Legal Aspects of the Concept of Well-Being in Left-Behind Regions

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Abstract

This research proposes an analysis of the concept of well-being from two perspectives: on the one hand, it aims to identify the normative acts of countries belonging to left-behind regions, in which the concept of well-being is defined; on the other hand, it will also consider jurisprudential aspects derived from court decisions handed down by courts in countries belonging to left-behind regions. Equally, in order to highlight the similarities and differences between the meanings of the concept of well-being, similar provisions in developed countries will also be identified and analyzed. The research hypotheses are as follows: 1. Left-behind regions are not concerned with enshrining the concept of well-being in legislation; 2. There are irreconcilable differences between the concept of well-being in developed countries and the concept of well-being in left-behind regions. The research methods used are literature review, comparative method, and case law analysis. The purpose of the research is to identify whether there is an archetype of the concept of well-being that can be implemented through legal acculturation in left-behind regions.

Keywords: *well-being; left-behind regions; legal regulation; quality of life; public policy.*

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1. Introduction

One of the biggest challenges in conceptual analysis is establishing the territorial boundaries of the analysis. In this regard, in the introductory section, we aim to identify which regions are considered to be left behind. In the context of establishing territorial boundaries, the research framework is much better defined, so that the research can be advanced in the sense of identifying those legal texts that are relevant to the conceptualization of the notion of well-being.

One of the criteria taken into account by the European Commission in determining the level of development of certain regions is the level of GDP per capita. Thus, according to the latest data available, made public on March 27, 2024, by the European Commission through the 9th Report on Economic, Social, and Territorial Cohesion, regions are divided into three broad categories: Less developed regions [GDP

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per capita (SPC) below 75% of the EU-27 average]; Transition regions [GDP per capita (SPC) between 75% and 100% of the EU-27 average]; More developed regions [GDP per capita (PPS) above 100% of the EU-27 average][2] . From the perspective of our research, we are interested in the regions included in the first category, i.e. the less developed regions. Thus, according to the map in the report, the following are identified as less developed regions: Romania, Hungary, southern Italy[3], western Spain, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, southern Greece, Bulgaria, Croatia, and most of Poland[4].

Another criterion taken into account is related to the degree of infrastructure development (modern and smart cities being those that contribute in this way to the implementation and configuration of well-being[5]). In this regard, European countries are divided into three major areas: Central and Eastern Europe, Southern Europe, and Western Europe[6].

The situation in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) aligns closely with the concept of left-behindness as a regional disadvantage composed of several interrelated dimensions that capture mutually reinforcing aspects of limited opportunities and wealth. In the CEE countries, low economic prosperity is strongly associated with higher social exclusion rates[7].

In Western Europe, the associations within and between the dimensions of left-behindness are much weaker and less clear. Lower economic prosperity is not directly associated with social exclusion and poverty[8].

Southern European regions exhibit patterns of left-behindness that fall between those of Western and Central and Eastern Europe. A distinctive feature of left-behindness in Southern Europe is particularly significant unemployment, high regional poverty rates, and substantially low economic growth[9].

We believe that well-being must be analyzed in full correspondence with everything that health entails, so that access to healthcare services becomes an important factor in determining the development category to which a particular region belongs. An increasing number of wealthy individuals are turning to private healthcare in order to avoid delays and gain access to specialised services. This is leaving low-income

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[2] European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, *Ninth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion* (Publications Office of the European Union, 2024), x–xi, https://doi.org/10.2776/264833.

[3] For details, see Roberta Capello, "What Makes Southern Italy Still Lagging Behind? A Diachronic Perspective of Theories and Approaches," *European Planning Studies* 24, no. 4 (2016): 668–86, https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2015.1128402.

[4] European Commission, *Ninth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion*, xi, map "Category of Regions for Cohesion Policy (ERDF and ESF+), 2021–2027."

[5] For details, see Peter Nijkamp and Karima Kourtit, "The 'New Urban Europe': Global Challenges and Local Responses in the Urban Century," *European Planning Studies* 21, no. 3 (2013): 291–315, https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2012.716243.

