

**CLICHÉS AND STEREOTYPES ABOUT ROMANIANS.
A STATISTICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract

Article *Clichés and stereotypes about romanians. A statistical perspective.* brings to the attention of those interested a series of theories intended to constitute a basis for possible research in the field of social sciences aimed at studies of public opinion and the role that stereotypes have in its formation. Based on these theories and using statistical data from official sources, we analyzed some stereotypes about Romanians, often publicized in the Romanian and international public space, by comparison with other European countries. We tried to interpret these data according to the degree of economic development of the analyzed countries, the degree of culture achieved by the respective societies, as well as the importance of the religious factor in shaping a certain cultural profile.

Key words: *stereotypes, prejudices, public opinion.*

Stereotypes. Concepts, definitions, theories

The issue of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination was initially explored by scholars of what is referred to as “classical social psychology” – including D. Katz, K.W. Braly (1933; 1935), G.M. Gilbert (1951), and G.W. Allport (1954). Later, the phenomenon drew the attention of researchers associated with “modern social psychology,” such as H. Tajfel (1969), S.E. Taylor (1978), and subsequently, contemporary scholars like A.J. Lambert, B. Seibt (1990), and J. Forster (2004). While classical social psychology primarily emphasized the negative character of stereotypes, more recent research has also highlighted their positive dimensions, particularly through the study of the cognitive mechanisms associated with them, as well as the contexts in which they may become functional.

Richard Schaefer defines stereotypes as “unfounded generalizations referring to all members of a social group, disregarding individual differences within that group” (Schaefer, 1983; 2001, p. 259).

Another widely accepted definition describes stereotypes as “a set of shared beliefs regarding the personal characteristics, personality traits, and behaviors typical of a group of people” (Bourhis Jacques, Richard Y., Philippe, cited in Leyens, Yzerbyt & Schadron, 1996, p. 98). However, this definition is

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somewhat restrictive, as it refers only to content, often neglecting how individuals interpret the link between attributes and a group, as well as the reasons they might choose to employ a stereotype.

The term "stereotype" was given its socio-psychological meaning by Walter Lippmann in his seminal work *Public Opinion*, published in 1922. Prior to that, the term had referred to the printing process of casting lead into a mold to create a typographic cliché. By analogy, Lippmann referred to the rigidity of individuals' conceptions about social groups, while acknowledging that such mental images are necessary in order to filter the complexity of the surrounding reality. "In most cases, we do not first see and then define, we define first and then see" (Lippmann, 2009, p. 95). According to Lippmann, stereotypes originate in society and can help explain the nature of intergroup relationships and social concepts. They are culturally constructed and represent projections onto the world, based on the meaning assigned to individuals' positions, values, and rights.

Thus, stereotypes are viewed as "mental shortcuts, as heuristics that guide the individual through their environment. When stereotypes are reinforced by the development of events, they may evolve into ideal types and are reactivated in similar situations, shaping our expectations of the social environment we live in" (cited in Chelcea, 2004, p. 89).

As Lippmann states, "We are told about the world before we see it. Most of the things we imagine, we have never seen" (Lippmann, 2009, p. 102). More often than not, perceptions govern the entire process of perceiving, especially when individuals lack the proper education that would enable them to discern. Perceptions "define certain objects as familiar or foreign, emphasizing differences, so that a partially familiar object is seen as very familiar, while something somewhat foreign is perceived as entirely foreign. They are triggered by minor cues, ranging from genuine hints to vague analogies. Once activated, they overwhelm fresh perception with older images and project onto the world what has been revived in memory. If there were no practical regularities in the environment, human reliance on anticipation as a way of seeing would be merely erroneous. But since there are regularities sufficiently precise and since the need to economize attention is so inescapable, abandoning all stereotypes in favor of a purely innocent approach to experience would impoverish human life" (ibid.).

Stereotypes and the way they are used depend on each individual's philosophy of life, and accounts of them are made in accordance with the interpretative code each person holds. Through awareness and judgment, individuals are capable of discerning that they are using stereotypes and can even modify them. Likewise, they can reflect on which ideas led to the emergence of those stereotypes, why they appeared, and why they were accepted. "All useful history is antiseptic in this way. It enables us to identify which story, which textbook, which tradition, which novel, play, image, or

phrase planted one preconception in one mind and another in a different mind” (ibid.).

