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Why is Romania in Last Place in Europe (30 out of 30 Countries Analyzed) In The Work-Life Balance Index

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Abstract: According to a study conducted by a prestigious Institute² in 2023, in Romania, the level of balance between work and personal life is the place out of 30 countries where these researches were carried out). The purpose of this scientific research is to identify the reason for this ranking for Romania and to identify ways to improve the indicators that determine the World-Life Balance indicator. Let's understand what is the reason that led to this result. The research presented in the annex identified 8 indicators that could be measured to determine a ranking in Europe.

Keyword: Romania; scientific research; Europe; Health System

How is Romania Positioned in Relation to the other Analyzed Countries

1. The Health System

The health system is not ranked, nor does it calculate any index, but it is a descriptive one, in which, according to the law of each country, it is mentioned how the medical system works. In Romania, there is a public medical system of health insurance, similar to the medical system of the countries in the region, respectively from the center, east and south-east of Europe, 16 analyzed countries having this system.

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² <https://remote.com/resources/research/european-life-work-balance-index>.



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2. Legal Annual Leave

Legal annual leave – here are calculated the days of leave to which employees from the analyzed countries are entitled. In Romania’s law, the number 34 is passed, being equal with Sweden in the 11th place out of 30 countries analyzed.

Table 1. Legal Annual Leave

1	Estonia,	39
2	Iceland,	38
3	Austria,	38
11	Sweden,	34
12	Romania,	34
28	Greece,	29
29	Netherlands,	28
30	United Kingdom,	28
1	Estonia,	39

We cannot comment on the hierarchy given by this criterion, Romania’s position being quite good in this ranking, compared to its competitors. It is a criterion that benefits us and it is a topic that has had a significant impact recently, with the Legislature having many proposals to increase the number of days off, other than rest days.

It should be noted that there are countries in which the public holiday is postponed, if it falls on a weekend day, being given a day off on the following Monday or Friday. Romania has implemented a system by which a day off is granted by Government Decision, the so-called “bridge day” (if it is a Monday or Friday between a public holiday and a weekend), but there is an obligation to recover through overtime.

3. Paid Medical Leave

Paid medical leave is another important indicator, in which the paid percentage of the total salary for employees who are on medical leave among employees in the analyzed countries is highlighted. And in this case, Romania is in a leading position, also in the first half, being tied for 9th place, next to Latvia, with a settlement percentage of 75%.

Table 2. Paid Medical Leave

	European country	Minimum sick pay
1	Luxembourg,	100
2	Norway,	100
3	Denmark,	100
4	Iceland,	100
9	Latvia,	75
10	Romania,	75
27	Slovakia,	25
28	Belgium,	12.15
29	Ireland,	0
30	United Kingdom,	£96.35 per week

In this chapter, there are 4 countries in Europe where settlement is complete, 100%. These countries have a very high standard of living – Luxembourg, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. It is no coincidence that it is a chapter that has a special significance for the quality of life and people’s perception of the formal work environment; there are countries where the level of respect is mutual – between employee and employer.

At the opposite pole are the countries of the British zone, where there is no discussion of a percentage settlement of the salary during the period of sick leave. Thus, in Ireland no amount of money is paid by the state during the period of sick leave, and in Great Britain a fixed amount of 96.35 GBP is paid, which strictly covers subsistence expenses, the amount being granted regardless of the employee’s salary.

4. Maternity Leave

Maternity leave is an indicator that has two components:

- component highlighting the percentage of salary paid to the person who benefits from this leave;
- a component in which the maximum number of weeks of maternity leave from which it can benefit is highlighted.

Let’s take them one at a time.

The salary payment percentage is almost in all countries above 50% - respectively in 28 of the analyzed countries. The exception is the countries of the British territory (Great Britain and Ireland), where the percentage is below 30%.

Romania is this time in the second half of the ranking, with a percentage of 85%. However, many countries in Europe have a maximum percentage, which shows an orientation to stimulate the birth rate in some cases, but also a policy oriented to protect mothers and young families who want to have children. The countries with 100% percentage are: Luxembourg, Spain, Estonia, Slovenia, Germany, Serbia, Belarus, Croatia, Austria, Portugal and Poland.