[6] Josef Bernard et al., *Left-Behind Regions in the European Union: Conceptualisation – Operationalisation – Classification*, Thünen Working Paper 260 (Thünen Institute of Rural Studies, 2025), 26–27, https://doi.org/10.3220/WP1737358537000.

[7] Bernard et al., *Left-Behind Regions in the European Union*, 26.

[8] Bernard et al., *Left-Behind Regions in the European Union*, 26–27.

[9] Bernard et al., *Left-Behind Regions in the European Union*, 27.

populations with no alternative but to rely on overstretched public facilities[10].

Mental health is another area of concern.[11] Comprehensive reforms, including increased funding, decentralised healthcare systems, and targeted support for vulnerable populations, are essential to addressing these inequalities[12].

2. Comparative Analysis of the Concept of Well-Being in the Regulatory Provisions of Left-Behind Regions

The concept of "well-being"[13] does not generally have a uniform legal definition valid in all the countries mentioned, but in some countries — particularly Italy — the concept has been officially integrated into public planning instruments. In other countries — such as Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, Spain, Latvia, Lithuania, and Croatia — no clear official documents defining "well-being" as a legal concept have been identified, suggesting that it is generally used as a general term.

European context — the general framework applicable to member states. At the European Union level, there is the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)[14], adopted in 2017, which establishes 20 key principles on work, social protection, inclusion, equal opportunities, decent living and working conditions, access to services, etc. This is a common reference for EU member states in the field of social policy.

From the EU's perspective, member states (including those in the East and Southeast) are encouraged to adopt policies that ensure social protection, inclusion, decent working and living conditions — i.e., elements relevant to well-being — but concrete implementation remains at the national level.

Based on recent European analyses and reports[15] (including from 2025 – for example, Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion), countries such as those in Eastern and Southeastern Europe are assessed in terms of social convergence – for example, for inclusion, education, equal opportunities, protection of vulnerable groups, etc.

In conclusion, at the European Union level, even if there is no single legal definition of "well-being" applicable to all countries, the European framework promotes

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[10] Giorgio Pirina and Fabio Perocco, *Unpacking Left-Behindness: A Comparative Study on Territorial Inequalities in Europe*, EXIT Working Paper 2 (EXIT Project, April 2025), 8, https://www.exit-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/EXIT-Working-Paper-2_Unpacking-Left-Behindness.-A-Comparative-Study-on-Territorial-Inequalities-in-Europe.pdf.

[11] Gabriele Nibbio et al., "Well-Being and Mental Health: Where Do We Stand After COVID-19 Pandemic?," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 213, no. 1 (2025): 28–33, https://doi.org/10.1097/NMD.0000000000001815.

[12] Pirina and Perocco, *Unpacking Left-Behindness*, 8.

[13] For a study of subjective well-being and left-behind places, see Anastasia Panori et al., "Unraveling the Nexus: Subjective Well-Being and Left-Behind Places," *Regional Science Policy & Practice* 17, no. 10 (2025): 100222, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rspp.2025.100222.

[14] European Commission, "European Pillar of Social Rights – Building a Fairer and More Inclusive European Union," accessed October 5, 2026, https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/european-pillar-social-rights-building-fairer-and-more-inclusive-european-union_en.

[15] European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Joint Employment Report 2025: As Adopted by the EPSCO Council on 10 March 2025* (Publications Office of the European Union, 2025), chap. 3, https://doi.org/10.2767/9542551.

a set of principles and objectives aimed at well-being, inclusion, and quality of life.

Italy. In Italy, the BES / ESW ("Equitable and Sustainable Well-being") system has been active for several years[16].

The public accounting law (Law 163/2016, which amended Law 196/2009) made it mandatory for national budget reports to include an annex with BES indicators.

Since 2017, BES indicators have been integrated into official economic and budget planning documents, and reports on the evolution of "equitable and sustainable well-being" are published periodically.

The system includes approximately 152 indicators divided into 12 dimensions: health, education, work and work-life balance, economic well-being, social relations, institutions, security, subjective well-being, environment, cultural heritage/landscape, research/innovation, and quality of services.

Therefore, Italy has a current institutional framework with official indicators integrated into the budget and planning, so that well-being has legal and practical relevance.