Stereotypes are embedded within the culture in which each individual lives, being reproduced and further incorporated into all socio-cultural layers of society due to processes of socialization—whether within the family or school—and through the repeated exposure to images in books, television, and newspapers (cited in Brown, 1995, p. 83).

Thus, systems of stereotypes may become part of each person’s personal tradition, employed to defend their position within society. Through stereotypes, individuals construct an organized image of the world, upon which their habits, tastes, abilities, and hopes are calibrated. Stereotypes contribute to forming a possible vision of the world in which individuals adjust and into which they become integrated.

Once individuals give up some of their previously familiar beliefs in favor of a particular template, any disruption of those stereotypes is felt as a disturbance to their internal world. “In such cases, where stereotypes are charged with emotions and lived experiences, they cease to be mere shortcuts and become a guarantee of the individual’s respect for themselves” (Lippmann, 2009, p. 107).

Another interpretation suggests that stereotypes stem from a perceptual illusion. Particularly relevant in this regard is Hamilton’s 1976 study, in which subjects were presented with a set of 39 sentences, each describing a different behavior performed by a different individual. The conclusions of Hamilton’s study indicate that “the characteristic exaggerations of stereotypes are, at their core, a consequence of our cognitive limitations. Given that we can only process a limited amount of information, Hamilton suggests that we are highly sensitive to distinctive events in our environment. What occurs rarely captures our attention and receives privileged cognitive treatment” (Bourhis Jacques, Richard Y., Philippe, cited in Leyens, Yzerbyt & Schadron, 1996, p. 119).

Stereotypes and the formation of public opinion

The definition of the concept of public opinion involves an interdisciplinary synthesis of elements from fields such as sociology, psychology, social psychology, political science, communication sciences, and statistics.

The most influential approaches to public opinion appear to be: the analysis provided by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann—known for developing the “spiral of silence” theory; Walter Lippmann’s 1922 study—the first of its kind; and the writings of Jürgen Habermas.

Habermas’s works place particular emphasis on the historical evolution of public opinion, which he defines as a state of consciousness within the bourgeois public sphere, with public opinion being understood in the sense of

reputation or social prestige. He identifies the different linguistic forms of the concept: public opinion in England, opinion publique in France, and öffentliche Meinung in Germany. Regardless of terminology, in Habermas's view, the essence of "public opinion" is that of a public capable of forming judgments.

Habermas's contribution to the conceptualization of public opinion is significant particularly from historical and normative perspectives, as he undertakes a critical analysis of previous works referencing this idea. For instance, he cites the writings of Thomas Hobbes, who viewed public opinion as comprising the totality of beliefs, judgments, reflections, and acts of conscience. He also references John Locke, for whom public opinion was equivalent to individual conscience, and the views of John Burke, who believed that the public is capable of expressing a private judgment on matters of public concern.

In the French context, definitions of public opinion tend to integrate the common elements identified by these thinkers, whereas the German tradition features the writings of Friedrich Georg Forster, who distinguishes between public opinion and common spirit, as well as Immanuel Kant, whose works include key postulates regarding publicity and the public sphere. Noteworthy are also Karl Marx's ideas, which overturn several philosophical constructions of the bourgeois public sphere formulated by earlier thinkers.

While Habermas's writings emphasize the historical development of the phenomenon of public opinion, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann approaches public opinion from the perspective of its social envelope, viewing it as an anonymous judgmental instance—more precisely, as "the weakness, the dependence of the individual on the judgment of the social environment in which they live, a meaning that refers to their sensitive social shell, their social nature" (Noelle-Neumann, 2004, p. 84). According to her, public opinion is expressed by individuals who are capable of articulating responsible views on public issues and who fulfill a critical and supervisory function regarding how society is governed. Drawing on the ideas of Ferdinand Tönnies, the author also maintains that public opinion manifests only when opinions are in a liquid state—everything related to customs, conventions, traditions, and norms must be openly expressed.

