevarul.ro/news/politica/psd-isi-pune-cenusa-n-cap-gafa-halep-1_5b22886ddf52022f7526096e/index.html
- ExpressPress., (2015, October 22). Simona Halep e cea mai simpatica si populara din Romania! [online]. ExpressPress. [Viewed June 10 2019]. Available from: <http://www.expresspress.ro/simona-halep-e-cea-mai-simpatica-si-populara-din-romania/>
- Fanatik., (2017). Simona Halep, primită cu onoruri la Bușteni. De cine a fost însoțită [online]. fanatik.ro. [Viewed 20 December 2019]. Available from: <https://www.fanatik.ro/foto-simona-halep-primita-cu-onoruri-la-busteni-de-cine-fost-insotita-17306973>
- , (2018). Simona Halep a fost numită cetățean de onoare al orașului Călărași! Cum a fost primită! Video [online]. fanatik.ro. [Viewed 10 January 2020]. Available from: <https://www.fanatik.ro/simona-halep-a-fost-numita-cetatean-de-onoare-al-orasului-calarasi-cum-a-fost-primita-video-18682317>
- Fishwick, M. W. (1975). *American Heroes: Myth and Reality*. Greenwood Press.
- Focus on Travel News., (2018, August 8). Insider's Guide To Riga Stars Tennis Prodigy Jelena Ostapenko. [online] ftnews.com. [Viewed 15 September 2019] Available from: <https://ftnews.com/other-news/34737-insider-s-guide-to-riga-stars-tennis-prodigy-jelena-ostapenko>
- GSP, (2011, July 10). Elena Udrea Explică Huiduielile Primite La Gala Lui Bute. [online]. GSP. [Viewed 10 June 2019]. Available from: <https://www.gsp.ro/sporturi/box/elena-udrea-explica-huiduielile-primate-la-gala-lui-bute-247012.html>
- (2014a). Simona Halep va primi titlul de cetățean de onoare al Constanței. [online]. GSP. [Viewed 27 November 2019]. Available from: <https://www.gsp.ro/sporturi/tenis/simona-halep-va-primi-titulul-de-cetatean-de-onoare-al-constantei-427818.html>
- (2014b). Analiză. Simona Halep a avut un an de poveste în 2013 » 70 de meciuri, 53 de victorii, 6 trofee. [online]. GSP. [Viewed 28 November 2019]. Available from: <https://www.gsp.ro/sporturi/tenis/analiza-simona-halep-a-avut-un-an-de-poveste-in-2013-70-de-meciuri-53-de-victorii-6-trofee-412587.html>
- (2018a). SIMONA HALEP. FOTO Noul lider din WTA, premiat de Gabriela Firea » Simona Halep, declarată cetățean de onoare al Capitalei. Gazeta Sporturilor [online]. 26 February 2018. [Viewed 03 March 2020]. Available from: <https://www.gsp.ro/sporturi/tenis/simona-halep-foto-noul-lider-din-wta-premiat-de-gabriela-firea-simona-halep-declarata-cetatean-de-onoare-al-capitaliei-533785.html>

- (2018b). UPDATE Halep le prezintă românilor trofeul astăzi în fața Areei Naționale! Decizie ciudată a PMB: eveniment în afara stadionului. Ce a cerut Simona, ce i-a oferit Firea. *Gazeta Sporturilor* [online]. 11 June 2018. [Viewed 05 March 2020]. Available from: <https://www.gsp.ro/sporturi/tenis/update-halep-le-prezinta-romanilor-trofeul-astazi-in-fata-arenei-nationale-decizie-ciudata-a-pmb-eveniment-in-afara-stadionului-ce-a-cerut-simona-ce-i-a-oferit-firea-541534.html>
- (2019a). Emil Boc, răspuns pentru Ion Țiriac: „Suntem singurul oraș care poate oferi asta”. *Gazeta Sporturilor* [online]. 25 April 2019. [Viewed 10 February 2020]. Available from: <https://www.gsp.ro/sporturi/tenis/emil-boc-raspuns-pentru-ion-tiriac-suntem-singurul-oras-care-poate-oferi-asta-565699.html>
- (2019b). Dezastru pentru Ilie Năstase și Anghel Iordănescu la Europarlamentare: votanții lor intră pe Arena Națională. [online]. GSP. [Viewed 25 November 2019]. Available from: <https://www.gsp.ro/gsp-special/diverse/alegeri-europarlamentare-ilie-nastase-si-anghel-iordanescu-rezultate-umilitoare-semne-de-intrebare-la-rapid-si-turris-568154.html>
- (2020). VIDEO Simona Halep și Camelia Potec, mesaj pentru români în plină pandemie de coronavirus: „Sunt doar un om, ca și tine. Nu am mai trecut prin asta niciodată?”. *Gazeta Sporturilor* [online]. 31 March. [Viewed 31 March 2020]. Available from: <https://www.gsp.ro/gsp-special/stiri-extrasport/simona-halep-si-camelia-potec-vedete-intr-un-clip-pentru-romani-in-timpul-pandemiei-de-coronavirus-594557.html>
- Hoberman, J. M. (1977). Sport and political ideology. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 1(2), 80-114.
- Hook, S., (1945). *The Hero In History*. Secker & Warburg.
- Hotnews, (2018a). PSD a strâns în Piața Victoriei peste 180.000 de manifestații / Dragnea: Dacă nu vor înțelege că regimul lor s-a sfârșit, vom veni din nou, mai mulți, și nu vom mai pleca / Mitingul s-a încheiat puțin după ora 22,00, piața s-a golit rapid. Hotnews [online]. 9 June 2018. [Viewed 03 March 2020]. Available from: <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-22498515-fotogalerie-primele-grupuri-sus-tori-psd-ajuns-pia-victoriei-guvernul-acoperit-uria-steag-tricolor.htm>
- (2018b). Sentință Definitivă în Dosarul Gala Bute: Elena Udrea, șase Ani De închisoare Cu Executare / Rudel Obreja, Cinci Ani De închisoare. [online]. HotNewsRo. [Viewed 10 June 2019]. Available from: <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-22490231-dosarul-gala-bute-rudel-obreja-cinci-ani-nchisoare-elena-udrea-ase-ani-nchisoare-executare-sentin-definitiv.htm>
- Houlihan, B., (2007). *Politics and Sport*. In: Ritzer, G. (Ed.): *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, p. 3473.
- IICRR., (2018). George Weah: From national hero to leader of the nation [online]. iicrr.ie. [Viewed 21 November 2019]. Available from: <https://iicrr.ie/george-weah-national-hero-leader-nation/>
- IloveBusteni., (2014). Simona Halep, de Dragobete la Bușteni [online]. [Viewed 1 December 2019]. Available from: http://www.ilovebusteni.ro/evenimente/15-SIMONA_HALEP_DE_DRAGOBETE_LA_BU%C8%98TENI/
- Jurnalul de Calarasi, (2018). Cel puțin o motivație – STRĂBUNICII SIMONEI HALEP AU FOST LA CĂLĂRAȘII!. Jurnalul de Calarasi [online]. 23 November 2018. [Viewed 13 January 2020]. Available from: <http://www.soridapress.ro/cel-putin-o-motivatie-strabunicii-simonei-halep-au-fost-la-calarasi/>
- Jurnalul Prahovean., (2014a). Mesaj inedit pentru Simona Halep la Bușteni [online]. jurnalulph.ro. [Viewed 4 December 2019]. Available from: <https://jurnalulph.ro/sport/9679-mesaj-inedit-pentru-simona-halep-la-busteni.html>
- (2014b). Simona Halep, de Dragobete la Bușteni [online]. jurnalulph.ro. [Viewed 1 December 2019]. Available from: <https://jurnalulph.ro/sport/6624-simona-halep-de-dragobete-la-busteni.html>
- Klapp, O. E. (1949). Hero worship in America. *American Sociological Review*, 14(1), 53-62.

- La Stampa., (2017). Maradona Awarded Honorary Citizenship In Naples [online]. Lastampa.It. [Viewed 24 June 2019]. Available from: <https://www.lastampa.it/2017/07/06/esteri/maradona-awarded-honorary-citizenship-in-naples-oxn1ZsxvorWsStok0Wb1hN/pagina.html>
- Libertatea., (2014). Simona Halep își face casă de vacanță la Bușteni! Vecinii ei: alți doi campioni! [online]. libertatea.ro. [Viewed 3 December 2019]. Available from: <https://www.libertatea.ro/sport/simona-halep-isi-face-casa-de-vacanta-la-busteni-vecinii-ei-alti-doi-campioni-992911>
- Libertatea., (2018). Radu Mazăre o umilește de patru ani pe Simona Halep. Ce spunea fugarul în Madagascar, în martie 2014 [online]. libertatea.ro. [Viewed 1 December 2019]. Available from: <https://www.libertatea.ro/sport/radu-mazare-o-umileste-de-patru-ani-pe-simona-halep-2099179>
- Lin, C. Y., Lee, P. C., & Nai, H. F. (2008). Theorizing the role of sport in state-politics. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Science*, 1(1), 23-32.
- Lines, G. (2001). Villains, fools or heroes? Sports stars as role models for young people. *Leisure Studies*, 20(4), 285-303. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614360110094661>
- Marsh, D., Hart, P. T., & Tindall, K. (2010). Celebrity politics: The politics of the late modernity?. *Political Studies Review*, 8(3), 322-340.
- Media9, (2019a). Galeria Simonei Halep s-a întors. O galerie de șefi :) FOTO. media9.ro [online]. February 2019. [Viewed 20 February 2020]. Available from: <https://media9.ro/galeria-simonei-halep-s-a-intors-o-galerie-de-sefi-foto/>
- Media9, (2019b). Primăria bate toba. Galeria de șefi a Simonei Halep, gata de acțiune :). media9.ro [online]. April 2019. [Viewed 20 February 2020]. Available from: <https://media9.ro/primaria-bate-toba-galeria-de-sefi-a-simonei-halep-gata-de-actiune/>
- Ministerul Sănătății., (2021). [Facebook]. 05 January. [Accessed 06 January 2021]. Available from: <https://www.facebook.com/MinisterulSanatatii/posts/1346343982387030/>
- Monitorul, (2019a). Emil Boc va face deplasarea la Rouen pentru partida Franța – România din semifinalele Fed Cup, programată în week-end-ul următor, 20-21 aprilie. Monitorul de Cluj [online]. 16 April 2019. [Viewed 01 February 2020]. Available from: <http://www.monitorulcj.ro/sport/70511-emil-boc-sef-de-galerie-la-meciul-franta---romania-din-semifinalele-fed-cup>
- Monitorul, (2019b). De ce PNL nu a câștigat alegerile la Cluj, deși Emil Boc are o cotă de încredere uriașă. Monitorul de Cluj [online]. 4 June 2019. [Viewed 01 March 2020]. Available from: <http://www.monitorulcj.ro/politica-administratie/71750-de-ce-pnl-nu-a-castigat-alegerile-la-cluj-napoca-desi-emil-boc-are-o-cota-de-incredere-uriasa>
- Monitorul, (2019c). Boc, cel mai iubit primar... pe Facebook! Cifre zdrobitoare pentru edilul clujean. Monitorul de Cluj [online]. 5 June 2019. [Viewed 01 March 2020]. Available from: <http://www.monitorulcj.ro/actualitate/71793-boc-cel-mai-iubit-dintre-primarii-de-provincie-cifre-zdrobitoare-pentru-edilul-clujean>
- Nițu, C., (2018). Simona Halep la Călărași / Drăgulin: Este numărul 1 mondial! Halep: Sunt onorată să fiu la Călărași. Ediția.ro [online]. 29 November 2018. [Viewed 14 January 2020]. Available from: <https://editia.ro/2018/11/29/simona-halep-la-calarasi-dragulin-este-numarul-1-mondial-halep-sunt-onorata-sa-fiu-la-calarasi/>
- Norwood, D. R. (1982). The sport hero concept and Louis Cyr (p. 12), Master Thesis, Electronic Theses and Dissertations, viewed 20 June 2019. Available from: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/4292>
- Novinite., (2014). Grigor Dimitrov Becomes Honorary Citizen Of Varna [online]. Novinite.com. [Viewed 25 June 2019]. Available from: <https://www.novinite.com/articles/162132/Grigor+Dimitrov+Becomes+Honorary+Citizen+of+Varna>