For the other countries, namely those in Eastern and Central Europe, we have identified that although they do not define "well-being" as an explicit legal term, they pursue through policies, strategies, or development objectives what could be subsumed under the umbrella of "quality of life/well-being/social inclusion/cohesion, etc."

Table 1 provides a comparative overview of selected national legal, policy and statistical frameworks relevant to well-being in the EU Member States examined.

Table 1. National Legal, Policy and Statistical Frameworks Relevant to Well-Being in Selected EU Member States

Country	Document	Year	Document type	Areas of well-being covered	Observations
Italy	BES – Benessere Equo e Sostenibile (ISTAT + Ministry of Economics)[17]	2017–today	National system of indicators integrated into the budget	health, education, work-life balance, environment, subjective well-being, public services, etc.	The only comprehensive and official EU framework that explicitly uses the concept of "well-being" in the budgetary process

[16] OECD, "Italy's Equitable and Sustainable Well-Being (Bes) Indicators," Well-Being Knowledge Exchange Platform, November 20, 2023, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/well-being-knowledge-exchange-platform-kep_93d45d63-en/italy-s-equitable-and-sustainable-well-being-bes-indicators_2e947d9a-en.html. See also Italy, Law no. 163 of August 4, 2016, *Gazzetta Ufficiale*, Serie Generale, no. 198, August 25, 2016, https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2016/08/25/16G00174/sg.

[17] Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT), "Gli indicatori del Bes" (2026), https://www.istat.it/statistiche-per-temi/focus/benessere-e-sostenibilita/la-misurazione-del-benessere-bes/gli-indicatori-del-bes/.

Country	Document	Year	Document type	Areas of well-being covered	Observations
Italy	Law 163/2016 (amending Law 196/2009)[18]	2016	Law	Integrating well-being indicators into budget documents	Direct legal relevance
Romania	National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction 2022–2027[19]	2022	Governme nt strategy	inclusion, poverty, housing, social services, access to education/health	The document closest to a "social well-being" framework
Romania	National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2022–2027[20]	2022	Strategy	inclusion, services, access, independence	Sectoral approach
Romania	National Strategy on Long-Term Care and Active Ageing 2023–2030[21]	2022 (adopted)	Strategy	health, social protection, care services	Sectoral, but relevant
Poland	Poland's Development Strategy 2035[22]	2025–2026 (draft)	National strategy	quality of life, social cohesion, regional balance, public services	The clearest document focused on "quality of life"
Poland	Implementation of the 2030 Agenda – national SDG indicators[23]	2026 (report)	Statistical monitoring	education, health, poverty, environment	Includes quality of life indicators

[18] Italy, Law no. 163 of August 4, 2016, amending Law no. 196/2009 (2016), https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2016/08/25/16G00174/sg.

[19] Romania, Government Decision no. 440 of March 30, 2022, approving the National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction 2022–2027 (2022), https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/253819.

[20] Romania, Government Decision no. 490 of April 6, 2022, approving the National Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities "O Românie echitabilă" 2022–2027 (2022), https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/254203.

[21] Romania, Government Decision no. 1492 of December 14, 2022, approving the National Strategy on Long-Term Care and Active Ageing 2023–2030 (2022), https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/263098. Editorial verification: Adopted in 2022; implementation period 2023–2030.

[22] Poland, Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, "Strategia Rozwoju Polski do 2035 r." (draft transmitted to the Council of Ministers on April 10, 2026) (2026), https://www.gov.pl/web/funduszе-regiony/strategia-rozwoju-polski-do-2035-r-. Editorial verification: Draft, not an adopted national strategy; public consultations were in 2025.