To support her claims, E. Noelle-Neumann refers to a number of biblical and historical events, highlighting their contribution to the development of the concept of public opinion. She cites works such as *Henry IV* by William Shakespeare, *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli, and *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* by John Locke. She also analyzes Enlightenment-era writings by authors such as David Hume, James Madison, Joseph Glanvill, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, René Descartes, and Alexis de Tocqueville.

Furthermore, the author succeeds in synthesizing the fifty definitions of public opinion compiled by Harwood Childs into two overarching interpretations: public opinion as a rational sphere and public opinion as a social tribunal (ibid., p. 278).

Lippmann's work, in contrast, focuses primarily on the analysis of stereotypes as a psychosocial phenomenon, emphasizing that stereotypes play a crucial role in shaping public opinion, as the generation of new stereotypes contributes directly to its formation. Since symbols and labels can be defined as stereotypes, public relations appear, indirectly, as a tool for modeling public opinion.

The study of public opinion has also attracted the attention of Romanian researchers. In his work *Public Opinion – Strategies of Persuasion and Manipulation*, Septimiu Chelcea examines the mechanisms behind the formation of public opinion through the lens of psychosociological and linguistic theories. In addition to reiterating previous contributions to the study of the concept, Chelcea highlights several definitions that emphasize the cognitive dimension of interpretation. He argues that opinions arise in crisis situations or in the presence of social problems, that the public is a particular type of social group, and that social groups contribute in varying degrees to the formation of public opinion—since they are fluid structures composed of individuals who interact (cited in Chelcea, 2004, pp. 67–71).

The *individual dimension* of public opinion reflects the idea that opinions are formed based on mental schemas that help individuals simplify reality. These schemas may relate to the self, to one's social roles, to events, or they may be causal or content-free.

This idea is also found in Lippmann's work, where he argues that mental schemas allow individuals to condense complex representations of reality—representations that cannot be fully comprehended by the human mind. This phenomenon manifests both in the political realm, where propaganda plays a significant role, and in the social sphere, where imitation acts as a mechanism for the dissemination of standards that, over time, generate individual judgment composed of models that can be transmitted and inherited.

The formation of public opinion at the individual level relies on the coding of reality. The factors that contribute to the formation of public opinion may include: censorship, privacy, physical or social barriers, language, emotional elements, routine, fashion. The coding process assumes that each individual has their own personal experience, and what occurs is interpreted through pre-existing internal images

The *social and psychosocial dimensions* of public opinion are analyzed by Septimiu Chelcea, who highlights those elements that give public opinion its fundamentally social character. Thus, public opinion arises from a mix of involved social elements such as emotions, aspirations, judgments, representations, stereotypes, beliefs, as well as from the broader elements of social life, comprehensively addressed under the umbrella of social sciences: psychology, history, political science, linguistics, and statistics.

Moreover, the social dimension of public opinion can also be understood through the lens of social capital theory, as well as seen as a product of communication within social networks.

Lastly, this dimension is shaped by certain methodological and ethical aspects that emerge from public surveys and that may influence various behaviors. This phenomenon is especially visible in the case of opinion polls.

The *political dimension* of public opinion concerns the way public opinion is associated with the political domain. This field of analysis includes decoding the mechanisms and processes through which public opinion is utilized at the political level. More specifically, it encompasses the analysis of the characteristics of the public sphere where political events and debates unfold, the role of television and TV hosts in shaping public opinion, the importance of polling institutions, as well as specific elements found in specialized publications.

The *communicational dimension* of public opinion is closely linked to the field of public relations. In 1923, Edward Bernays suggested that public opinion can be viewed as a tool for achieving communication objectives, serving as the core element of activity for communication professionals (cited in Bălășescu, 2013, p. 194). In practice, the origins, nature, and associated factors of public opinion significantly influence the effective performance of public relations specialists. Public opinion and the development of stereotypes can be understood in relation to the individual, who is influenced by a variety of factors. On one hand, these include the family, school, and church; on the other hand, the media and institutions that reflect public thought—such as films, conferences, and public debates.

Within this paradigm, the consensus generated by public relations leads to the formation of public consciousness, thereby enabling propaganda to shape public opinion alongside other influential actors in an individual's life, such as parents, schools, the press, films, and magazines.