- Observator de Călărași, (2018). Simona Halep a primit titlul de cetățean de onoare al municipiului Călărași [online]. observatorcl.info. [Viewed 10 January 2020]. Available from: <https://observatorcl.info/simona-halep-a-primit-titulul-de-cetatean-de-onoare-al-municipiului-calarasi/>
- Observatorul Prahovean., (2017). Ștampila specială a Poștei Române, dedicată Simonei Halep, folosită exclusiv la Bușteni [online]. observatorulph.ro. [Viewed 23 December 2019]. Available from: <https://www.observatorulph.ro/viata-prahovei/88517-stampila-speciala-a-postei-romane-dedicata-simonei-halep-folosita-exclusiv-la-busteni>
- Onciu, A., (2021). Eșecul campaniei de vaccinare înseamnă continuarea pandemiei și un dezastru economic greu de imaginat. Mediafax [online]. 03 January. [Viewed 04 January 2021]. Available from: <https://www.mediafax.ro/editorialisti/comentariu-adrian-onciu-esecul-campaniei-de-vaccinare-inseamna-continuarea-pandemiei-si-un-dezastru-economic-greu-de-imaginat-19848875>
- Orwell, G. (2000). *Essays*. Penguin Classics.
- Paddick, R. (1984). Sport and Politics: The (Gross) Anatomy of Their Relationships. *The Journal of the Australian Society for Sports History*, 1(2), 51-66.
- Pal, A., (2019). Halep a schițat „portretul” victoriei entuziasmante cu Siniakova, la conferința de presă: „Publicul m-a ambiționat, mi-a dat energie!”. Cum l-a laudat pe Emil Boc. ProSport [online]. 10 February 2019. [Viewed 24 January 2020]. Available from: <https://www.prosport.ro/alte-sporturi/tenis/halep-a-schitat-portretul-victoriei-entuziasmante-cu-siniakova-la-conferinta-de-presa-publicul-m-a-ambitionat-mi-a-dat-energie-cum-l-a-laudat-pe-emil-boc-17869777>
- Pedersen, P. (Ed.) (2013). *Routledge Handbook of Sport Communication*. Routledge, New York.
- Pirloagă, M., (2018). Tenismena constănțeană Simona Halep va primi titlul de călărășean de onoare. Iată de ce... . Atitudinea din Călărași [online]. n.d. . [Viewed 17 January 2020]. Available from: <https://atitudinea din calarasi.ro/tenismena-constanteana-simona-halep-va-primi-titulul-de-calarasean-de-onoare-iata-de-ce/>
- Popa, E.N., (2018). Emil Boc, reacție virală după îmbrățișarea cu Simona Halep. Fanatik [online]. 22 April 2018. [Viewed 17 January 2020]. Available from: <https://www.fanatik.ro/emil-boc-reactie-virala-dupa-imbratisarea-cu-simona-halep-18330865>
- Prelipceanu, M., (2020). Parlamentare 2020: Prima analiză a rezultatelor scrutinului din 6 decembrie. rfi.ro [online]. 07 December. [Viewed 08 December 2020]. Available from: <https://www.rfi.ro/asculta-la-rfi-ro-128250-parlamentare-2020-prima-analiza-rezultatelor-scrutinului-din-6-decembrie>
- Prodan, M., (2015). Cum au ajuns să scrie de Cluj Reuters, BBC, The Guardian și CNBC – în același timp. Actual de Cluj [online]. 25 iulie 2015. [Viewed 05 February 2020]. Available from: <https://actualdecluj.ro/cum-au-ajuns-sa-scrie-de-cluj-reuters-bbc-the-guardian-si-cnbc-in-acelasi-timp/>
- ProSport., (2018a). Cât a băut Traian Bănescu la celebra petrecere de la Golden Blitz, după sfertul UEFAntastic Steaua – Rapid. Rădoi: „Am stat toată seara lângă el” [online]. prosport.ro. [Viewed 20 November 2020]. Available from: <https://www.prosport.ro/fotbal-intern/cat-a-baut-traian-basescu-la-celebra-petrecere-de-la-golden-blitz-dupa-sfertul-uefantastic-steaua-rapid-radoi-am-stat-toata-seara-langa-el-17639162>
- (2018b). După București, Bușteni. Decizia luată de primarul stațiunii de pe Valea Prahovei în semn de reverență pentru triumful Simonei Halep de la Roland Garros [online]. prosport.ro. [Viewed 5 January 2020]. Available from: <https://www.prosport.ro/alte-sporturi/tenis/dupa-bucuresti-busteni-decizia-luata-de-primarul-statiunii-de-pe-valea-prahovei-in-semn-de-reverenta-pentru-triumful-simonei-halep-de-la-roland-garros-17256116>
- Realitatea din Călărași, (2018). Sula...prefectura... Drăgulin... Biroul de presă și Simona Halep!. Realitatea din Călărași [online]. 22 November 2018. [Viewed 13 January 2020]. Available from:

- <https://realitateadincalarasi.ro/2018/11/22/sula-prefectura-dragulin-biroul-de-presa-si-simona-halep/>
- Rein, R., (1998), "El primer deportista: the political use and abuse of sport in Peronist Argentina", *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 15: 2, p. 54.
- Rein, R. (1998). 'El primer deportista': the political use and abuse of sport in peronist Argentina. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 15(2), 54-76.
- Republika News., (2017). Cetățenii de onoare fac cinste orașului Bușteni! Mesajul senatorului Emanoil Savin pentru Simona Halep [online]. republikanews.ro. [Viewed 23 December 2019]. Available from: <https://www.republikanews.ro/cetatenii-de-onoare-fac-cinste-orasului-busteni-mesajul-senatorului-emanoil-savin-pentru-simona-halep/>
- Rezultatevot.ro., (2020). Rezultatevot.ro [online]. [Viewed 01 February 2021]. Available from: <https://rezultatevot.ro/elections/112/results>
- Roșu, I., (2018). Cum am trăit momentul în care Firea a fost huiduită că s-a folosit de Halep. Vice [online]. 12 June. [Viewed 06 March 2020]. Available from: <https://www.vice.com/ro/article/9k8gzx/momentul-in-care-firea-a-fost-huiduita-ca-sa-folosit-de-halep>
- Smart, B. (2005). *The Sport Star: Modern Sport and the Cultural Economy of Sporting Celebrity*. SAGE.
- Smith, G. (1973). The Sport Hero: An Endangered Species. *Quest*, 19(1), 59-70.
- Sport.ro, (2014). Cum a ajuns Simona Halep cetatean de onoare in Calarasi: "Stramosii ei au trecut pe aici!" :) Explicația primarului din orașul FĂRĂ tenis. Sport.ro [online]. 28 November 2018. [Viewed 14 January 2020]. Available from: <https://www.sport.ro/tenis/cum-a-ajuns-simona-halep-cetatean-de-onoare-in-calarasi-stramosii-ei-au-trecut-pe- aici-explicatia-primarului.html>
- (2018). "Eu nu fac politica!" Ce spune Simona Halep despre huiduielile primite de Firea pe Național Arena. Sport.ro [online]. 15 June 2018. [Viewed 20 March 2020]. Available from: <https://www.sport.ro/tenis/eu-nu-fac-politica-ce-spune-simona-halep-despre-huiduielile-primite-de-firea-pe-national-arena.html>
- (2019). Adevăratul motiv pentru care Emil Boc a fost șef de galerie în Cehia! Planul pus la cale pentru 2020. Sport.ro [online]. 11 February 2019. [Viewed 20 February 2020]. Available from: <https://www.sport.ro/tenis/adevaratul-motiv-pentru-care-emil-boc-a-fost-sef-de-galerie-in-cehia-planul-pus-la-cale-pentru-2020.html>
- Știrile TVR, (2018). Gabriela Firea, huiduită pe Arena Națională. "Echipe de cetățeni cu venin au venit bine organizate, plasate strategic printre oameni decenti". stiri.tvr.ro [online]. 11 June, 22:38. Updated 11 June, 23:56. [Viewed 05 March 2020]. Available from: http://stiri.tvr.ro/gabriela-firea-huiduita-pe-arena-na-ionala---echipe-de-cetateni-cu-venin-au-venit-bine-organizate--plasate-strategic-printre-oameni-decenti_832344.html#view
- Știripesurse, (2019). "Strategia 'Ilie și Puiu' la UNPR: dezvăluiri din campania la europarlamentare" [online]. stiripesurse.ro [Viewed 22 November 2019]. Available from: https://www.stiripesurse.ro/strategia-ilie-i-puiu-la-unpr-dezvaluiri-din-campania-la-europarlamentare_1352698.html
- The Guardian, (2018, June 23). Mohamed Salah 'honoured' With Gift of Citizenship From Chechen Leader [online]. The Guardian. [Viewed 10 December 2019]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2018/jun/23/mo-salah-egypt-liverpool-ramzan-kadyrov-chechnya-russia-world-cup>
- (2018, September 10). 'A new heroine': Japan celebrates first grand slam winner amid Serena row [online]. The Guardian. [Viewed 20 August 2019]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/10/naomi-osaka-japan-ignores-serena-spat-to-celebrate-first-grand-slam-winner>
- The Portugal News., (n.d.). Luis Figo becomes honorary citizen of Faro [online]. The Portugal News. [Viewed 24 June 2019]. Available from: <https://www.theportugalnews.com/news/luis-figo-becomes-honorary-citizen-of-faro/16045>

- Țopescu, C., (2018). Exclusivitate RFI: Gabriela Firea despre evenimentul de pe Arena Națională dedicat Simonei Halep -"Am greșit". rfi.ro [online]. 18 June. [Viewed 12 March 2020]. Available from: <https://www.rfi.ro/social-104075-gabriela-firea-despre-evenimentul-arena-nationala-dedicat-simona-halep>
- Turner, G., (2004). *Understanding Celebrity*. SAGE, London.
- Ziare.com, (2019). Simona Halep si-a anuntat prezenta la Sports Festival. ziare.com [online]. 21 March 2019. [Viewed 25 February 2020]. Available from: <https://ziare.com/simona-halep/stiri-simona-halep/simona-halep-si-a-anuntat-prezenta-la-sports-festival-1554458>
- Ziua de Constanta, (2014). Simona Halep are melodie lăutărească! [online]. [Viewed 3 December 2017]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIhzTOY0E1o>



ASPIRATIONS, CONCERNS AND PRIORITIES OF FAMILIES WITH SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

Adina MIHĂILESCU¹
Mariana STANCIU²
Livia ȘTEFĂNESCU³
Cristina HUMĂ⁴
DOI: 10.35782/JCPP.2021.1.03

Abstract: *A decent standard of living could be defined by covering general biological and social needs at a given time. In the following we will see how different income categories could ensure or not, a decent standard of living in urban and rural areas for the family of adults with dependent children, based on data collected inside the grant GAR-UM-2019-XI-5.5-8/15.10.2019 named 'Decent standard of living for families with school-age children'. The research sample included 173 families with school-age children and data were collected through questionnaires, from 1 April to 30 June 2020. We were interested in several aspects of the life of these families, among which the accessibility of children to current forms of education; the possibility of asserting the couple's partners and their possibility to aspire to the best possible schools for their children; the extent to which parents' rights are respected both in the workplace and in society; their safety at home, at work and on the street. Also, we looked at concerns related to expenditures and satisfaction with daily life of the respondents.*

Keywords: *family with children; school; child aged 6-14 years; standard of living; aspirations; concerns.*

Introduction

The daily habits of people around the world have been suddenly turned upside down by the pandemic caused by SARS-COV-2. The health crisis was followed by an economic crisis. People were forced to carry out their income-generating activities from home, in part or total employment. Meetings with family, friends or participation in

¹ Senior Researcher, The Research Institute for Quality of Life, e-mail: adina.mihaiulescu@yahoo.com

² Senior Researcher, The Research Institute for Quality of Life, e-mail: mariana3stanciu@gmail.com

³ Senior Researcher, The Research Institute for Quality of Life, e-mail: livia.stefanescu@gmail.com

⁴ Senior Researcher, The Research Institute for Quality of Life, e-mail: cristinhum@gmail.com

various social, cultural and leisure activities remained a memory. The end of February 2020 announced in Romania the first case of infection with SARS-COV-2, a situation that subsequently triggered taking exceptional measures to protect the population, its forced stay at home and the adoption of ten Military Ordinances, the first being implemented with March 18, 2020. The effects of these military ordinances in Romania led to a change in people's mobility (table 1): visits to shops and other recreational trips decreased by over 80%, walking in parks decreased by an average of 60%, travel to jobs by employees decreased to about 40%, and staying in residential space increased by more than 14%¹

Table 1. Mobility in the most affected counties of Romania

	Retail	Shopping	Parks	Stations	Work	Housing
Suceava	-85%	-65%	-49%	-78%	-48%	+17%
Bucuresti	-85%	-50%	-86%	-74%	-45%	+18%
Neamt	-80%	-55%	-62%	-79%	-39%	+16%
Brasov	-85%	-61%	-79%	-79%	-43%	+17%
Constanta	-80%	-49%	-72%	-69%	-37%	+16%
Arad	-81%	-55%	-45%	-69%	-38%	+15%
Hunedoara	-82%	-53%	-66%	-67%	-44%	+14%

Source: Romanian Government data (April 3, 2020)

<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/coronavirus-rom%C3%A2nia-cum-s-a-schibat-mobilitatea-oamenilor-%C3%AE-n-starea-de-urgen%C8%9B%C4%83-%C8%99-i-cum-vom-fi-urm%C4%83-r%C8%9B-prin-telefoanele-mobile/30527518.html>

In Romania, employees sent home in technical unemployment received 75% of the gross employment salary. Government aid for technically unemployed private sector employees amounted to 75% of the gross salary of the employee, but not more than 75% of the average gross salary per economy². The government granted the payment of the aid, for the employees who are technically unemployed from the budget of the Ministry of Labor³, through the National Employment Agency (ANOFM), to companies that are in the following two situations: the first situation was that of companies directly affected by *"restrictive measures that were ordered by the authorities in an emergency, such as: hotels, restaurants, cafes, entertainment institutions by suspending activity during the emergency situation expedite"*. This included companies that have totally or partially discontinued their activity, as a direct result of the measures imposed by the authorities. The second situation concerned companies indirectly affected by the crisis. They must

¹ <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/coronavirus-rom%C3%A2nia-cum-s-a-schibat-mobilitatea-oamenilor-%C3%AE-n-starea-de-urgen%C8%9B%C4%83-%C8%99-i-cum-vom-fi-urm%C4%83-r%C8%9B-prin-telefoanele-mobile/30527518.html>

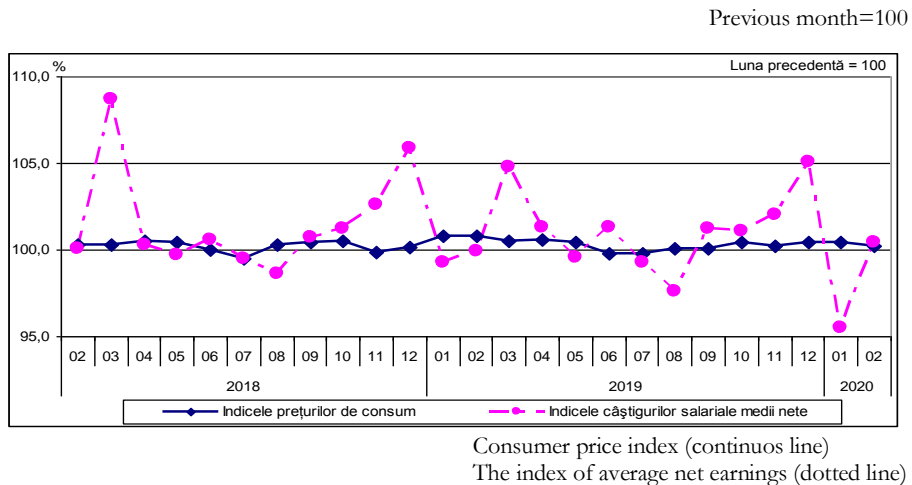
² <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/somaj-coronavirus-technique-as-the-government-what-companies-must-do/30497645.html>

³ <http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/comunicare/comunicate-de-presa/5856-situa%C8%9Bia-individual-employment-contracts%C4%83-suspended-%C3%AE-cused-on-April-2, 2020>

prove that their turnover has fallen by at least 25% in order to be eligible for technical unemployment benefits.