Table 3. Maternity Leave

	European country	Payment rate
1	Luxembourg	100%
2	Spain	100%
3	Estonia	100%
4	Slovenia	100%
5	Germany	100%
6	Serbia	100%
7	Belarus	100%
8	Croatia	100%
9	Austria	100%
10	Portugal	100%
11	Poland	100%
12	Netherlands	99%
17	Romania	85%
28	Denmark	52%
29	United Kingdom	29.80%
30	Ireland	27.30%

The analysis should also be correlated with the number of free weeks granted by the state for maternity. And here Romania is still in the middle of the ranking, in 14th place. The information must be viewed strictly from the point of view of the number of days strictly provided for maternity leave, namely the number of days that the mother takes as maternity leave and it is formed of 126 days (ie 18 weeks):

63 days of leave before the birth (ie before prenatal leave);

63 days after the birth of the child (postnatal leave).

Table 3. Maternity Leave

	European country	Paid maternity leave (weeks)
1	Bulgaria,	58.6
2	Serbia,	52
3	Greece,	43
4	United Kingdom,	39
5	Slovakia,	34
6	Croatia,	30
7	Czech Republic,	28
14	Romania,	18
28	Germany,	14
29	Sweden,	12
30	Portugal,	6

Basically, the analysis only includes this leave; it is well known that there is another component, i.e. parental leave, which can be extended until the child is 2 years old (or more in certain special cases), but it is a different type of leave and can be taken by any of the parents.

In order for this indicator to be relevant and to observe a correct hierarchy of countries from this perspective, we proceeded to a dynamic processing of the data from the 2 hierarchies and proceeded to allocate a place from 1 to 30 for each country, after which we combined the 2 indicators and we ordered from the lowest place - which indicates the best conditions for maternity leave - to the highest place - where the conditions for employees are unfavorable, with an impact on the work-personal life balance.

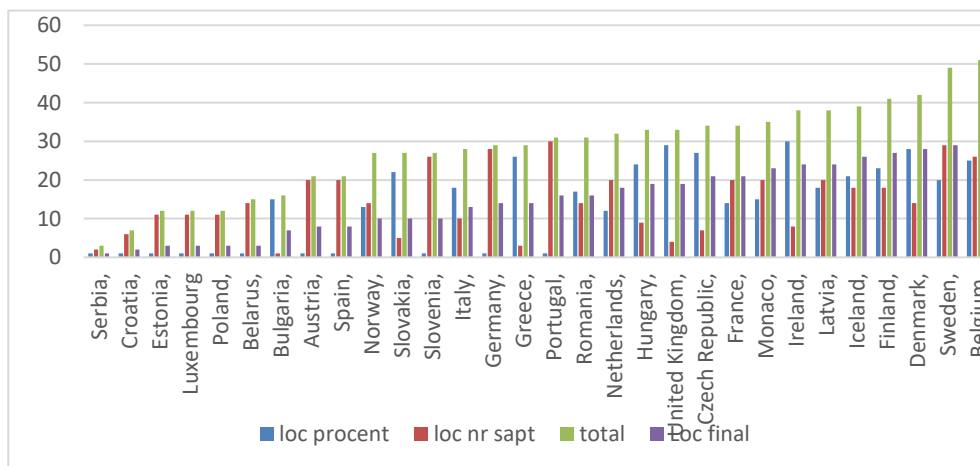


Figure 1. Combining the Hierarchies given by Payment rate and Paid Maternity Leave (Weeks)

Apart from the graph that includes all the countries in a realistic hierarchy, but not complete and relevant, because the allocation of weights for each component of the hierarchy would have been necessary, I also present below a hierarchy used as in the case of the other components to observe the place occupied by Romania, as well as the countries that offer the best conditions, but also the countries with less people-oriented positions regarding maternity leave.

Table 4. Maternity Leave

	Country	loc procent	loc nr sapt	total
1	Serbia,	1	2	3
2	Croatia,	1	6	7
3	Estonia,	1	11	12
3	Luxembourg	1	11	12
3	Poland,	1	11	12
3	Belarus,	1	14	15
7	Bulgaria,	15	1	16
16	Portugal,	1	30	31
16	Romania,	17	14	31
26	Iceland,	21	18	39
27	Finland,	23	18	41
28	Denmark,	28	14	42
29	Sweden,	20	29	49
30	Belgium,	25	26	51

5. The Minimum Wage for the Economy

The minimum wage for the economy is calculated in the form of USD/hour, meaning here the level of the minimum wage that an employee receives, divided by the number of hours worked. It is a “serious” category, with a strong impact on the level of satisfaction, reflecting the reward of work for employees. As the cost of food and other expenses come to equalize in Europe, the pay gap makes the difference between rich and poor countries. Some income growth may have been achieved in Eastern European countries, but there are large differences that are seen in the rankings and felt in terms of living standards.