Clichés and stereotypes about Romanians and Romania in public narratives

In Romanian public discourse, a range of clichés and stereotypes—some positive, but predominantly negative—are frequently circulated. In many cases, these are unfairly disseminated and perpetuated in the public space. Generalizing clichés such as “Romanians do...”, “Romanians are...” or “Romanians always...” often give way, within public narratives, to expressions that are offensive or even fatalistic—statements rarely found when describing other ethnicities.

Thus, Romanians are often depicted as “thieves,” “lazy,” or characterized by phrases like “a beautiful country, but unfortunately inhabited,” as being unwilling to defend their country, uneducated and impolite, corrupt, doomed, and discriminated against by foreigners.

Of course, public discourse also includes several positive stereotypes. One of the most familiar is that “Romanians are hospitable,” along with others such as: “Romanians are born poets,” “Romanians are inventive,” or “Romanians are good cooks.”

Research methodology, data, and findings

In our analysis, we aimed to investigate the extent to which certain stereotypes about Romanians—commonly circulated in the public space—have any factual basis.

Specifically, we employed secondary data analysis using statistical data provided by Eurostat to test several concrete stereotypes. We sought to interpret this data in light of the countries’ levels of economic development, the degree of cultural attainment of their societies, and the significance of the religious factor in shaping a particular cultural profile.

We selected three frequently encountered public clichés about Romanians: “Romanians are thieves,” “Romanians are poor,” and “Romanians are obese.” While the first two stereotypes are more widely spread, the third is less commonly circulated, which we believe makes it all the more worthwhile to study.

The stereotype “Romanians are thieves” is one of the most frequently disseminated in the public sphere.

Eurostat data regarding the number of complaints filed with the police per 100,000 inhabitants reveal the following:

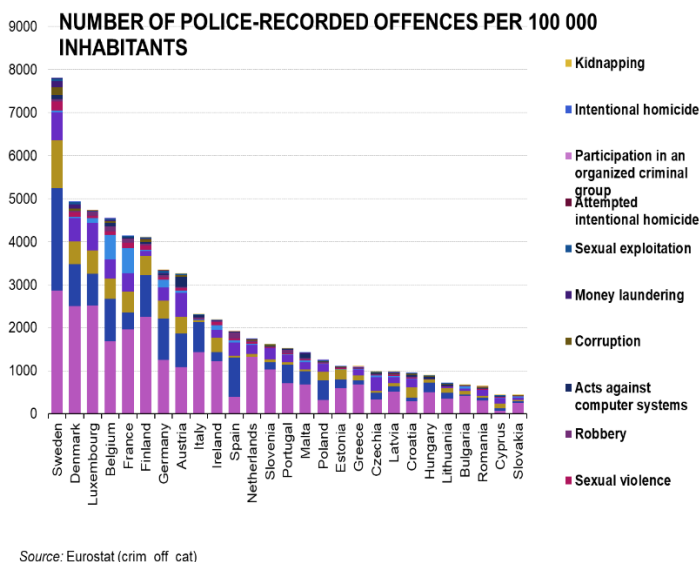
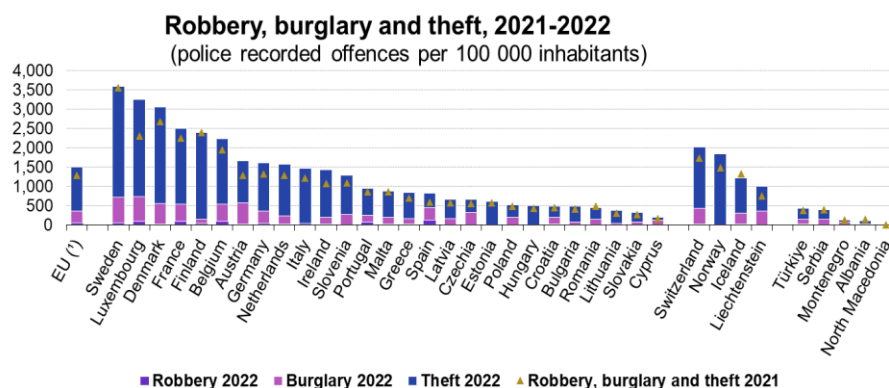


Fig. 1. Number of complaints registered with the police per 100,000 inhabitants in 2022

It can be observed that Romania ranks among the countries with the lowest number of police complaints regarding criminal offenses, surpassed only by Cyprus and Slovakia. Among the most frequently reported offenses are thefts, followed by burglaries, and—at a significant distance—drug-related offenses.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that theft is also the most frequently reported crime in other European countries. The highest numbers in this category are recorded in Sweden, Denmark, and Luxembourg.