[23] Statistics Poland (GUS), "Realizacja SDG w Polsce. Pomiar postępów" (2026), https://publikacje.new.stat.gov.pl/portal-publikacje/realizacja-sdg-w-polsce-pomiar-postepow. Editorial verification: Indicators/

Country	Document	Year	Document type	Areas of well-being covered	Observations
Hungary	National Reform Programme 2023 (European Semester)[24]	2023	EU-national programme	social inclusion, employment, education	Does not define well-being, but covers components
Hungary	Family policy action plan 2021–2030 (selected sectoral example)[25]	2021–2030	Sectoral policies	family support, birth rate, health	Fragmentary
Bulgaria	National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030[26]	2020	National strategy	quality of life, education, health, demography	Very broad document with a strategic role
Bulgaria	National Strategy for Long-Term Care[27]	2014	Strategy	health, care, inclusion	Sectoral
Spain	Estrategia Nacional de Salud Mental 2022–2026[28]	2022	Strategy	mental health, psychological well-being	Relevant to emotional well-being
Spain	National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion 2019–2023[29]	2019	Strategy	inclusion, social protection	Important in the area of social well-being

report, not an independently verified government programme with 2020–2025 validity.

[24] European Commission, "European Semester Documents for Hungary" (2026), https://reforms-investments.ec.europa.eu/european-semester-your-country/european-semester-documents-hungary_en. Editorial verification: National Reform Programmes were replaced from 2024 by medium-term fiscal-structural plans.

[25] Hungary, Government, "A nők szerepének erősítése a családban és a társadalomban (2021–2030) akcióterv" (2023), https://kormany.hu/dokumentumtar/a-nok-szerepenek-erositese-a-csaladban-es-a-tarsadalomban-20212030-akcioterv. Editorial verification: Illustrative specific action plan; the original umbrella heading does not identify a single verifiable document.

[26] Bulgaria, Council of Ministers, "Национална програма за развитие 'България 2030'" [National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030] (2020), https://www.strategy.bg/bg/strategy-documents/1349.

[27] Bulgaria, Council of Ministers, "Национална стратегия за дългосрочна грижа" [National Strategy for Long-Term Care] (2014), https://www.strategy.bg/bg/strategy-documents/881. Editorial verification: Adopted on January 7, 2014, not 2021.

[28] Spain, Ministry of Health, Estrategia de Salud Mental del Sistema Nacional de Salud 2022–2026 (2022), https://www.sanidad.gob.es/areas/calidadAsistencial/estrategias/saludMental/.

[29] Spain, Ministry of Health, Consumer Affairs and Social Welfare, Estrategia Nacional de Prevención y

Country	Document	Year	Document type	Areas of well-being covered	Observations
Spain	Multidimensional Quality of Life Indicators (IMCV)[30]	2024 data; 2025 release	Statistical system	income, health, education, housing, relationships, environment	Complementary to the strategy
Latvia	Latvia Sustainable Development Strategy 2030[31]	until 2030	Strategy	quality of life, human capital, equity, communities	Extremely well-being oriented
Latvia	National Development Plan 2021–2027[32]	2020	Strategy	social inclusion, public services, housing	Main strategic document
Lithuania	Lithuania Progress Strategy „Lietuva 2050"[33]	2023	Strategy	quality of life, demography, health, education	Main national framework
Lithuania	Lithuania's Health Programme 2014–2025[34]	2014–2025	Strategy	health, prevention, lifestyle	Close to the concept of well-being
Croația	National Development Strategy Croatia 2030[35]	2021	Strategy	quality of life, services, social protection	Very clearly structured national framework

Lucha contra la Pobreza y la Exclusión Social 2019–2023 (2019), https://www.inclusion.gob.es/documents/4913549/4917437/20240530%2B-%2BInforme%2BCRE.pdf/431d8102-5b8d-32de-5ece-61c12f7f10ba?t=1718190349519. Editorial verification: Indirect official source referring to 2019–2023 strategy; the table's 2021 title/year is unsubstantiated.

[30] Spain, Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), "Indicador Multidimensional de Calidad de Vida (IMCV): Año 2024" (2025), https://www.ine.es/dyngs/Prensa/IMCV2024.htm. Editorial verification: 2024 is the reference year; the press release was published in 2025.

[31] Latvia, Cabinet of Ministers, "National Development Planning" (Latvia 2030) (2023), https://www.mk.gov.lv/en/national-development-planning. Editorial verification: Latvia 2030 is a long-term strategy, not one adopted for 2020–2030.