When austerity was installed, the population resized its consumption, in the sense of compressing or closing certain types of expenditures. According to the data of the National Institute of Statistics, the average income of a Romanian in the last quarter of the year 2019 was 1,940 lei. Over 80% of them went to consumer spending (food, non-food, services), taxes, contributions and other contributions. The increase of salaries in Romania preceded the increase of prices, in the time horizon February 2018 - February 2020¹

Chart 1. Evolution of consumer price indices and average net earnings, between February 2018 and February 2020



Source: https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/com_presa/com_pdf/cs02r20.pdf

Research methodology and objectives

A decent life is defined by covering general biological and social needs at a given time. In the following we will see how different income categories could ensure, or not, a decent life for families with dependent school children from primary and secondary school.

The micro-research took place between 1 April and 30 June 2020 and consisted of a semi-structured questionnaire with 30 questions, including objective and subjective indicators, applied to 173 families with school-age children 6-14 years of age, in Bucharest, in order to determine the monthly consumption of these families.

¹ https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/com_presa/com_pdf/cs02r20.pdf

The selection of families was done by the "snowball" method, until the information was saturated. The methodology also included an interview guide for teachers who know the school needs of children and an interview guide for medical professionals (pediatrician/family doctor) who know the medical and hygiene needs of school children, especially in the conditions of COVID-19 pandemic.

From the literature and from the discussions held on the ground during the exploratory phase of the research, with families having children between the ages of 6 to 14, several problems were identified: financial problems and insufficient income to support their children; problems related to enrolling with the family doctor and providing quality medical care; lack of housing or insufficient space for families with more than one child, especially if they are of different sexes; increasing the amount of allowance due to children from 150 lei per month covering a small part of children's consumption needs; the situation of children whose parents go to work abroad and remain in the care of grandparents, other relatives or neighbours.

Socio-demographic characteristics of study participants

Families included in the sample have children of school age of 6 to 14 years and live in Bucharest and its surroundings. Almost all families participating in the study live in *urban areas* 97.6% and only 2.4% in rural areas.

Of the 173 respondent families, 63% had children aged 6 to 10 years and 62% of families had children aged 11 to 14 years; 2% of families had children with health problems. They answered our questions: *the mothers of these children* 70% of the sample, fathers 21.4%, other relatives 2.9% and other situations 1.7%. Respondents were grouped by the following age categories: between 26-35 years old (16.4%); between 36-45 years old (56.9%); between 46-55 years old (23.1%); and 61-78 years (3.6%).

The marital status of the respondents with children is as follows: married 84.9%, divorced 11% and other situations 4.1%. As a state of health, parents generally declare themselves to be in good health 54.3%, in very good health 32.9% and satisfactory 11%. Only 3 respondents in the sample stated that they were in poor health.

The level of education of the respondents is mainly with higher education 45.2% (graduated, master and doctorate), followed by those with secondary education (26.8%), vocational school and unfinished high school (23.7%). The share of those with training up to full secondary school is insignificant (2.4%). Regarding the life partner and he has a level of training mainly with higher education (graduate, master and doctorate) 36.4%, ie over a third of the sample, with secondary education (vocational school, unfinished and graduated high school, college unfinished) we have a share of 47.4%. 16.2% did not answer this question.

As referring to living, about 73% of the interviewees owned a personal property and 18.5% lived with their parents / in-laws / other relatives, an extremely small percentage (4%) lived with rent at the time of the research. Regarding the assessment of their own home, the respondents say they are "very satisfied" with grades of 8, 9 and 10; about

63% of respondents say "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" with grades 5, 6 and 7; only 7% of the sample said they were "dissatisfied" with housing.

Perceived accessibility to education and jobs

The first set of questions refers to children's accessibility to current forms of education, insofar as they are desired by parents; the possibility of asserting the couple's partners and their possibility to aspire to the best possible schools for their children; the extent to which parents' rights are respected both in the workplace and in society; as well as their safety at home, at work and on the street.

Regarding the *accessibility of children to current forms of education*, families appreciate it, as being high and very high, in a percentage of 68.2%; the possibility for the respondent to find a job, if he wishes, is appreciated as high and very high, by almost 55% of the sample; 47.3% signify the positive appreciation related to the affirmation in life and 63.6% the observance to a high extent of the rights; security at home and away from home is not a concern for 68.6% of families; in terms of finding a job for the partner (43.3%), in correlation with the partner's assertion in life were rated as "high" and "very high" by the respondents (41.7%); just over half (52%) of the respondents rated the care provided by the medical staff to which they belong or to whom they addressed with various health problems.

Regarding the accessibility of children to *current forms of education*, the respondent families in Bucharest appreciate in a percentage of 68.2% that the accessibility of children is high and very high. Modern teaching aids are tools meant to facilitate the transmission of knowledge, the formation of skills, the realization of practical applications in the instructive-educational process. Parents have obtained the right to stay at home with their children, paid by the employer, when classes are suspended for certain reasons. Along with the pandemic, the state of emergency and then the alert, the Government issued, by OUG no. 147/2020 the right to stay at home with children if the teaching activities that involve the actual presence in school were limited or suspended, due to the coronavirus. The right to these vacancies is maintained in 2021 (OUG 147), as long as parents are unable to work telework / work at home and do not go to school due to the evolution of COVID-19.

The high and very high possibility of the respondent *to find a job*, if he/she wants, is appreciated with a percentage of almost 55%. A percent of 47.3% represents the positive appreciation related to the affirmation in life, and 63.6% the observance to a high extent of the rights; security at home and away from home is not a concern for 68.6% of families; in terms of finding a job for the partner (43.3%), correlated with the partner's assertion in life were equally rated as "high" and "very high" by respondents (41.7%), slightly above half (52%) of the interviewees positively appreciated the provision of medical care.

Expenditures and related concerns/fears

The fears and worries of parents, who have school-age children, related to these extremely important aspects of life: education, employment, health cannot be ignored. To the

question: "What would be the main problems of families with school-age children in today's Romania?" several answers were given, in order of importance given by the respondents we offer the answers: "poverty" (48.8%), "lack of money" (27.7%), and at a great distance from the first two answers with 7.2% percentage is placed "lack of school education". The current health crisis draws attention to an important issue, namely the confrontation with the "lack of school education" (27.7%), but also the "finding a job" by parents (23.7%).

In the study conducted between 1 April to 30 June 2020, *the estimated monthly expenses for raising and educating a child are differentiated by age groups*, but also by the sex of the child as follows: most families in Bucharest, who have dependent boys aged 6 -10 years, respectively 22 families (47.8% of the sample) spent at the time of the survey between 251 lei and 500 lei for the school child and 12 families (26% of the sample) exceeded the amount reaching up to 1,000 lei spent per child / boy / school

A number of 28 families from Bucharest (39.5% of the sample), who have dependent boys aged 11-14, spent at the time of the survey between 500 lei and 1,000 lei for the school child, followed by 26 families (about 46.6% of the sample) who spent up to 500 lei per child, and 15 families exceeded the amount of 1,000 lei per child / boy / school reaching up to 2,000 lei / month; 2 families reached 3,000 lei spent per month for the male school child.

A percent of 48% of the families in Bucharest, who have dependent girls aged 6-10 spent between 500 and 1,000 lei per month, and 7 families (30% of the sample) spent at the time of the survey over 1,000 lei for a female school child. In the case of families with dependent girls aged 10-14 years, up to 1,000 lei were spent at the time of the survey (table 5) in 33 families (about 70% of the sample), only 14 families (almost 30% from the sample) exceeded the amount of 1,000 lei per female school child.

The *total expenses per family* are within the following limits 1,000 and 13,000 lei (table 2); a little over a tenth (13%) spend monthly between 1,000 and 2,500 lei; 47% of the families declared the monthly consumption between 2,500 and 5,000 lei, approximately equal to those who spend between 5,000 lei and 7,500 lei (18.7%), respectively 7,500 and 10,000 lei (15.5%). We have a percentage of 5% of families who spend over 10,000 lei per month per family.

Table 2. Total expenses

Expenses between 1,000-13,000 lei (ron)	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
1,000 – 2,500 lei	21	13.0
2,501 – 5,000 lei	76	47.2
5,001 – 7,500 lei	30	18.7
7,501 – 10,000 lei	25	15.5
10,000 – 13,000 lei	9	5.6
Total expenses (12 families did not declare)	161	100.0

Source: data collected in the grant 'Decent standard of living for families with school-age children'.

In order to better understand to what type of monthly expenditure the money of the families participating in the study is allocated, we first analyzed the *food expenses* (table 3). This type of expenditure is appreciated by 75.3% as large and very large, and by 23% as suitable "so and so".

Table 3. Food expenses

Food expenses	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Small	3	1.8
So and so	38	22.9
Big	68	41.0
Very big	57	34.3
Total	166	100.0
7 families did not declare	-	-

Source: data collected in the grant 'Decent standard of living for families with school-age children'.

Expenditures on alcohol and cigarettes (table 8) are rated by more than a quarter of moderate respondents and one-fifth of families as "large" and "very large". **Clothing and footwear expenditure** is estimated by more than 40% of respondents as "large" and "very large" and by a number of families approximately equal to "so and so" in the monthly family budget.

Parents' monthly expenses for children only are estimated by more than a third of respondents as "large" and by another third as "so and so"; about a third of parents make "very high" expenses for their children. In this regard, we find that there is an almost equal distribution between expenditures considered appropriate (32.5%), high (34.3%) and very high (28.9%).

Housing costs (table 4) are estimated to be more moderate by most of the respondents (47.6%) and "high" by about a third 30% of them. About a tenth, however, considers them "very large".

Table 4. Housing expenses: maintenance, installments

Housing expenses: maintenance, installments	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Very small	3	1.8
Small	14	8.4
So and so	79	47.6
Big	50	30.1
Very big	18	10.8
Not necessary	2	1.2
Total	166	100.0
7 families did not declare	-	-

Source: data collected in the grant 'Decent standard of living for families with school-age children'.

Transport costs are considered average: "so and so" of 38% of respondents and "small" of about a third of the families in the sample (31.3%). *Health care expenditures* are estimated by 40% of respondents "so and so" and "small" by 31.3% of families. *Expenditures for culture, school, books*, shows are estimated as averages of 40% of respondents, "large" by a quarter of them and "small" by only one-fifth 19.3% of families. *Alimony expenses* do not burden the budget of the families in the sample. 90% of them consider that this expenditure is "not the case"; and 61.3% consider that other expenditures in the household budget are "not the case".

Incomes related to the needs

The *income obtained by the family in relation to the monthly needs* (table 5) is enough only for the strictly necessary, a quarter of the respondents participating in the survey tell us; 37% of them say they can buy some more expensive items but making efforts and reducing other spending chapters. These answers can be seen in the table below.

Table 5. Total family income in relation to needs

Total family income in relation to needs	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
They are not enough for what is strictly necessary	12	7.2
They are enough for what is strictly necessary	42	25.3
They are enough for a decent restrictive life	35	21.1
We can also buy some more expensive items, but with effort	62	37.3
We have everything we need, without much effort	15	9.0
Total	166	100.0
7 families did not declare	-	-

Source: data collected in the grant 'Decent standard of living for families with school-age children'.

Access to food in relation to income (table 6) is totally satisfactory for 32% of families; 21.7% consider that they rarely buy some products over what they absolutely need, and 15% state that: "sometimes we can't buy everything we need for the whole family" and "they manage to buy only for the child / children what it's absolutely necessary".