The situation of robberies and thefts recorded across European Union countries for the period 2021–2022 is presented as follows:



(*) In burglary category figures for Estonia, Italy and Hungary are missing for both years.

Fig. 2. Robberies, thefts, and crimes recorded by the police per 100,000 inhabitants in the period 2021–2022

In 2022, the European Union average for thefts was 1,140. The country with the highest number of recorded thefts was Sweden (2,858), followed by Luxembourg (2,520) and Denmark (2,496). Romania, ranking among the last in this classification, recorded 311 thefts. It was followed by Lithuania (343), Slovakia (250), and Cyprus (68).

At the EU level, the average number of burglaries was 306, with the highest numbers reported in Sweden (663), Luxembourg (634), and Austria (552). The countries with the lowest figures were Bulgaria (63), Slovakia (65), and Lithuania (29). Romania reported 134 burglaries—almost the same as Greece (136) and Cyprus (125).

Regarding the number of robberies, the EU average stood at 57. The highest numbers were reported in Spain (134), Belgium (104), and Luxembourg (101). At the opposite end were Slovakia and Hungary (6), Estonia (7), and Slovenia (10). In Romania, 16 robberies were reported in 2022, placing

the country among those with the lowest number of robberies in the European Union.

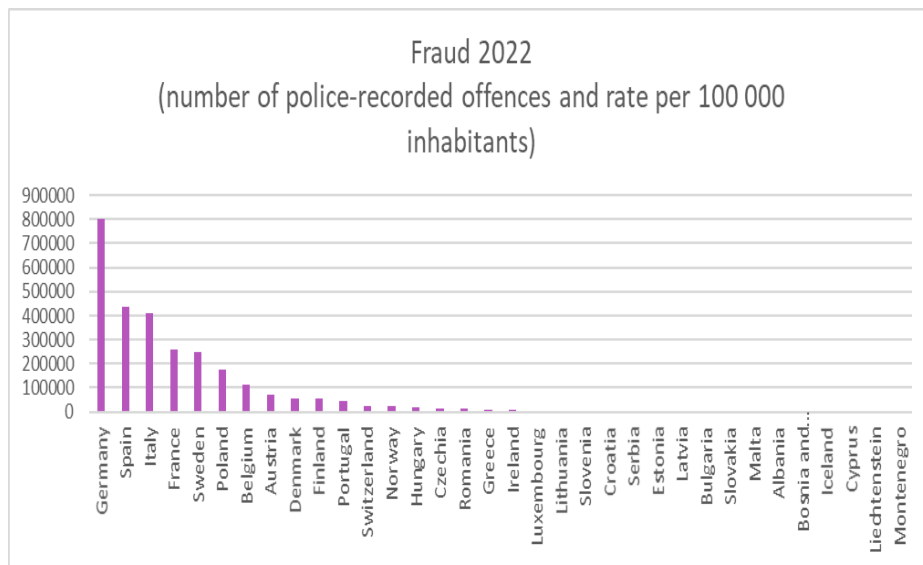


Fig. 3. Fraud-related crimes (including cybercrime) reported by the police per 100,000 inhabitants in 2022

Source: Eurostat (crim_off_cat)

The highest number of fraud-related offenses (including cybercrime) in 2022 was reported in Germany (801,412), Spain (438,207), and Italy (410,198). At the other end of the spectrum were countries such as Slovakia (2,122), Bulgaria (2,299), and Latvia (2,322). Romania ranked 16th in this classification, with 12,269 reported offenses, placing it in the lower half of the ranking.

As the data show, there are many countries in Europe—economically more developed than Romania—where theft-related crimes are reported in greater numbers. Although one might assume that these crimes are not committed by citizens of those countries but rather by foreign nationals, statistics show that correlations can be drawn based on the number of prisoners by nationality.