Here, the hierarchy is clear: countries with a high standard of living also have a high level of wages, namely the minimum payment per working hour: Luxembourg, Belgium, Great Britain, Germany, Monaco, France, Ireland and the Netherlands - all having a level greater than \$10/hour of work, the average actually being greater than \$12/hour. Here the level can be quantified because there are legal regulations regarding the legal minimum wage chapter, but there are 7 other countries out of 30

where there are no legal regulations or constraints, but which we know have a very high wage level, an aspect that is reflected directly and in the standard of living; here we find the Nordic countries plus Italy and Austria.

Table 5. The Minimum Wage for the Economy

Norway	0
Denmark	0
Iceland	0
Sweden	0
Italy	0
Finland	N/A
Austria	N/A

Unfortunately, Romania is at the bottom of the ranking, along with other countries in the region, with a level between 3.97 and 1.92 USD/hour. The last two countries in the ranking are those outside the European Union – Serbia and Belarus. It is difficult to understand the way in which the European mechanisms work, where the citizens of Western Europe collect 3 or 4 times more than the citizens of Bulgaria, Latvia, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, in the conditions where, as I mentioned above, the level of living expenses is roughly similar.

Table 6. The Minimum Wage for the Economy

	European country	Minimum wage
1	Luxembourg	14.26
2	Belgium	12.59
3	United Kingdom	12.44
4	Germany	12.41
5	Monaco	11.99
6	France	11.95
7	Ireland	11.7
8	Netherlands	11.61
	Slovakia	3.97
	Romania	3.94
	Hungary	3.7
	Latvia	3.49
	Bulgaria	2.46
	Serbia	2.09
	Belarus	1.32

6. The Happiness Index

The happiness index is an extremely important indicator, but I believe it is also a subjective one. In the mentioned research, no precise criterion appears to determine this happiness index, but it is specified that it is calculated on a scale from 1 to 10.

We searched outside sources and found several quantifiable factors to assess the level of happiness, and the most important of them are:

- Personal care;
- Freedom;
- Generosity;
- Honesty;
- The health;
- The income;
- Good governance.

As I stated before, it is extremely complicated to rank generosity and honesty. The other factors may also be found in the other Work-Life Balance hierarchies (such as income, healthcare, etc.), but subjective factors can cause significant.

Table 7. Index Happiness

	European country	Happiness index
	Monaco	N/A
1	Finland	7.82
2	Denmark	7.64
3	Iceland	7.56
4	Netherlands	7.41
5	Luxembourg	7.4
6	Sweden	7.38
7	Norway	7.37
8	Austria	7.16
9	Ireland	7.04
10	Germany	7.03
16	Spain	6.48
17	Romania	6.48
27	Greece	5.95
28	Belarus	5.82
29	Bulgaria	5.37

It is already a well-known aspect: whenever we see rankings with the happiness index, the Nordic countries are inevitably in the first places. Thus, in the first 10 places, with an index of over 7, we find all the Nordic countries analyzed in this ranking: Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden and Norway. The other positions are occupied by countries with a high standard of living, such as the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Austria, Ireland and Germany, which are at the top of all categories. We have also included Monaco in the hierarchy, even though we have an N/A rating; I don't understand the "not applicable" criterion, but the extremely high standard of living in Monte Carlo certainly leads to a higher level of happiness.

Romania is still in the second half, close to the middle, equal to Spain. Spain's position is surprising, as globally they are in 2nd place, which means that the happiness index does not seem to be their strong point.

At the bottom of the ranking are Bulgaria and Belarus, countries in Eastern Europe, which have a level of happiness with an index below 6. The only country that still has a level below 6, along with these two countries, is Greece - a surprising situation and in this case.

7. The Average Number of Working Hours

The average number of working hours is an indicator that calculates the weekly level of hours spent at work on average by employees in the analyzed countries. If until now we have made hierarchies that show a high level of satisfaction the higher the indicator, this time the lower the level of satisfaction. It is obvious that a lower number of hours, determined by the time spent at work, will lead to higher satisfaction for the employee. Under these conditions, the level of satisfaction in terms of work-life balance will be higher.