Regarding the access to clothing and footwear products in relation to the existing income over a third of families (34.3%) less often buy some products over what we absolutely need; 20.5% consider that "sometimes we can't buy everything that is necessary for the whole family", and 18% "manage to buy only for the child / children what is absolutely necessary".

Table 6. Access to food

Access to food	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
We can't even buy what is strictly necessary for the child / children	15	9.0
We manage to buy only for the child / children what is absolutely necessary	24	14.5
Most of the time we buy only for the child / children neglecting the whole family	13	7.8
Sometimes we can't buy everything we need for the whole family	25	15.1
We rarely buy for the whole family and some products over what we absolutely need	36	21.7
We buy everything we want for the whole family	53	31.9
Total	166	100.0
7 families did not declare	-	-

Source: data collected in the grant 'Decent standard of living for families with school-age children'.

Prioritizing the expenses

It seems that in terms of prioritization (see tables 7-8) the most important expenses are the following: on the first position are placed the family obligations (73.3% of the sample), followed by the current expenses for child / children with 68 %, the home maintenance payment ranks third with 62%. 51.5% is the percentage of families who want to pay their installments at the bank and attaches importance to this aspect in the order of prioritization of expenses; and at an extremely short distance, but in fifth place is the payment of debts.

Table 7. What priority do you give to housing maintenance payments?

What priority do you give to housing maintenance payments?	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Maximum 1	103	62.0
2	29	17.5
3	27	16.3
4	4	2.4
Minimum 5	3	1.8
Total	163	100.0
7 families did not declare	-	-

Source: data collected in the grant 'Decent standard of living for families with school-age children'.

Table 8. What priority do you give to current expenses for the child / children?

What priority do you give to current expenses for the child / children?	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Maximum 1	113	68.1
2	27	16.3
3	23	13.9
4	3	1.8
Minimum 5	-	-
Total	166	100.0
7 families did not declare	-	-

Source: data collected in the grant 'Decent standard of living for families with school-age children'.

The assessment of the financial situation of the household (table 9) has the highest value on the eighth position of the measurement scale with 23.5%, the seventh position is occupied by 21.1% of families; the sixth and fifth position, ie the middle of the measurement scale, is occupied by 16.3%, respectively 15.7% of families.

Table 9. How satisfied are you with the financial situation of the household

How satisfied are you with the financial situation of the household?	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Minimum 1	-	-
2	1	0.6
3	1	0.6
4	14	8.1
5	26	15.7
6	27	16.3
7	35	21.1
8	39	23.5
9	18	10.8
Maximum 10	5	3.0
Total	166	100.0
7 families did not declare	-	-

Source: data collected in the grant 'Decent standard of living for families with school-age children'.

Regarding the concerns of families (table 10) they concern to a large extent for the education of children (almost 8%), but also the loss of the job and the impossibility of not finding a new job (almost 5% of families).

Table 10. Concern for job loss/children's education

Concern for: 1. job loss 2. children's education	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
To a very large extent	1- 13; 2- 8	1- 7.9; 2- 4.8
Largely	1- 46; 2- 16	1- 27.9; 2- 9.7
To a small extent	1- 60; 2- 82	1- 36.4; 2- 49.7
To a very small extent	1- 38; 2- 53	1- 23.0; 2- 32.1
Non answer	1- 8; 2- 6	1- 4.8; 2- 3.6
Total answers	1- 165; 2- 165	1- 95.4; 2- 95.4
No answers	1- 8; 2- 8	1- 4.6; 2- 4.6

Source: data collected in the grant 'Decent standard of living for families with school-age children'.

It cannot be said that about 65% of families have never had enough food; 32.4% rarely run out of money; about half of the sample were never able to buy drugs.

Happiness and satisfaction

The answers regarding the state of happiness in the last year (table 11) are gratifying, because almost 47% consider themselves quite happy and 12% even very happy, 32% appreciate their state of happiness: so and so.

Table 11. The state of happiness in the last year

The state of happiness in the last year	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Not very happy	7	4.0
So and so	56	32.4
Pretty happy	81	46.8
Very happy	21	12.1
Total answers	165	95.4
They did not declare	8	4.6
Total sample	173	100.0

Source: data collected in the grant 'Decent standard of living for families with school-age children'.

Satisfaction with daily life (table 12) confirms what the respondents said in the previous question, namely the satisfied and very satisfied assessment of almost 60% of the sample, and over 30% are considered neither dissatisfied nor satisfied.

Table 12. Satisfaction with everyday life

Satisfaction with everyday life	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Dissatisfied	9	5.2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	53	30.6

Satisfaction with everyday life	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Satisfied	83	48.0
Very satisfied	20	11.6
Total answers	165	95.4
They did not declare	8	4.6
Total sample	173	100.0

Source: data collected in the grant 'Decent standard of living for families with school-age children'.

And in terms of *all aspects of your life* lately, 'how satisfied you are' seems to respect the same preferences expressed by respondents, ie placing the answers at the top of the measurement scale. The largest share of the answers is in notes 8, 7, 6 and 9, as can be seen in table 13.

Table 13. Appreciation of your recent condition

Appreciation of your recent condition	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Minimum 1	-	-
2	-	-
3	2	1.2
4	4	2.3
5	11	6.4
6	27	15.6
7	47	27.2
8	49	28.3
9	21	12.1
Maximum 10	4	2.3
Total	165	95.4
They did not declare	8	4.6
Total sample	173	100.0

Source: data collected in the grant 'Decent standard of living for families with school-age children'.

The *importance of school for the success of the child's life* is appreciated as extremely important to all families, the grades given being 8, 9 and 10. *As leisure concerns of children* in the first place were mentioned: extracurricular training in almost a quarter of families (24.9%), then play / meetings with other children (23.7%) and much less, but equally appreciated were walks with mom / dad / grandparents / friends (12%) and computer games respectively on (12%).

Conclusions

The families participating in the study appreciated certain aspects of their family life and how satisfied they are with them: the first aspect appreciated by the respondents was family life they responded with the statements satisfied and very satisfied 78%; the second aspect was related to the income obtained by the partners together, to which the

answers were given with the ratings satisfied 30.6% and so and so 30.1%, and 33% said they were dissatisfied with their income; the third aspect is related to the relations in society with other people appreciated as such and such by 40.5% and satisfactory by 39.3%; the appreciation related to the couple's jobs which are satisfactory for 38.7% and so and so for 32.4%; how to spend free time with family is another aspect to which respondents answered satisfied 41% and very satisfied almost 29%; political life in the country is not a favorable option, 47.4% say they are dissatisfied with it, 17.3% say they are very dissatisfied and just as many, that is not the case; your family's achievements so far in life is the last question answered in this questionnaire and which received an equal percentage of 35.3% with satisfaction and 35.3% so and so, and 20.8% say they are very satisfied.

Funding

The authors received financial support for the research, within the Research Grant No. GAR-UM-2019-XI-5.5-8/15.10.2019 (coord. Adina Mihailescu), with the name 'Standardul decent de viata pentru familiile cu copii de vârstă școlară' ('Decent standard of living for families with school-age children'), from the Recurrent Donors Fund, available to the Romanian Academy and managed by the "PATRIMONIUM" Foundation GAR-UM-2019

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declare no conflicting interests.

References

- Colintineanu L. (2020). *Coronavirus România: Cum s-a schimbat mobilitatea oamenilor în starea de urgență și cum vom fi urmăriți prin telefoanele mobile*, Europa Liberă, 03rd of April 2020, available at <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/coronavirus-rom%C3%A2nia-cum-s-a-schimbata-mobilitatea-oamenilor-%C3%AEn-starea-de-urgen%C8%9B%C4%83-%C8%99i-cum-vom-fi-urm%C4%83%C8%9Bi-prin-telefoanele-mobile/30527518.html>, accessed 27.07.2020.
- Popescu L. A. (2020). *Șomaj tehnic în vremea coronavirusului. Cât dă de fapt Guvernul și ce trebuie să facă firmele*, Europa liberă, 19th March 2020, available at <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/somaj-tehnic-coronavirus-cat-da-guvernul-ce-trebuie-sa-faca-firmele/30497645.html>, accessed 27.04.2020.
- INSSE (2020). *Comunicat de presă nr. 95/ 09.04.2020*, Bucharest, available at https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/com_presa/com_pdf/cs02r20.pdf, accessed 30.04.2020.
- Ministerul Muncii și Protecției Sociale (2020). *Situația contractelor individuale de muncă suspendate/ încetate la data de 2 aprilie 2020*, Comunicat de presă, 02nd of April 2020, available at <http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/comunicare/comunicate-de-presa/5856-situa%C8%9Bia-contractelor-indivuale-de-munc%C4%83-suspendate-%C3%AEncetate-la-data-de-2-aprilie-2020>, accessed 27.04.2020.
- <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/coronavirus-rom%C3%A2nia-cum-s-a-schimbata-mobilitatea-oamenilor-%C3%AEn-starea-de-urgen%C8%9B%C4%83-%C8%99i-cum-vom-fi-urm%C4%83%C8%9Bi-prin-telefoanele-mobile/30527518.html>, accessed 27.04.2020.

Appendix

Table 14. Expenses with boys in the age group 6-10 years

Expenses with boys in the age group 6-10 years between 50-2500 lei	Number of children in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
50 – 250 lei	7	15.2
251 – 500 lei	22	47.8
501 – 1000 lei	12	26.1
1001 – 2000 lei	3	6.6
2001 – 2500 lei	2	4.3
Total children boys aged 6-10 years included in the sample	46 (26.6% from the sample of children)	100.0

Table 15. Expenses with boys in the age group 11-14 years

Expenses with boys in the age group 10-14 years 13-3,000 lei	Number of children in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
13 – 250 lei	9	12.7
251-500 lei	17	23.9
501 – 1,000 lei	28	39.5
1,001 – 2,000 lei	15	21.1
2,001 – 3,000 lei	2	2.8
Total children boys aged 11-14 years included in the sample	71 (41.0% from the sample of children)	100.0

Table 16. Expenses with girls in the age group 6-10 years

Expenses with girls in the age group 6-10 years between 250-8,000 lei	Number of children in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
250 – 500 lei	5	21.7
501 – 1,000 lei	11	47.9
1,001 – 2,000 lei	5	21.7
2,001 – 8,000 lei	2	8.7
Total children girls aged 6-10 years included in the sample	23 (13.3% from the sample of children)	100.0

Table 17. Expenses with girls in the age group 11-14 years

Expenses with girls in the age group 6-10 years between 200-4,000 lei	Number of children in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
200 – 500 lei	12	25.5
501 – 1,000 lei	21	44.7
1,001 – 2,000 lei	11	23.4
2,001 – 4,000 lei	3	6.4
Total children girls aged 10-14 years included in the sample	47 (27.2% from the sample of children)	100.0

Table 18. Expenses for alcoholic beverages and cigarettes

Expenses for alcoholic beverages and cigarettes	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Very small	16	9.6
Small	21	12.7
So and so	45	27.1
Big	29	17.5
Very big	5	3.0
Not necessary	50	30.1
Total	166	100.0
7 families did not declare	-	-

Table 19. Clothing and footwear expenses

Clothing and footwear expenses	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Very small	4	2.4
Small	23	13.9
So and so	71	42.8
Big	45	27.1
Very big	22	13.3
Not necessary	1	0.6
Total	166	100.0
7 families did not declare	-	-

Table 20. Expenses only for children

Expenses only for children	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Small	6	3.6
So and so	54	32.5
Big	57	34.3
Very big	48	28.9
Not necessary	1	0.6
Total	166	100.0
7 families did not declare	-	-

Table 21. Transport and subscription expenses

Transport and subscription expenses	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Very small	20	12.0
Small	52	31.3
So and so	63	38.0
Big	23	13.9
Very big	2	1.2
Not necessary	6	3.6
Total	166	100.0
7 families did not declare	-	-

Table 22. Health care expenses

Health care expenses	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Very small	18	10.8
Small	52	31.3
So and so	67	40.4
Big	19	11.4
Very big	8	4.6
Not necessary	2	1.2
Total	166	100.0
7 families did not declare	-	-

Table 23. Expenses for culture, school, books and shows.

Expenses for culture, school, books and shows	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Very small	3	1.8
Small	32	19.3
So and so	67	40.4
Big	41	24.7
Very big	22	13.3
Not necessary	1	0.6
Total	166	100.0
7 families did not declare	-	-

Table 24. Alimony expenses

Alimony expenses	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Very small	3	1.8
Small	6	3.7
So and so	4	2.4
Big	2	1.2
Very big	1	0.6
Not necessary	148	90.2
Total	164	100.0
9 families did not declare	-	-

Table 25. Other expenses

Other expenses	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Small	2	1.2
So and so	28	17.2
Big	22	13.5
Very big	11	6.7
Not necessary	100	61.3
Total	163	100.0
10 families did not declare	-	-

Table 26. Access to clothing / footwear products

Access to clothing / footwear products	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
There are situations in which we cannot buy what is strictly necessary for children	19	11.4
We manage to buy only for the child / children what is absolutely necessary	30	18.1
Sometimes we can't buy everything we need for the whole family	34	20.5
We rarely buy for the whole family and some products over what we absolutely need	57	34.3
We buy everything we want for the whole family	26	15.7
Total	166	100.0
7 families did not declare	-	-

Table 27. What priority do you give to the payment of installments to banks?