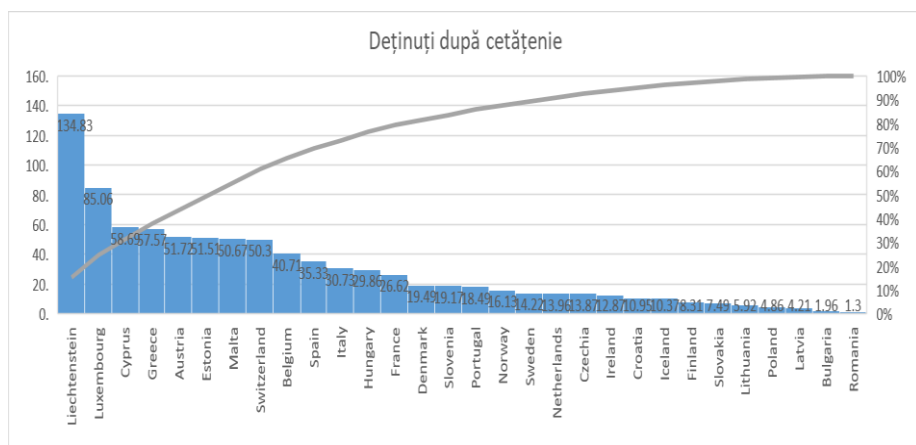


Fig. 4. Number of prisoners by nationality
Source: Eurostat (crim_pris_ctz)

It can be observed that Romania ranks last in this classification. Even if one were to assume—hypothetically—that the number of offenses in other countries were committed solely by Romanian nationals, which is, of course, impossible, it still would not account for the high number of offenses committed by foreign nationals in other countries compared to Romania.

Therefore, based on the data analyzed, it can be asserted that Romanians are not thieves.

However, this conclusion should not be examined in isolation but must be correlated with a fundamental ethno-cultural dimension in the Romanian context: religion. Within the European Union, Romania stands out for its significantly higher level of religiosity compared to the continental average, consistently ranking at the top of surveys and statistics regarding declared religious affiliation.

According to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics during the 2022 census, approximately 98% of respondents who answered the question regarding religion declared themselves as Christian/believers. Among them, 83% identified as members of the Romanian Orthodox Church, indicating an overwhelming religious majority and a high level of confessional cohesion at the national level. The remaining officially recognized denominations—18 at the time of the census and 19 at present—are divided between historical Christian denominations (such as Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Reformed, Evangelical, etc.) and other minority religious communities.

It is significant that only around 2% of respondents identified as having no religion or as atheists, placing Romania among the least secularized societies in Europe. In contrast to Western trends of decreasing religious involvement in public life and the growing number of individuals identifying as “non-religious”

(the so-called nones), Romanian society appears to maintain a traditional model of religious affiliation, with clear influence on its value structures, social behaviors, and even demographic orientations.

This ethno-religious reality has profound implications not only in the cultural sphere, but also in the domains of social attitudes, public policy, and the reception of moral discourse. As such, any analysis seeking to interpret current social or demographic trends must account for this deeply rooted cultural constant within Romanian public consciousness.

In this context, it is reasonable to assume that the religious dimension—predominantly Christian—of Romanian society has a significant influence on social behaviors and, by extension, on the level of criminality. Romania, as one of the most religious countries in the European Union, with an overwhelming majority of citizens identifying as practicing Christians or at least as culturally affiliated with Christian values, also stands out for maintaining a relatively low level of criminality compared to the European average. This correlation between religious affiliation and civic conduct is also supported by research in the sociology of religion, which highlights the role of moral values transmitted through religion in shaping both individual and collective behavior.

It is important to emphasize in this regard that one of the Ten Commandments of the Christian Decalogue—"Thou shalt not steal"—has normative implications that are both moral and legal in nature. This prohibition functions not only as a personal ethical code but also as a collective cultural reference point, internalized from early childhood through both formal and informal religious education. Thus, the presence of religious beliefs in the daily lives of a large segment of the population may act as a deterrent to deviant behavior, particularly crimes involving property.

Of course, such a claim does not imply a direct and exclusive causal relationship between religiosity and low criminality. However, it does suggest a justified interpretative direction in analyzing the socio-cultural factors contributing to the maintenance of a relatively high degree of social cohesion and norm compliance in Romania.