[32] Latvia, Cabinet of Ministers, "National Development Planning" (National Development Plan 2021–2027) (2023), https://www.mk.gov.lv/en/national-development-planning. Editorial verification: Plan adopted July 2, 2020.

[33] Lithuania, Ministry of Social Security and Labour, "Conceptions, Strategies" (State Progress Strategy "Lithuania 2050") (2026), https://socmin.lrv.lt/en/legislation/conceptions-strategies/.

[34] World Health Organization, "Lithuania's Health Programme 2014–2025" (2025), https://extranet.who.int/cpcd/global-repository/lithuanias-health-programme-2014-2025. Editorial verification: The asserted "National Health Strategy 2030" (2021) could not be verified; substituted documented 2014–2025 health programme.

[35] Croatia, Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds, "Relevant Croatian Documents" (National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030) (2024), https://razvoj.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/slike/Vijesti/2024/Sije%C4%8Danj/Ma%C4%91arskaa/Interreg%20HU-HR%2021-27_CBC_Environ

Country	Document	Year	Document type	Areas of well-being covered	Observations
Croația	National Plan for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2021–2027[36]	2021–2027	Strategy	inclusion, social services, vulnerable groups	Similar to Romania, Poland

Source: *Author's compilation and comparative analysis based on the official national legislation, policy documents and statistical frameworks referenced in the table.*

As **Table 1** shows, the documents examined differ in legal status and function, ranging from legislation and national strategies to statistical monitoring frameworks. These differences must be taken into account when assessing the legal recognition of well-being.

Central and Eastern Europe. Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Croatia have medium- and long-term national development strategies that explicitly integrate quality of life objectives. Polish documents — in particular Poland's Development Strategy 2035 — are clear examples of anchoring the concept in priorities such as social cohesion, regional balance, and access to public services. In Poland, Poland's Development Strategy was launched for public debate this year. The stated objective of the strategy is to "ensure a good quality of life for all citizens," regardless of whether they live in large cities, medium-sized towns, or rural areas.

The strategy seeks a balance between economic competitiveness, social/territorial cohesion, and security — that is, it recognizes the need for economic development to be accompanied by well-being and quality of life for the population.

In addition, by participating in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG) and defining national priorities/sustainable development indicators, Poland aims to monitor dimensions such as social inclusion, education, housing, health, etc.

In conclusion, in Poland, the recent national strategy has an explicit ambition to guarantee "quality of life" and to integrate the social and territorial component into economic development — which de facto corresponds to the broad notion of "well-being."

Similarly, Latvia and Lithuania stand out with a robust strategic orientation: Latvia Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 and Lietuva 2050 operate with long-term visions focused on equity, human capital, and community well-being.

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mentalReport.pdf. Editorial verification: Official ministry-hosted indirect source.

[36] Croatia, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, "Final Evaluation of the National Plan for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion for 2021–2027" (2025), https://mrosp.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Uprava%20za%20socijalnu%20politiku/Programi%20i%20projekti/Zavr%C5%A1no%20izvje%C5%A1%C4%87e%20o%20provedenom%20vrednovanju_FINAL.pdf?vel=1028954. Editorial verification: Correct title is National Plan for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2021–2027; not 2023.

Croatia, through its National Development Strategy 2030, presents a well-structured framework that treats quality of life as a cross-cutting objective. In Bulgaria, the National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 has a similar strategic role, but its implementation is complemented by sectoral documents with a more limited scope.

Spain. Spain takes a mixed approach, in which thematic strategies (mental health, social inclusion) are complemented by an official statistical system for monitoring quality of life. This complementarity suggests institutional maturity in integrating well-being indicators into planning processes.

Typology of documents and depth of integration of the concept of well-being. Three categories can be distinguished:

a) *Broad-based national strategies*. These include Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Croatia, and Bulgaria. The documents place well-being in an integrated framework, treating it as a result of economic, demographic, and social development. Here, quality of life becomes a guiding principle, not just a sectoral objective.

b) *Implementation programs and EU-national frameworks*. Hungary uses the National Reform Program, influenced by the European Semester, which addresses social inclusion and education, but without directly conceptualizing well-being. This indicates a fragmented approach, dependent on European priorities.

c) *Sectoral or thematic strategies*. Bulgaria (long-term care), Spain (mental health, social inclusion), Hungary (family and demography), and Lithuania (health strategy) operate with specific dimensions of well-being. These documents contribute to strengthening social, health, and demographic aspects, but do not replace integrated approaches.