What priority do you give to the payment of installments to banks?	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Maximum 1	85	51.5
2	7	4.2
3	4	2.4
4	3	1.8
Minimum 5	43	26.1
It's not necessary	23	13.9
Total	165	100.0
8 families did not declare	-	-

Table 28. What priority do you give to the payment of debts?

What priority do you give to the payment of debts?	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Maximum 1	83	50.6
2	16	9.8
3	7	4.3
4	6	3.7
Minimum 5	32	19.5
It's not necessary	20	12.2
Total	165	100.0
9 families did not declare	-	-

Table 29. What priority do you give to family obligations?

What priority do you give to family obligations?	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Maximum 1	121	73.3
2	10	6.1
3	22	13.3

What priority do you give to family obligations?	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
4	5	3.0
Minimum 5	7	4.2
Total	165	100.0
8 families did not declare	-	-

Table 30. You didn't have enough food.

You didn't have enough food	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Frequently	3	1.7
Sometimes	15	8.7
Rare	36	20.8
Never	106	61.3
No answer	4	2.3
Total answers	164	94.8
No answers	9	5.2
Total sample	173	100.0

Table 31. You ran out of money.

You ran out of money	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Frequently	1,5	8.7
Sometimes	50	28.9
Rare	56	32.4
Never	42	24.3
No answer	3	1.7
Total answers	166	96.0
No answers	7	4.0
Total sample	173	100.0

Table 32. You could not buy medicine.

You could not buy medicine	Number of families in the sample	Frequency in the total sample (%)
Frequently	5	2.9
Sometimes	28	16.2
Rare	45	26.0
Never	82	47.4
No answer	5	2.9
Total answers	165	95.4
No answers	8	4.6
Total sample	173	100.0

THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO POVERTY: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE 21st CENTURY CHURCH

John SIRENGO¹
DOI: 10.35782/JCPP.2021.1.04

Abstract: *The concept of poverty is multifaceted as regards to humanity because of its description as being spiritual and material. From its antiquity, poverty has contributed to hunger and other related effects such as diseases which have fuelled the devastations of global community in matters of food production. This article focuses on the Christian response to poverty and its implications to the 21st century Church. It addresses the nature of poverty as absolute and relative. The causes based on the Church's historical proponents, theologians and biblical causes are highlighted. In its implications, one should take a holistic approach towards human sustenance of good life. God is the source of this wealth and material possessions are good and valuable, that man should not pride with it in exclusion of God. In conclusion, transformation of the sinful humanity is the beginning of the alleviation of both spiritual and material poverty. Stewardship and generosity are the gateway out of poverty.*

Keywords: *Christian response, poverty, implications, Church*

Introduction

The idea of poverty is systematically associated to man. Poverty is as old as man himself; hence, the eradication of poverty is very multifaceted. Around the globe poverty is explicitly an obstacle to many achievements. For example extreme hunger may lead to dangerous diseases that may cause man to become un-functionable in matters of efficiency in production.

If Christians are to respond to the extreme perils of poverty, they may first positively interpret Jesus' assertion that "*for you always have the poor with you*" (Matthew 26:11 ESV). This statement is negative, but should follow Jesus' teachings on the poor and how he advocated for their welfare. Secondly, they should find out the causes and nature of

¹ Lecturer, Friends Theological College-Kaimosi, P.O. Box 9, Tiriki, 50309, Kenya. Website: <http://ftc.friendsunitedmeeting.org>; E-mail: ftc@fum.org

poverty in order to come out with comprehensive and lasting solutions. Since there are various understanding of the nature of poverty, then the perspectives may also vary in response.

The paper will also focus on the Church's historical proponents on how poverty was viewed and their response to it. A biblical perspective is the core for the findings about the issue of poverty as a peril to many communities. Theologians on the other hand will be essential in the understanding of how poverty should be addressed to reduce its courses to the populace. On the other hand the findings will be recollected for proper applications and making a strong and lasting solution.

Definition of Key Terms

- i. **Christian:** According to Webster Dictionary, the term Christian is defined as “*a person professing belief in Jesus as the Christ, or in the religion based on the teachings of Jesus*” (Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, 1966: 259-260).
- ii. **Response:** The word response in the Webster's Dictionary is defined “*as something said or done in answer to the something else*” (ibid: 1240).
- iii. **Poverty:** The term poverty is defined as “the condition or quality of being poor or indigent” (ibid: 1144). It also adds that it is a “deficiency in necessary properties or desirable qualities, or in a specific quality” (ibid).
- iv. **Church:** The term Church is defined as “the ecclesiastical government of a particular religious group, or its power, as opposed to secular government” (ibid: 262).

The Concept of Poverty

The concept of poverty may vary from time to time and from one geographical area to the other. Poverty is complex to define and it also poses a challenge in the measurement of its status. Both the Old and the New Testaments have different etymological understanding of the term poverty. On the same note, the secular perspective also varies as per jurisdiction of its effectiveness. In this case, poverty can be understood as either absolute or relative:

- a. **Absolute Poverty:** The word absolute may be understood as something being independent of its own, without any comparisons. However, Kunhiyop (2008) defines the word ‘absolute’ as “*the inability to afford a minimum standard of living*”.
- b. **Relative Poverty** is the relationship between the poor as compared to others in a given community in matters of resources and income. Peter Town Ford in Kunhiyop's book African Christian Ethics defines ‘relative poverty’ as “*the absence of inadequacy of those diets, amenities, living standards, services and activities which are common customaries in society*” (Kunhiyop, 2008).

The Causes of Poverty

The causes of poverty may vary from community to community. For example, the World Book Encyclopedia (1992: 728) mentions the first one as “*the inability of certain people to get or hold steady, well-paying jobs. Many of these lack the education, skills, or talent needed for such jobs, other people are too old or sick to work*”. Many times people lack the ability to acquire good jobs. For example, education is the key to employment, skills are part of the training that can make one to be self-employed or be employed by other people or companies. On the same note, it is related to physical weakness in which Myers (2006: 67) observes that “*the household members are weak. They lack strength because of poor health and inadequate nutrition. Many in the household are women, the very young, and the very old*”. It is also noted that “*the economic forces and changes in labor requirements also causes poverty*” (World Book Encyclopedia, 1992: 728). When the economy rises, the value of money goes down and this may cause the inflation to affect both workers and the common man. On the side of the workers, they may lose their jobs due to lack of enough money for their payments. While with the common man the prices may go up or the supply of goods may become scarcity as a result people miss to have adequate food.

On the one hand, technology is sufficient in making the work easier and faster in its accomplishment. But on the other hand, “*advances in technology may cause unemployment and poverty among workers whose jobs are taken over by machines*” (Myers, 2006: 67). For example, the use of combine harvesters in farms of wheat and maize in Kenya caused many people to lose their jobs. When factories close down many people become unemployed. As a result poverty dominates because there would be no enough money in circulation. For example, when the Pan Paper Factory in Western Kenya closed down, approximately 2000 people lost their jobs.

Social forces have been noted as a cause of poverty. For instance, “*certain employers purposely try to avoid hiring blacks and other members of minority groups*” (World Book Encyclopedia, 1992: 728). It is a case also in the Kenyan system in certain counties where inflation in economy has caused unemployment to many people. When such situations take place, poverty dominates in many people’s lives and thus hunger and other related effects like diseases spread. Myers has observed that “*the household lacks the ability and the knowledge to influence the life around it and the social systems in which it lives*” (Myers, 2006: 67). If any government may take less control in social relationships the minority groups may remain poor for many years. The above causes of poverty were in line with the perspectives of World Encyclopedia’s definition of poverty as “*the lack of enough income and resources to live adequately by community standards*” (World Book Encyclopedia, 1992: 727). Since these causes vary from place to place and from county to country, it is difficult to come up with the proper measuring standards of control. The world Book Encyclopedia has suggested three major measures for eliminating poverty, firstly, “*measures to improve job opportunities, secondly, education programs, and thirdly, social welfare programs*” (World Book Encyclopedia, 1992: 728).

Biblical Causes of Poverty

The major biblical causes of poverty are related to the rebellion of man against God. Sin becomes the cause of poverty among the first parents of humanity, Adam and Eve. From the consequences of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, man therefore faces the challenge of survival and suffering. In Genesis 3:18-19, God pronounces a curse to the land and humanity as a whole, “*it will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken, for dust you are and to dust you will return*” (Genesis 3:18-19, NIV). As a result of this, poverty is seen as spiritual and material. Man is alienated from God and begins a wondering life. This has affected the entire human race in the world. God in his mercy, provided for Adam and Eve laws to govern them. The book of Exodus 23:2, 6,7 NIV records:

When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not prevent justice, by siding with the crowd (verse 6). Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd (verse 7). Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will acquit the guilty.

As time went by, man could not withhold the laws and therefore corruption entered among the kings and other leaders. Poverty in this state affected man and therefore he continued to suffer without any remedy.

a. Holy Poverty

The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought describes Holy Poverty as that “*which renounces material wealth, frees people to serve others and keeps them close to and reliant on God*” (Hastings, 2000: 552). The Holy Poverty was more of serving God in the spiritual without having the material wealth. So whosoever focuses on the material things falls into poverty. The disciples of Jesus Christ decided to leave everything and followed Jesus. The Bible records, “*and when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him*” (Luke 5:11 ESV). Jesus had encouraged his disciples to sell everything in acceptance of serving God without the involvement of the material things. In the gospel of Matthew 19:21, “*if you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have ‘treasure in heaven; and come, follow me*” (Matthew 19:21, ESV). It was a warning against acquiring of riches and the pursuit of wealthy without considering the poor.

This Holy Poverty was in the minds of the early church fathers that strongly rejected the practice of material wealth. Material wealth was a destructive towards knowing God the Maker and Provider of every human need. Cyprian of Cathege had to say that:

The property of the wealthy holds them in chains... which shackle their courage and choke their faith and hamper their judgment and throttle their souls. They think of themselves as owners, whereas it is they rather who are owned: enslaved as they are to their own property, they are not the masters of their money but its slaves (Kangas, 2012; retrieved online on 28th June 2020).

b. Laziness/Lack of Intelligence

Laziness and lack of intelligence were the causes of poverty in the Old and New Testament understanding. It is an idea that “*the poor have only themselves to blame [...]*” (Hastings, 2000: 552). Therefore, poverty comes as a result of God’s punishment to those who lack the ability to think and find food. Job’s poverty, as he lost everything, was termed by his friends as a punishment from God. It is written in Job 4:7-9, that “*who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off?... By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed*” (Job 4:7-9, ESV). On the same note, Jesus, according to the gospel of Matthew 25:28, castigated those who did not put their initiatives in the use of talents to produce profit. Jesus said to one of them, “*so take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents*” (Matthew 25:28, ESV).

The lack of intelligence is one of the causes of poverty. Myers (2006: 84), asserts that “*poverty is caused in part by lack of knowledge and technical information*”. The mental aspect of man is important in the fact that he/or she should be knowledgeable on matters of spiritual and physical wealth. Those who involve themselves in drugs and alcohol may increase the inability of the mind and the spirit to think and act as God made it. The Bible is also clear as it mentions in the book of Hosea 4:6 (ESV) that “*my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*”. Knowledge as a process could cause some people to acquire it adequately and understand quickly while others would be slower. Therefore, Clement of Rome (1st Century) understood it as the strong taking the initiative towards the weak:

Let the strong take care of the weak; let the weak respect the strong. Let the rich man minister to the poor man; let the poor man give thanks to God that he gave him one through whom his need might be satisfied (Kangas, 2012; retrieved online on 28th June 2020).

c. Injustice

Injustice done by the rich to the poor is against God’s laws. God instructed Prophet Amos to proclaim the prophetic message to the corrupt and unjust Kings and Judges who exploited the poor by not giving them their rights of pay after working for them. In Amos 4:1 ESV: “*who oppress the poor, who crush the needy*”. Injustice done by the rich on the poor is one of the causes of poverty among the community. This implies the imbalance of life in economic and social life to the people. It may also mean exploitation of the poor by the power of wealth to manipulate the poor to worship the rich in honouring them as their providers. God in his words of Proverbs 14:31 ESV proclaimed to the community that “*whoever oppresses a poor man insults his maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him*”. Generosity is the key to fulfilling the command of God towards the rich and the poor. It is warning towards the rich to disburse and share their wealth to the needy by fulfilling the law of God. Failure to do, Irenaeus commended that:

Instead of the tithes which the law commanded, the Lord said to divide everything we have with the poor. And he said to love not only our neighbors but also our enemies, and to be givers and sharers not only with the good but also to be liberal givers toward those who take away our possessions (Kangas, 2012; retrieved online on 28th June 2020).