Table 8. The Average Number of Working Hours

	European country	Average hours worked
1	Monaco	N/A
2	France	25.6
3	United Kingdom	25.6
4	Spain	25.9
5	Denmark	25.9
6	Estonia	25.9
7	Norway	26.9
8	Netherlands	26.9
9	Austria	26.9
28	Portugal	34.3
29	Poland	34.3
30	Romania	34.3

There are many aspects to comment on in this chapter, so I will address them one at a time.

Romania is in last place in this chapter, which means that it is one of the factors that determine a low level in the Work-Life Balance chapter, that is, we work too much to have time for personal life. However, many other questions arise:

- Do we also work well or just a lot compared to the citizens of other countries?
- We spend a lot of time at work, but does that mean we are using resources correctly?
- Are we as efficient?
- Is labor productivity at an optimal level?
- Do we have the necessary training to perform the tasks?
- Does the public sector work as much as the private sector?
- Is the work fairly remunerated?

and other.

There are many areas in which labor efficiency and productivity are at a very high level in Romania; there are many multinational companies in which Romanians are highly valued for the quality work they do, often superior to employees with similar positions in the companies' countries of origin. But it is necessary to see the big picture, the media and the mentality that determines the attitude towards work of the majority, and it seems that this is a chapter in which we, as a country, are deficient.

What's the use if we work hard and don't get the expected results, or don't have the consciousness of a job well done?

The average number of hours spent at work in Romania per week is 34.3, but legally, in Romania the standard work is 40 hours per week, respectively 8 hours per day. There are areas where you work more, in shifts, but there are also areas where you work less – the calculation is at the level of actual work, because it takes a full time 40 hours a week. For example, in education, a teacher has a norm of approximately 16 hours of actual work in the classroom, but up to 40 hours are added study hours and other activities specific to the field.

We often hear that Romanians are among the most inefficient employees in Europe, that productivity is low and that the same tasks are performed as in the case of other employees from different countries in a much longer term; also, there are situations where the cited studies refer to the complexity of the activities carried out and the lack of effectiveness of employees in Romania.

I have my own experiences in several multinational companies and I can say that the efficiency of employees in Romania is very high. He does not deny the fact that there are exceptions and that there are some employees who are inefficient or unable to perform the assigned tasks (perhaps sometimes more than in other countries where the respective companies operate), but he affirms without any hesitation that there are many cases in which Romanian employees they do the job much better than their foreign counterparts, they are creative and there is no need for strict supervision to monitor performance.

8. LGBTQ+ Inclusion

This is a sensitive topic in Romania, which is often difficult to discuss at this stage of time. I will try to have a neutral approach and make an objective analysis of the technical aspects that determined the relevance of this indicator for the compiled ranking.

First of all, I set out to define the term, because I noticed that the meaning of the acronym is often not known:

- L (lesbian): a female person who is attracted only to other people of the same sex.
- G (gay): a term used to usually refer to men who are only attracted to people of the same gender.

- B (bisexual): indicates an attraction to people of all genders.
- T (transgender): a term indicating that a person's gender identity is different from the gender associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- Q (queer): a term used to designate people who do not conform to social norms of gender or sexuality.
- +: "Plus" represents other sexual identities, including pansexual and Two-Spirit, a modern, pan-Indian term used by some North American indigenous communities to describe people who fulfill a traditional ceremonial and social role of the third gender in their cultures.

The order of the letters is not standardized; adding the letters allows the acronym to have the initials L and G reversed and the rest in a different order. Usually, the different variants of the term do not reflect differences in politics within the community, but arise from preferences in their use by individuals or groups.

9. Conclusions and Future Perspectives

I understood from this study that Romania is in a very bad situation in general regarding the Work-Life Balance category and it is necessary to implement some measures to correct the gaps compared to other European countries. We are not in a bad situation in Romania in all aspects, but I believe that it is necessary to adopt some firm measures.

I have had various debates with people from different walks of life and ages, and I have noticed major differences, especially between generations.

Currently, four generations are present on the labor market; the measures should target, in my opinion, different segments of the population. In the next period, I will carry out a scientific study, with a different focus for the four generations, in order to identify clear measures adapted to each generation.

I propose that these measures materialize in legislative proposals, which are promoted for public debate in an initial phase, after which they become specific legislative proposals, discussed within the legislature.

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