Presence and use of quality of life indicators. Poland and Spain stand out for explicitly including quality of life indicators in official documents. In Spain, the statistical system (INE) provides a consolidated, multidimensional framework covering income, education, health, social relations, housing, and the environment — aligning with OECD practices. Poland includes indicators in the context of implementing Agenda 2030, integrating well-being into the logic of sustainable development.

The data presented highlights a diverse but convergent strategic landscape in terms of integrating quality of life and well-being dimensions into the public policy documents of several European countries. Overall, there is a noticeable shift from traditional sectoral policies to strategic frameworks with a holistic approach, in which the concept of well-being becomes both an end goal and a governance criterion.

In other countries, indicators appear implicitly in health, demographic, or inclusion strategies, but without a centralized "quality of life" statistical system.

Degree of coherence and strategic integration. Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Croatia show the best coherence between long-term visions, national plans, and sectoral documents. Spain stands out for its systematic integration of psychological and social well-being, suggesting a mature model of well-being policies.

Hungary and Bulgaria have a more fragmented approach, where sectoral strategies compensate for the lack of a comprehensive national framework explicitly geared towards well-being.

Conclusions. The comparative analysis shows that most of the European

countries analyzed have incorporated elements of quality of life and well-being into their strategic documents, but with varying degrees of depth and consistency. Two dominant models stand out:

- The integrated model (strategic-national complementary with indicators) – present in Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Croatia, and Spain.
- The fragmented model (sectoral or dominated by EU frameworks) – present in Hungary and, partially, Bulgaria.

In general, the trend is to make well-being the core of public policies, in line with European and OECD conceptual developments, although the degree of operationalization varies significantly between countries.

2.1. Analysis of the Particular Situation in Romania

In Romania, the National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction 2022–2027[37], adopted by Government Decision No. 440/2022. The document sets out strategic objectives such as "a decent life for all," social protection, combating poverty and exclusion, with a multi-year action plan.

The strategy includes measures to modernize social services, access to social and medical services, support for vulnerable groups (homeless people, people with disabilities, marginalized communities, etc.), social infrastructure, social inclusion, deinstitutionalization, active aging, etc.

A set of sectoral strategies has also been adopted that target aspects of "social welfare": protecting and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, social inclusion of homeless persons, child protection, combating early school leaving, stimulating green jobs, long-term care and active ageing, etc.

From a theoretical perspective, there are approaches in research and social policy that pursue the concept of "quality of life" and a coherent "social model" — for example, the analysis entitled The Romanian Social Model — Horizon 2025, which discusses the role of public policy, social cohesion, inclusion, equal opportunities, etc.[38]

In conclusion, although the notion of "well-being" does not appear as a legally defined key term in Romania, there is a wide range of public strategies and policies that actually pursue elements of well-being, inclusion, and quality of life for various groups.

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[37] Romania, Government Decision no. 440 of March 30, 2022, approving the National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction for 2022–2027, *Monitorul Oficial al României*, Part I, no. 359, April 12, 2022, and annex in no. 359 bis, https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/253819.

[38] Ioan Mărginean, "Modelul social românesc din perspectiva calității vieții populației," *Calitatea Vieții* 15, nos. 3–4 (2004): 213–18, https://www.revistacalitateavietii.ro/journal/article/download/501/423/819. See also Daniel Arpinte et al., "Politici de incluziune socială," *Calitatea Vieții* 19, nos. 3–4 (2008): 339–64, https://revistacalitateavietii.ro/journal/article/view/559.

3. Comparative Analysis Between Left-Behind Countries and Developed Countries[39] Regarding the Implementation of the Concept of Well-Being

In the following, we will analyze several states that have initiated public policies oriented toward "well-being."