The Practical Response to Poverty

Practically, the existence of poverty has its meaning in a broad spectrum of understanding. The church has been given the spiritual and material responsibilities to liberate the deprivation of the human condition of spiritual and physical poverty. For this case, the following are the practical approaches towards the eradication of spiritual and material poverty:

a. Be Salt and Light of the World

The use of salt and light is metaphorically described by Jesus Christ in the gospel of Matthew 5:13-14 ESV, that *“you are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world”*. This meant that Christians should preserve the truth and teach the world the knowledge of how humanity should come out of the sin that has entangled it into both spiritual and material poverty. The late Tokunboh Adeyemo (2006: 14) asserts in *“Is Africa Cursed?”* that *“as salt is used to arrest the process of decay and add taste to the insipid, and as light dispels darkness and reveals the hidden things, so also are Christians expected to be in society”*. If Christians should accept Christ’s call as salt and light of the world, all humanity would be freed from poverty. In the words of Kunhiyop (2008: 154), *“if the church in Africa were to covenant before God and before each other to be uncompromisingly honest, to defend the poor, and to do all it can within its power to better their lives, it would indeed be a source of good news to the poor”*.

b. Practicing the Golden Rule

The practice of the Golden Rule is to those who understand the law of God loving of the neighbor and instilling peace to each other. Tokunboh (2006: 114) commented that *“the Golden Rule implies patriotism, or love, for your nation”*. Love as an attribute of God should be practical within the rich and the poor as a fulfillment of God’s law of the neighbor. This is the commitment of Christians to non-Christians to put into practice a brotherly love, by sharing and supporting the poor in their state of want.

c. Positive Attitude towards Work

The term ‘work’ appears in the Bible in the second chapter of Genesis (2:2 ESV) when God finished his creation (*“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work”*). This is the finishing purpose, as we work; we are finishing what God has already accomplished. The Bible indicates a positive focus towards work. Genesis 1 and 2 describe the type of work God demands from man. Shaw (2014: 61) asks *“why do people work?”*, explaining that, *“one of the primary longings of emerging adults is for great work. They may insist that they work simply to make money, but in their hearts they want work that satisfies their soul and makes the world a better place”*. The Protestant view of work has helped us understand work as being holistic in nature. In this sense, a holistic type of work has been introduced to satisfy the rational, the spiritual and the physical parts of man.

Those who practice this holistic understanding of work often fulfill God's mission. Tokunboh (2006: 117) asserts that "*the Bible is serious about the importance of work*". The church has to make serious practicum on what apostle Paul admonished in Thessalonians 3:10-11 ESV: "*if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat; for we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies*". Here, work becomes a necessity towards accomplishing God's desires and for man to acquire food.

d. Raising Godly Families

Raising Christian families is a model of God's mission in this world beginning from Adam and Eve. The family unit has been affected from both spiritual and material decadence. Tokunboh (2006: 118) denotes that "*such foreign perversions as homosexual and lesbian relationships are contributing to moral decadence and collapse of family units in our societies*". The household has the responsibility of preserving God's creation by working together in unity (father, mother and children) as a replicated model of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit working in Trinity. By behaving in this way, no poverty should exist within the family.

The Bible affirms family unit in training: "*train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it*" (Proverbs 22:6 ESV). A godly family that follows what is expected of them lives a well balanced life. It is what Tokunboh (2006: 119) calls "*a regular consistent family altar backed by a live of prayer, of holiness, of charity and of hard work is an investment that guarantees impressive dividends*".

e. Presenting the Whole Gospel

Presenting the whole Gospel means that the spiritual, physical and mental needs of man have to be acquired. This is a holistic approach towards the eradication of poverty. Kunhiyop (2008: 158) says that "*we are not only to people and to convert them, but are also to teach them how to live in a way that pleases God*".

Application

It is important for Christians to defend the view that both material and spiritual wealth can coexist with godliness. Blomberg and Carson (1999) have illustrated five points in support of both material and spiritual possessions as in line with God's work. The first one is that, "*material possessions are a good gift from God meant for his people to enjoy*" (Blomberg, Carson, 1999: 243). It is evident that when God created the heavens and earth he eventually said that it is good. Nothing is wrong with material possessions. The second point mentioned is that "*material possessions are simultaneously one of the primary means of turning human hearts away from God*" (ibid: 244). Beginning from Adam and Eve had coveted against the forbidden and attractive fruit in the Garden of Eden. Hostility and exploitation of the poor begins with much desire for material possessions. The idea is explicitly addressed by the pastoral writer Timothy (I) 6:10 ESV, who says "*for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils*". Once more Paul encouraged Timothy not to appoint

any person who loved the money. In I Timothy 3:3 ESV, he says “*not a lover of money*” should be involved in leadership capacities.

The heart of generosity is important in the service of God. Giving of tithes was encouraged both in the Old and New Testaments, at least to support the poor, widows, orphans and other social categories exposed to the risk of poverty. Blomberg and Carson (1999: 245) claim that “*one of the most frequent refrains of Torah, Psalms and Prophets is God’s concern for the widow, fatherless, alien and poor*”. This calls for transformation and stewardship among the ministers of God in the achievements of God’s concern for his people. This however contributes to the third point, “*a necessary sign of a life in the process of being redeemed is that of transformation in the area of stewardship*” (ibid: 244).

The fourth point towards the skewed process of defending poverty depends upon the area affected. Blomberg and Carson (1999: 245) argue that “*there are certain extremes of wealth and poverty which are in and of themselves intolerable*”. People or a certain community may be rich or poor depending on the economic setup that might affect them. Therefore, this may call in any material support to enhance the wellbeing of the people.

No single church can prosper spiritually without the material support. In their fifth point, Blomberg and Carson (1999: 246) note that “*the Bible’s teaching about material possessions is inextricably intertwined with more spiritual matters*”. If the church works on the one part, then the other part will be left incomplete which may mean poverty is half way solved. Balancing the two is important as a good steward of God’s property. The gospel can be well spread with good contributions of funds out of which church workers are to be paid, or costs of travel and other socio-economic needs covered. The office of evangelism cannot work well without having good offertory and tithes in the church. There is need to have godly people who may be contended with the little or much wealth.

Conclusion

It is fundamentally important to note that eradication of poverty begins with the transformation of the sinful humanity. When man is redeemed from the prison of sin then the socio-economic life of man becomes manageable under God’s control. Stewardship takes lead in both material and spiritual possessions. The church should try to gain the material and spiritual possessions because they are good from the beginning of creation of man. In the third letter of John 2 ESV it is stated that “*beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul*”. Generosity and compassionate heart is a means of poverty reduction in cases of either in surplus or little possessions. Supporting the needy is indispensable because of the intolerable circumstances.

Churches that believe in the holistic ministry should enlarge their work to become global. Blomberg and Carson (1999: 247) are clear as they mention that “*if holistic salvation represents the ultimate good God wants all to receive, then our charitable giving should be directed to individuals, churches or organizations that minister holistically, caring for people’s bodies as well as their spiritual circumstances*”. It is a call to the church to have a holistic Christian

who can carry out the work of God in a faithful manner to achieve the spiritual and physical needs of man.

Authorship

This work is John Sirengo's own research and it has not been surpoted by any external person.

Acknowledgements

This study was not surpoted in any kind whatsoever.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and publication of this article, apart from the redactional assistance of the Journal of Community Postive Practices (JCPP) for publication.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author, by the name John Sirengo, declares no conflicting interests within this article.

References

- Blomberg, C. L., & Carson, D. A. (1999). *Neither Poverty nor Riches. A Biblical Theology of Possessions*. Illinois: InterVarsity Press.
- Hastings, A., Mason, A., & Pyper, H. (2000). *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kangas, B. (2012). Teachings of the Early Church Fathers on Poverty & Wealth. *The Orant*, available online at URL: <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/billykangas/2012/08/teachings-of-the-early-church-fathers-on-poverty-wealth.html>
- Kunhiyop, S. W. (2008). *African Christian Ethics*. Zondervan: WaordAlive Publishers.
- Myers, B. L. (2006). *Working with the poor. Principles and practices of Transformational Development*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Shaw, M. (2014). *Work, Play, Love: A Visual Guide to Calling, Career and the mission of God*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.
- Tokunboh, A. (2006). *Is Africa Cursed? A vision for the Radical Transformation of an Ailing Continent*. Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers Limited.
- Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*. College Edition, New York: The World Publishing Company, 1966.
- World Book Encyclopedia*. Vol. 15. Chicago: World Book, Inc, 1992.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS OF ROMANIAN MIGRATION IN UK, GERMANY AND AUSTRIA DURING 2020

Sebastian FITZEK¹
DOI: 10.35782/JCPP.2021.1.05

Abstract: *In the current context of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Globalization, the emphasis of Romanian migration in Western countries (particularly in this article in UK, Germany, and Austria) has become a phenomenon with multiple challenges and dilemmas on different levels and dimensions. Thus, the special attention from the state authorities on these issues is not just a short-term task, requiring a complex collaboration between the political government, the medical system, and specialized researchers. Both state institutions can establish medium and long-term interests regarding the effort to strengthen the Romanian state's relations with citizens abroad, negotiate inter-community solutions, guide public policies to support the insertion on the labour market, etc., a complex set of analysis and solutions with a multidisciplinary scientific contribution. In the conditions of intensifying the flows of Romanian immigrants, the risks of losing an important national productive and creative segment also increase. Local human resources management is a strict subject of internal management and abroad human resources management, this being a subject of Community legislation, diplomatic communication and policies of inclusion, integration, and insertion in the labour market. The long-term goal is to strengthen the sense of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious identity and security of Romanians abroad, consolidating the Romanian cultural heritage.*

Key words: *immigration, cultural identity, insertion, labour market, civil rights, public health, COVID-19 Pandemic.*

¹ Senior Researcher, The Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy; Lecturer at Faculty of Communication and Public Relations (FCRP) National University for Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA); e-mail: sebastian_thomas2000@yahoo.com, sebastian.fitzek@comunicare.ro

1. Romanian emigration in a European context during COVID-19 Pandemic

In the midst of a medical crisis, the number of Romanian immigrants has slightly declined in 2020. The year 2020 has also been a difficult one for Romania, particularly medically and economically. Throughout this period, the number of Romanian immigrants decreased substantially over a period determined by the multiple problems caused by the global health crisis. According to the National Statistical Institute, as of January 1, 2020, „*the resident population was 19,318,000, a reduction of 96,500 compared to January 1, 2019. The main cause of this decline is the negative natural increase (number of deaths surpassing the number of live births by 73,630 persons). The balance of long-term temporary international migration was negative (- 30,591 people). On January 1, 2020, the population living in the urban area was 10,449 thousand, down 0.1% from January 1, 2019*” (NIS, 2020).

Romanian communities around the world are characterized by a weak cohesion and vulnerability against the factors of erosion of their identity belonging to the motherland, evolving towards a set of perceptions weakly correlated with cultural heritage. At their level, there is a number of common features:

- a) the lack of a sufficiently consolidated associative framework to offer a unitary and efficient presentation of its members in their relationship with the authorities of the countries they reside and even in their dialogue with the Romanian State;
- b) the lack of institutional culture necessary for procedural and organizational articulation, essential points for a better effectiveness of one's actions;
- c) lack of internal democratic experience that decreases the chance to support leaders / authentic representatives of diaspora communities;
- d) the non-involvement of the elites inside the Romanian communities abroad and their minimal relationship with the professional networks in the country;
- e) the lack of vision of the Romanian communities, together with problems of image distortion compared to the public opinion in the country of residence;
- f) the problems of Romanian communities abroad are, generally speaking, peculiar.

Emigration shaped up from successive waves of Romanians having different reasons, depending on the historical and social moments when they left, the phenomenon of migration meeting variable dimensions (eds. Zamfir and Cace, 2020). In this regard, there are important differences between Romanian communities, depending on their attitude and relationship to: representatives of Romanian public authorities (including citizenship reports), religious authorities, Romanian cultural heritage (including Romanian language) and professional groups in Romania. In short, after giving up the rigorous control of the emigration process, difficult and subjective characteristic of the former communist regime, Romania faced a massive process of emigration without precedent. The main feature was the transition from emigration for ethnic reasons (the example of ethnic Germans and Jews) to a massive emigration of the majority ethnic

groups, for economic reasons, as a dominant circulatory type. This is often characterized by the sum of confusing, sometimes abusive procedures over a period of political change (legal entries followed by illegal jobs, illegal entries followed by compliance with legal support in those countries). There have also been changes in the migration mechanisms in Romania, changes focused on the following directions:

- a. the evolutionary change by years of the share of the number of emigrants, changing also the reasons for emigration;
- b. the specialized legislation on the migratory phenomenon is found in three main categories of laws: laws on migration, laws for the labour force and laws for the attestation of diplomas and qualifications.

In recent years, major progress has been made in amending existing legislation and adopting new regulatory documents compatible with the community “acquis”. During the completion of the legal-institutional environment in accordance with the requirements of the European Union, Romania creates its own migration policy. Moreover, the Romanian treaty of accession to the European Union has a series of regulations regarding the transition period introduced at the will of a member state from the European family. The suggestion to control the migratory phenomenon by establishing transitional periods aims to determine the increase of uncertainty regarding the migratory flow and the decrease of the pressures created by migration, establishing a balanced structure of the qualification of the labour force. After 1990, an institutional environment was created in Romania, with the aim of presenting activities related to the preservation and sustenance of the cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic identity of all Romanians everywhere. Once the migratory conditions were diversified, the Romanian institutions created specific mechanisms for keeping the various aspects of migration in order. The Department for Romanian Relations from all over the world was created in the departmental area of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has now been transferred to the Government, as the main instrument of the state to support communities abroad, Romanian values and identity.

Also, in accordance with the regulations of Government Decision no. 162 of 1998 and later by Law no. 150 of 1998 - on support for Romanian communities around the world, the Eudoxiu Hurmuzachi Institute was created for Romanians everywhere.

There are also other institutions with responsibilities and competences in the field: for the administration of bilateral agreements signed by Romania in the field of labour movement, the Office for Labour Migration was created within the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, which has the task of grants scholarships and diplomas, respectively professional qualifications for Romanian representatives abroad; the structure and competencies of the Romanian.

Language Institute have been strengthened, and the Ministry of Cults and Culture administers funds meant to support the Romanian cultural and religious heritage abroad (Dumitru, 2010). Through the specialized institutions for diplomatic missions and consular offices, as well as the strengthening of relations with the competent authorities of the host countries, a proper monitoring of the real situation of Romanian communities and Romanian citizens abroad, in order to preserve the rights, was carried

out in the name of the Constitution and in the spirit of the European Treaties, which ensure equal and non-discriminatory treatment with all European Community states for any European citizen. In the short and medium term, the Romanian language enjoys the same rights with the other languages spoken within the EU (Spain, Italy, Great Britain, Ireland, Germany, France, etc.) or with the languages spoken outside Europe (of interest to the USA, Canada, and Israel).

The new European status that Romania received in 2007 has a special impact on the dynamics of the neighbouring Romanian communities: Romania has become an increasingly attractive destination for many compatriots from the Balkans and neighbouring countries, countries outside the EU, which contributes to the decrease of Romanian minority groups in these areas and implicitly to the evolution of Romanian communities through the emigration of these categories of Romanians to EU member states. Emigration, especially in Western European countries, will remain a solid social phenomenon and Romania will be a source of sustenance for this type of migration, with a special appeal for highly educated human resources. Therefore, in the coming years, an increase of the Romanian communities abroad is foreseen, such as their consolidation, being more necessary every day as an underlining of the Romanian civil society in the international environment. If the number of this type of migration and the risk included by the loss of an important national productive and creative segment increases, as seen in recent years, the potential of these communities should be exploited in a higher way economically, politically, socially, and culturally for Romania, benefits pursued by the involvement of the Romanian emigrant elites. Promising from this point of view, for prompting professional networks that have specialists abroad and personalities or institutions from inside the country, becomes a “sine-qua non” condition for promoting the national goal, the Romanian cultural and scientific heritage.

There is a need for an increasingly active involvement of specialized institutions in the organization of migration and those arising from this globalized phenomenon, some of which are already mandatory, especially in European areas, on topics such as:

- a) high level of crime in host countries;
- b) insufficient integration of migrants into host societies;
- c) the emphasis on the labour shortage in some economic sectors in Romania;
- d) mobility of highly educated human resources, which calls for urgent solutions to increase brain drain through repatriation policies, providing conditions of employment at European standards;
- e) changing the demographic and cultural structure of Romanian communities abroad;
- f) the observance of the cultural rights of the citizens of Romanian origin by the authorities of the host countries;
- g) proper coordination of the image of the Romanian communities in the countries of residence with direct implications on the bilateral reports;

h) encouraging lobbying actions with the participation of Romanian elites abroad and the corresponding associative environment. (Down H. et al., 2011, p.5-6)

Considering the constitutional and moral obligation of the Romanian state in promoting the relationship with Romanians everywhere, the fundamental objective is to promote good cooperation relations, as well as partnerships with Romanian institutions whose activity could help Romanians abroad.

2. The case of the Romanians in UK

Lifting labour market restrictions in the UK remains a goal for the future. Numerous negative articles have appeared in London newspapers in recent years regarding the criminality of Romanians in England. The right question is: what does the freedom to work in the UK have to do with catching criminals? And why are British conservatives making deals with the anti-immigrant party Ukip on this issue? Probably British politicians have fallen into the cheap trap of prejudices according to which Romanian immigrants are prone to have the crime gene to a greater extent than all other nations. In England, the idea of restricting the access of Romanian immigrants to medical care, social benefits and jobs was grounded. As proof, insulting notes appeared at the entrance to some London stores where it was written that: "*Romanian access is forbidden*".

Another important issue is the status of Romanian workers after Brexit. In 2019, over 140,000 Romanians living and working in the UK applied for help from the European Granting System to be able to stay in the UK, even after Brexit. Over 410,000 Romanians have been living in the UK since 2017, becoming the second largest community of migrants in the EU, after Poles, according to official data. In their first meeting, the British ambassador Andrew Noble and the Romanian foreign minister, Ramona Mănescu, congratulated the over 140,000 Romanians in Great Britain who requested the European settlement scheme and encouraged the rest of the Romanians in Great Britain to request this help, through which their rights are guaranteed. These advantages were enjoyed, in particular, by Romanian students, including those whose university courses started in January 2020.

According to this agreement, Romanians who were in the UK before October 31, 2019 applied for the established status, given that they lived in the UK for more than five years, or pre-settled status, if they lived in the UK less than five years. Applications can be submitted until 31st of December 2020. Those who obtain the established status can then live and work in the UK for as long as they want, bring their families, and apply for British citizenship (minimum 12 months after obtaining the status).

All EU citizens with a pre-established status in the UK can stay, work and study in the country, using the National Health System, apply for state pensions and have the right to rent a house. To date, around 1 million of the almost 4 million EU residents living in the UK have chosen to remain under this system.

EU citizens arriving in the UK after 31st of October 2019 will not be able to apply for this scheme, in accordance with current regulations. According to Euronews however, the British government intends to grant to all EU residents who enter the UK between

the scheduled date for Brexit (without considering the Covid-19 medical crisis), 31 October 2019 and the end of 2020, a right of residence for three years.

In 2020, in the midst of a pandemic period, Romanians in the UK retained their third place as the largest community after the Irish and Indians, but they are also the most vulnerable group at risk of poverty. Brexit and Covid19 have not reduced the number of Romanians, according to Professor David Coleman, a demography specialist who advocates for Eastern Europeans in Britain. Many of them have jobs in the living area, working on supermarket shelves or for the elderly in nursing homes, asylums, hotel rooms, restaurants, etc.; however, there is a fear that social and economic isolation implies discomfort among most Romanian workers. Most EU citizens are not well informed about Brexit, and Romanians make no exception. The language barrier, the fact that most Romanian citizens do not get information directly from the British press, makes them somehow, quite vulnerable. Within the Romanian community, it was observed that many Romanians consider that the establishment process would be a simple and automatic process, as long as they will pay taxes, being citizens who respect the law. A closer look at the Romanians interviewed by The Guardian reveals that they arrived in Great Britain to improve their material life. A large number of parents tell heart-breaking stories about left behind children in the care of their grandparents to ensure a better life for them.

3. The case of the Romanians in Germany

Sometimes, several German officials complain about Romanians because they use their social assistance system selfishly and inefficiently. Here is a discriminatory statement: *"Romanians and Bulgarians are raiding our countries to abuse welfare systems, stealing jobs, probably our cars and wallets,"* concluded Ernst Peter, a German journalist at Die Zeit. *"No German or British politician will say it so responsibly, but that is the point,"* he said in his June 2, 2018 article.

In Germany, the term *"welfare tourism"* has emerged among Bavarian conservatives. Bavaria is a battleground for regional and federal elections, and Romanian immigration has become an election campaign theme for German conservatives in the CSU. A large part of the Bavarian politicians plead against Romania's entry into the Schengen area. *"Those who come to work are welcome, but we must not accept that people come here only for social benefits,"* is the argument mentioned by a journalist from Die Zeit. Indirectly it particularly refers to Roma - Romanians, who are entitled to about 200 euros per child each month; they usually have more than 5 children per family.

Since hundreds of thousands of ethnic Roma have Romanian passports, the term *"Romanian"* is often used as a euphemism for the racist term *"gypsy"*. In Britain and Germany there is no mass invasion as has happened in countries like Italy or Spain.

Pensions are the main form of protection of citizens by state social insurance. In an attempt to identify the possible causes of the significant differences that exist today between the amounts of pension obtained for the age limit of a Romanian pensioner who worked in Germany, I will make a comparison between the main sources on the establishment of state social security regarding the state contribution of employees and

employers, more precisely by the way in which a pension is granted and the way in which the public pension is calculated (Pillar I).

Romanians who worked in Germany and reached retirement age is regarded in the home country as an ideal scenario for many of Germany's foreign residents, whose numbers are rising. In 2019, approximately 5.2 million non-Germans (without citizenship) paid into the country's social security system. That is 330,000 more than in the previous year. Those managing the German public pension fund estimate that the number of foreign taxpayers will increase again this year. The eurozone crisis is an additional reason why Romanian workers have left for Germany. In 2019, the German Federal Statistical Office registered an influx of 800,000 thousand people in Germany, most of them refugees. During the outbreak of the COVID19 pandemic, more precisely after May 2020, the inflow process decreased a lot, sporadically restarting with the seasonal period.

Romanian employees of German companies contributed to the social security system. Currently, they have paid 18.9% of income in the pension system, with an additional 2.05 per cent compared to 2018, and will enter a fund for extended disability care insurance. German employers pay half of these contributions. During a working life, the money paid in these systems is added. However, not all foreign employees benefit equally from what they have contributed. For German economist Reinhold Schnabel of the University of Duisburg, *“the most important distinction must be made between foreign workers in the EU and elsewhere.”* This is partly due to the fact that in the EU, citizens of all Member States must be treated equally. Romanian workers, for example, should not be at a disadvantage compared to their German counterparts, who have the same rights. Every EU citizen has the right to receive a pension from Germany, provided they pay in that scheme for at least five years. All Romanians who have contributed to the German pension system for less than five years do not enjoy the same rights as longer-term taxpayers. This does not mean that their money is lost. The money they paid can be added to the pensions they get from their countries of origin, which means that pensioners can live on payments made in the systems of several countries. For the lump sum option, Romanian workers who were obliged to pay pensions but remained in Germany for less than five years also have the option to pay their contributions in a lump sum, instead of adding to the benefits of monthly pension drawn elsewhere. This option is only available after taxpayers have reached the age of pension eligibility. Extended care insurance usually becomes relevant for the elderly. When people retire or have German pension rights added to home benefits, employers' contributions are included.

Immigrants from outside the EU may face disadvantages when it comes to the pension system, as they are not governed by the European Union's uniform policy in this regard. Employees in Germany are also required to pay in the long-term disability insurance program, which helps cover costs for those in need of extended care services. The same goes for Romanian workers, the system costs them about 1 per cent of their income, especially for cases where the elderly need help to pay for asylum. These payments help too few financially retired foreign workers who want to return home.

As a result, Romanian immigrants who eventually leave Germany often lose the money they paid for extended care insurance. Upon returning home, they are subject to the laws governing their home nations. When someone from Romania comes to work in Germany for a few years, and then returns home, the regulations apply in their home country. There is no payment available, as there is with pensions. Also, the existing agreements on pensions in Germany and non-EU countries do not contain provisions for the recovery of extended care insurance payments. As members of the European Union, Romania and Germany have, at least officially in the case of Romania, an active social policy. For both countries, the term "welfare state" is used as a guarantee given by their fundamental laws; the welfare state is obliged to take measures for economic development and social protection, ensuring citizens a decent living. The right to receive a pension is enshrined in all European countries as a fundamental citizen's right. However, while in Germany the average social pension significantly exceeds, in some cases, the amount of 500 euros, in Romania the average social pension was, in July 2019, around 250 euros. At such an average net pension level, we cannot bring the ensuring of a decent living for Romanian retirees in discussion. Regarding the level of annual expenditures for public pensions, Romania registered in December 2018, 4,872 million social pensioners, of which over 3 million were retirees (with full or incomplete stage), the annual expenditures for pensions representing 7.3% of GDP, while in Germany - a country with a population four times larger than the population of Romania - the total number of pensioners was about 24.6 million, public pension spending accounting for about 11.5% of GDP.

4. The case of the Romanians in Austria

In 2017, there were over 36,000 Romanians in Vienna, and in all of Austria there are over 123,461 Romanians.¹ The closure of the borders, the suspicion of the spread of the pandemic also affected the lives of immigrants. Not long ago, Romanian seasonal workers waited to board planes to Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, etc.

For tens of thousands of seasonal workers (mostly from south-eastern Europe), the pandemic has become the most difficult time. Most Romanian workers faced an extremely difficult choice: to go to work in the host country, in the presence of major risks in the area of social assistance or to return to the country of origin without benefiting from a performing medical system. Many Romanians, who have taken advantage of their freedom of movement, are now trapped in a foreign country, with border closures, no repatriation flights, and if they have lost their jobs, their financial situation does not provide them with a safety net.

Despite the strict quarantine conditions to protect public health in Romania and Bulgaria, tens of thousands of workers in both countries choose to stay in the west so as not to lose their jobs, especially on seasonal farms where wages are very low. In Germany, the government has dropped employment provisions to save the white asparagus crop; German food growers will not need social security contributions for migrants as long as they are refugees again in 115 days.

¹ <https://www.wien.gv.at/statistik/pdf/menschen2017.pdf>

Meanwhile, Austria has defied the closure of the border by organizing charter flights from Romania and Bulgaria to bring in hundreds of workers and caregivers for the elderly. Several flights with over 200 people, mostly women, from Timisoara and Cluj arrived in Vienna. According to some of those who travelled, they did not have the opportunity to distance themselves socially during the trip, having their passports with them during the quarantine organized by the state. Once in Austria, the local media published several critical articles on the situation of Romanian workers.

Approximately 40,000 Romanians already work as caregivers for the elderly in Austria, on two- and four-week shifts. Employment contracts are exempt from certain obligations and, as a result of the pandemic, they are exposed to major risks. Romania has banned domestic travel and much of its travel abroad, after the government declared a state of emergency on March 16. When the borders were closed, many caregivers were blocked - some in their patients' homes, others in Romania, where they have no income. Their employment arrangements require them to spend half a month in the patient's home in Austria, and half in Romania. Earning less than 11,000 euros a year - the threshold is mandatory to complete a tax return to the Austrian authorities.