Finland. Finland has a "National Action Plan for the Economy of Wellbeing 2023–2025" — an official plan that aims to integrate the "well-being economy" approach into public decisions.[40]

The plan outlines five main directions: creating a governance model for the well-being economy; integrating well-being monitoring into decisions at the state, regional, and municipal levels; developing impact assessments; strengthening inclusion; and collaborating with European institutions. According to the source[41], Finland is working on a set of official indicators for the "well-being economy," with completion planned for 2024.

Finland is therefore currently the clearest example of a European state attempting to formalize "well-being" as an integral part of public policy, with an institutional structure.

***Germany*.** Since 2022, there has been an official initiative — the annual report of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action includes a chapter dedicated to "well-being and sustainability," which aims to evaluate economic and financial policies not only through GDP, but also through well-being indicators.[42]

Previously, a document entitled "Wellbeing in Germany – what matters to us"[43] was published, launched as an initiative to reflect on public policies relevant to well-being[44].

Therefore, Germany does not — apparently — have a "well-being law," but it does include "well-being" in government reports, which suggests an intention to structurally include the concept in public policy decisions.

In conclusion, we found no evidence that any of the countries analyzed (among those mentioned — France, Germany, Portugal, Norway, Finland, Austria) had adopted a law defining "well-being" as a generally applicable and binding concept.

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[39] For a comparison of well-being in developing and developed countries, see Jason Wei Jian Ng et al., "Determinants of Well-Being for Developing and Developed Countries and Their Role in Policy-Making: A Panel Data Analysis," *Malaysian Journal of Economic Studies* 56, no. 1 (2019): 85–105, https://doi.org/10.22452/MJES.vol56no1.5.

[40] OECD, "Finland's National Action Plan for the Economy of Wellbeing 2023–25 and Related Initiatives," Well-Being Knowledge Exchange Platform, November 20, 2023, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/well-being-knowledge-exchange-platform-kep_93d45d63-en/finland-s-national-action-plan-for-the-economy-of-wellbeing-2023-25-and-related-initiatives_58931a45-en.html.

[41] OECD, "Finland's National Action Plan," "Description and Key Outcomes."

[42] OECD, "Well-Being Measurement Efforts in Germany," Well-Being Knowledge Exchange Platform, August 29, 2024, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/well-being-knowledge-exchange-platform-kep_93d45d63-en/well-being-measurement-efforts-in-germany_4dc4947a-en.html.

[43] James O'Donovan, "Well-Being in Germany," Feasta, June 4, 2020, https://www.feasta.org/2020/06/04/well-being-in-germany/.

[44] Feasta, "Well-Being Resources," accessed October 5, 2026, https://www.feasta.org/category/well-being-resources/.

In particular, for ***Austria*** and ***Portugal***, we did not identify any recent strategies (2020–2025) or national plans promoting the "well-being economy" or establishing official sets of indicators under this name (or, if they exist, they are not easily accessible to the public). For other countries (such as France or Norway), we have not recently found a national plan dedicated to the "well-being economy" — even though, at the statistical level, data on quality of life/life satisfaction are collected (e.g., through international institutions or surveys).

The international context influencing the adoption of these approaches.

International organizations such as the OECD have been promoting a "well-being framework" for years — with about 11 dimensions of well-being and indicators of "future well-being" (natural, social, economic capital). This framework serves as inspiration and a statistical tool; countries can adopt it in their own reports.

Recently (2025), under the auspices of UNECE, a set of Guidelines on measuring well-being was launched, which can support states in producing holistic national well-being indicators[45].

There are transnational/societal movements for an "Economy of Wellbeing/Wellbeing Economy" (e.g., WEAll — Wellbeing Economy Alliance[46]), which promote alternatives to the growth- and GDP-centered economy and seek to influence both national and European policies.

In conclusion, the current status of "well-being" in these countries for the period 2020-2025 can be summarized as follows:

Only a few countries (Finland, Germany) have taken concrete steps towards integrating well-being as a public policy tool — in the form of action plans or dedicated chapters in government reports.

In most countries — including Austria, Portugal, France, and Norway — there is no (at least publicly available) law or uniform framework establishing well-being as a general legal concept. The adoption of the concept — when it occurs — is rather fragmented, through social, health, environmental, and education policies, but not under the umbrella of a unified "well-being economy" strategy.