As EU citizens, many Romanians do not have national insurance numbers or bank accounts in Austria, so they do not qualify for help from the Austrian state or the Romanian state. *“We feel abandoned by both states”* said Marinela Dagadita, a caregiver and rights activist. Some Romanians in Austria wanted to return home to their children and had to pay expensive taxes to reach the border and then cross the border on foot.

Misinformation, poor knowledge of the German language, Austrian law, power dynamics and typical isolation for care jobs have generated several problems for Romanian caregivers (especially women).

If flights can be arranged for caregivers to go to work, why can't they also arrange flights back home? In conclusion, there is a need for better regulation of the sector and stronger employment contracts.

There are some unresolved issues regarding certain rights of Romanian children living in the Republic of Austria. The Austrian allowance *“die Familienbeihilfe”* (family allowance) was regulated by the law *“Familienlastenausgleichsgesetz”* of 1967 (Law on compensation of family burdens), which provides that the parent of the child is entitled to receive the allowance, unlike the allowance in Romania, where the holder is the child (Law 61/1993, updated 2018, art. 3, paragraph 2). In Austria, the holder must be over 18 years of age, have a job and have a non-working person in charge, for whatever reason. The guardian of the child, according to Austrian law, is obliged to live with him in order to receive the right for allowance. For these reasons, a different address of residence between the child and the guardian parent cancels his right to withdraw the allowance. The given situation forces the address on the child's documents to coincide with the documents of the guardian parent. In conclusion, a Romanian worker is obliged to have the same address in Austria, together with his child, to enjoy this right. If the same worker has his residence address in Austria, and his child is in the care of other persons (residing in Romania or in another country) then he will not receive the allowance. Naturally, the child allowance is established as a form of state protection

granted to all children up to the age of 18, without discrimination. In other EU Member States, the child allowance is granted regardless of their address, as well as for health insurance and care, provided that the holder of the right to the state allowance is the child directly. The same goes for situations where the child does not live with the parents.

The Austrian case, from a human rights perspective, imposes a discriminatory restriction that prevents the children of Romanian workers in this country from enjoying a universal right. The law of residence of the holder brings, in conclusion, a problem that belongs to human rights, but also a problem that annuls the law of reciprocity.

5. Conclusions. General solutions to the problems of Romanian emigration during a Pandemic

Taking into account the complexity of the medical and socio-economic difficulties faced by Romanian emigrants, as well as the challenges of solving them, the amount of efforts and coordination of state institution's actions as a way to solve them become imperative. On the other hand, in order to establish partnerships with the Romanian associative field abroad and with the state residence institutions, there is the possibility of a very precise analysis of the needs, resources and strategies. Here are some steps in this regard:

- a) organizing the congress of Romanian associations abroad;
- b) supporting the partnership between the Romanian communities and the public institutions in Romania with interest for the image of Romanians from abroad (cultural institutions, etc.);
- c) achieving a close collaboration between the Romanian organizations from different European states in order to know, collaborate and support each other;
- d) to support the creation of organizations and associations of Romanians in places of emigration in order to cohesive the community and its affirmation in the states of residence;
- e) supporting organizations and associations of Romanian students abroad for studies and vocational education;
- f) the evolution of the Romanian administrative capacity and associations, through the financial support of adequate headquarters, of the necessary human resources, of the logistics;
- g) facilitating the transmission of good management practices in the evolution of projects designated to Romanians abroad by establishing partnerships between Romanian organizations and organizing changes in experience;
- i) consolidation and inter-institutional cooperation to unite Romanians in the Diaspora;

- j) adapting and articulating the legislation around the objective of associating qualified Romanian migrants - in a balanced partnership - to the economic evolution of the country.
- h) integration of Romanians abroad and the recognition of specialists as “*strategic potential*” of human resources, but also of social capital.

Due to the increase of the Romanian labour traffic in the community space, we are witnessing a qualitative and quantitative increase of emigration (OCDE Report, 2019). Taking into account the labour crises in Romania and the brain drain, the programs to support the construction of professional networks are part of the activities of the Romanian authorities regarding the recovery of the Romanian scientific culture, as well as the highly skilled workforce (brain recovery phenomenon). Professional networks contribute to the accumulation of efforts to identify, apply and transmit good practices in various fields of activity, with beneficial effects, in terms of coordinating the actions of Romanians who are engaged in projects of mutual interest everywhere. The support of these networks can have beneficial effects on strengthening the cohesion of the Romanian communities abroad and their relations with the Romanians inside the country.

Measures to be considered would consist of:

- a. mapping the networks of professional associations and students that already exist and creating a database as complex as possible to stimulate this type of initiative and provide the reproduction and pooling of resources through integrated communication platform on the Internet;
- b. supporting professional network projects, self-organization being one of the principles underlying professional communities;
- c. supporting and encouraging actions aimed at Romanian researchers and active universities involved in the international scientific scene;
- d. the organization in the first edition of the Forum of the Romanian associations from Italy / Germany / France / Spain / England, as workshops dedicated to some professional fields.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for this research.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declare no conflicting interests.

References

- Dumitru, S. (2010). *Lumile sociale ale migrației românești în străinătate*, Iași: Polirom Publishing House
- Zamfir, C., Căce, S. eds. (2020). *COVID-19 in Romania. Data, analysis, developments, and statistics*, București: Expert Publishing House
- Eurostat (2020). *Number of children living in another EU country, by citizenship*, accessed 5th of June 2020.
- Eurostat (2020). *Asylum and first-time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex*. Annual aggregated data (rounded); accessed 5th of March 2020.
- OCDE (2019) *International Migration Outlook. Raport study of immigration in European countries*.
- National Institute of Statistics (2020). *Resident population on January 1, 2021 and international migration in 2020*, available at comunicat populatia rezidenta si migratia internationala | Institutul Național de Statistică (insse.ro), accessed on 25th of February, 2021
- *** Package 'poLCA' (2014). available at <http://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/poLCA/poLCA.pdf>
- Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Wien (2017). *Menschen in Wien*, Bevölkerung, available at <https://www.wien.gv.at/statistik/pdf/menschen2017.pdf>

Legislative resources

International legal environment

ONU (1966) International Treaty on Civil and Political Rights

- *** UN General Assembly Resolution 47/135 of 18 December on the rights of persons belonging to national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities
- *** European Convention on Human Rights
- *** Convention established for the protection of national minorities of the European Council
- *** European Charter for Religious or Minority Languages (Council of Europe)
- *** The Hague Recommendation on the Rights of National Minorities in Education (1996)
- *** Oslo Recommendation on the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities (1998) promoted by the OCDE

Bilateral legal environment

- *** Treaty of Understanding, Cooperation and Good Neighborhood between Romania and the Republic of Albania which entered into force in 1995
- *** Treaty on Understanding, Cooperation and Good Neighborhood Relations between Romania and the Republic of Hungary, 1996
- *** Treaty on Good Cooperation Relations and Cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, 1997
- *** The collaboration protocol in the field of culture, education and sciences between Romania and Germany, renewed in 2004
- *** The Cooperation Protocol signed in 2003 was signed in Dinkelsbühl between the German Ministry of Culture and Cults of the Transylvanian Saxons, taking into account even the protection of the cultural heritage of the Transylvanian Saxons
- *** Treaty between the Austrian Federal Government and the Romanian Government on the reciprocal exchange of data in the field of migration control and asylum issues, signed by the Ministers of the Interior in 2004
- *** Cultural collaboration program between the Government of Romania and the Government of the Republic of Austria for the years 2006-2009, completed in 2007
- *** Institutional resources Romania's representatives in European commissions, institutions, bodies (ie the Committee of the Regions), the European Council, the UN

BOOK REVIEW

Kosher, H. et al.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND SOCIAL WORK

**SpringerBriefs in Rights-Based Approaches
to Social Work, 2016, p.75**

Cristina TOMESCU¹

DOI: 10.35782/JCPP.2021.1.06

The link between the social work profession and children's rights emerged since the 19th century and the social assistance has strongly influenced the movement for children's rights and the protection of children from abuse in the family or exploitation at work. But the awareness of children's rights and its expression in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child have important impact on social policy, institutions, and services for children, as they led to the establishment of new principles and values. Child protection services have therefore increased approaches appropriate to the new status of children in society, as persons with rights, and the social work has confronted the need to consider that in its practices and standards.

The profession of social assistance has had a historic commitment to protecting children. The reverse is also true, children's rights have contributed to the structuring of social assistance as a profession, the authors of the book show.

The purpose of this publication is to show influence of children's rights upon social work and aims to emphasize the special role of social workers in promoting children's rights, and in implementing them in daily practice.

The book is designed also as a textbook for students in the field, as at the end of each chapter, there is an exercise box, to help students/other readers to discuss and understand the ideas presented in the chapter.

Chapter one talks about the concepts of human rights, ethics and values in social assistance and practice in social work. For instance, authors talk about the visibility of

¹Senior Researcher, The Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy, E-mail: crisdobos@yahoo.com

social work in the global human rights movement (p. 6): “(1) *the profession’s emphasis on social and economic rights, rather than on civil and political rights that command more public attention;* (2) *the focus on vulnerable and socially excluded groups and not on the rights of all populations;* (3) *social work has a preference for the case approach rather than macro issues, which are more related to human rights;* (4) *the strict observance of confidentiality impeding use of cases to serve the wider cause;* (5) *social workers usually pay more attention to human needs than to human rights;* and (6) *the lack of sustained global leadership on human rights by the organizations representing the profession.*”, according to Healy (2008).

The second chapter refers at children's rights: *the discourse on children’s rights is relatively new, the authors show, even within the modern human rights discussion. Not long ago, it seemed absurd to talk about children’s rights; the concept of children’s rights gained widespread support only in the last few decades*” (p. 9). The chapter presents a historical perspective over children rights: the pre-industrial period, the industrial period-19th century to the middle of the 20th century, mid-20th century to the present, treaties and international conventions on the rights of the child, typologies of children's rights.

Chapter three refers to social assistance as referring to children's rights: a theory, and ethical vision, but also talks about history of social assistance to children, protection and insurance, the concept of ‘*every child matters*’, it talks about what happened in the late twentieth century to the present in the field. It also discusses why the child should be involved in welfare discussion.

“During the 19th century, societal efforts on behalf of children and families focused on dependent and neglected children. The period from the last third of the 19th century to the outbreak of the First World War was characterized by the forming of many voluntary organizations and child rescue organizations working in parallel to cope with the abandoned, orphaned children of the urban working class or those with ‘unfit’ parents. Until the 19th century Western world the family was regarded as the responsibility of the parents, thus there was minimal intervention in the family. It was only toward the end of the 19th century that laws across the Western world began to place the child’s welfare before the conduct and wishes of its parents.” (p.20).

Therefore, public attitudes towards child abuse changed, with concern growing about the practices of neglectful families and the need to ensure that children were raised as responsible citizens. As the attitude of the society progressively changed, the services and legislation also suffered transformations towards rights, inclusiveness, post-modern values.

Chapter 4 refers to children's rights and implications for practice, showing that the children’s right to participation is the core of the 20th century children’s rights movement. *“There is growing recognition that children should participate in forming their lives in various aspect and contexts, including in recent years children’s participation in the decision processes regarding their care and welfare. There is now a wide range of literature on this issue, including practical guides”* (p.35)

Chapter 5 talks about implications for research of the mentioned subjects. The chapter shows that studies on children’s rights have focused on four main domains. *“(1) The first is an evolving body of empirical research on the perception and attitudes of children and adults towards the concept of children’s rights. (2) A second domain is a focus on children’s participation rights.*

Studies have examined children's participation in the community, in civic society, and in the political arena. (3) Another body of studies, discussed above, is that examining children's participation in child protection processes in the welfare system. These studies have examined social workers' attitudes towards the idea of children's rights, the scope and nature of children's participation in the welfare system and the obstacles to children's participation. (4) A fourth domain of implementation research is investigating how the rights recognized in the Convention have been realized in practice in the various areas of society. The Convention is viewed as a standard-setting instrument and has formed the basis of a vast amount of implementation research" (p.45-46)

The topic is also relevant in the Romanian context of social assistance provision. A Report of the Organization 'Salvati Copiii' (published in 2019 and referring to children's rights) shows that one of the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child refers to the child's participation in activities and decisions concerning the children; in spite of all these, consulting, informing, involving in decision-making is still not a practice of public institutions in Romania, and there are no institutional tools required for this kind of involvement. In this context, the mentioned book can be a practical tool for Romanian practitioners in the field of social assistance and decision making.

Acknowledgments

This study was made possible with the kind support of the Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy, which kindly provided a copy of the hereby revised book.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declares no conflicting interests.

References

- Daly, M. (2020). Children and their Rights and Entitlements in EU Welfare States. *Journal of Social Policy*, 49(2), 343-360. doi:10.1017/S0047279419000370
- Salvati copiii (2019) *Raport privind respectarea drepturilor copilului in România*, available at <https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/sci-ro/files/97/9752e45b-e734-4d25-8d8f-b2f899a7fe73.pdf>
- Healy, L. M. (2008). Exploring the history of social work as a human rights profession. *International Social Work*, 51, 735-748



JCPP

Year XXI • No. 1/2021

EDITURA
Expert

ISSN 1582-8344