The international context (OECD, UNECE, civil coalitions) provides methodological tools and pressure for the conceptual adoption of well-being as a policy objective — but it is the responsibility of each country to decide what to adopt.

4. Conclusions

There are transnational/societal movements for an "Economy of Wellbeing."

A comparative analysis of the strategic framework in the European countries examined shows that, although the concept of well-being is not uniformly defined legally or institutionally, it has become a cross-cutting benchmark for modern public

[45] United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, *Guidelines on Measurement of Well-Being* (United Nations, September 2025), https://unece.org/info/publications/pub/407877.

[46] Wellbeing Economy Alliance, "What Is a Wellbeing Economy?," accessed October 5, 2026, https://weall.org/what-is-wellbeing-economy/.

policies. Most states directly or indirectly integrate quality of life objectives[47], but the degree of strategic maturity and coherence varies considerably.

Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Croatia, and Spain illustrate the transition to development policies based on comprehensive approaches to well-being. These countries have long-term national strategies, indicator systems, or monitoring mechanisms that treat quality of life as an essential objective of governance. The Polish model is currently the most explicit, with a strategy directly aimed at ensuring a "good quality of life for all citizens," while the Spanish model stands out for its systematic integration of statistical indicators.

Hungary and Bulgaria demonstrate a model in which social, health, and demographic policies compensate for the absence of an integrated national framework. These countries remain dependent on European instruments or sectoral policies, without managing to unify the concept of well-being into a visionary strategy. Romania is approaching this model, positioning itself between modern approaches (which explicitly conceptualize well-being) and traditional ones (focused on social protection and poverty reduction).

Countries such as Spain and Poland demonstrate that systematic monitoring, using standardized indicators, strengthens the government's ability to orient policies towards well-being. In contrast, in the rest of the countries, indicators appear fragmented, predominantly sectoral, which limits their comparative analysis and integration into the decision-making process.

Although Romania has numerous strategies relevant to social inclusion, the protection of vulnerable groups, health, and active aging, these are not part of a unified strategic architecture. There is no national strategy dedicated to quality of life, and the concept of well-being is not formalized in legislation or in the monitoring system. Romania thus remains in the lower-middle range, close to Hungary and Bulgaria, although it has the potential to adopt more integrated models, such as those of the Baltic states or Poland.

Finland and Germany demonstrate a distinct trend: the integration of well-being into the economic and institutional framework. Finland is the most advanced European example, with a national plan dedicated to the well-being economy and the design of an official set of indicators, while Germany includes well-being indicators in its annual economic reports. However, there is still no legislation dedicated to the legal definition ("codification") of the concept of well-being.

Europe is moving towards a holistic understanding of development, in which economic growth is analyzed in terms of its impact on quality of life. However, this transition is uneven: some countries have adopted sophisticated strategies, while others remain at a sectoral stage. Nevertheless, in all cases, well-being is gradually becoming a benchmark for strategic planning, moving closer to the models promoted by the

[47] For a discussion of quality of life and well-being in reporting on human development, see Stephen Morse, "Quality of Life, Well-Being and the Human Development Index: A Media Narrative for the Developed World?," *Social Indicators Research* 170, no. 3 (2023): 1035–58, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-023-03230-6.

OECD and Agenda 2030.

Overall, the analysis highlights that the concept of well-being is in the process of being institutionalized, but without a common regulatory framework at European level. There are leading countries that explicitly define quality of life as a central objective of public policy (Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Croatia, Spain, and, emergingly, Finland and Germany) and countries that remain in the traditional paradigm of social protection and fragmented interventions (Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria). The difference between these models is not only a matter of strategic ambition, but also of monitoring capacity, institutional continuity, and the maturity of the administrative system. The Europeanization of the concept of well-being is underway, and Romania is at a point where it can benefit from the experience of advanced countries to evolve towards an integrated and modern approach.

Secondly, the hypothesis that less developed countries, in terms of economic indicators, experience this situation also from the perspective of how they regulate the concept of well-being at the legislative level is confirmed.

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