Another widely circulated public stereotype is that "Romanians are poor."

Eurostat data on poverty and social exclusion for the year 2023 show that Romania ranks first in the European Union, with a poverty and social exclusion rate of 32%, compared to the EU average of 21.4%. Romania is followed by Bulgaria (30%) and Spain (26.5%), while countries such as Finland (15.8%), Slovenia (13.7%), and the Czech Republic (12%) are at the opposite end of the spectrum.

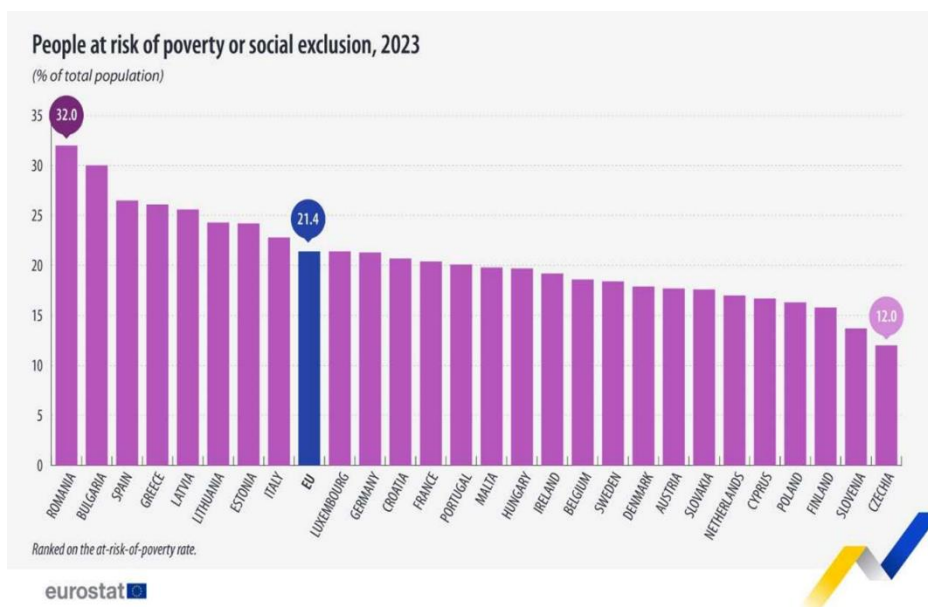


Fig. 5. People at risk of poverty and social exclusion
Source: Eurostat (ilc_peps01n)

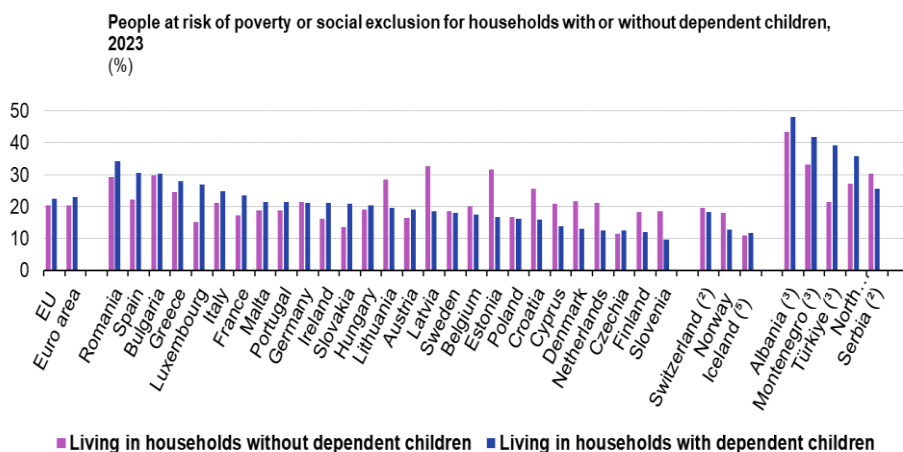
Eurostat data show that, in 2023, the share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in households with or without dependent children was highest in Romania: 29.4% for households without dependent children, compared to the European Union average of 20.4%. For households with dependent children, Romania recorded 34.2%, while the EU average was 22.4%. Romania was followed in the ranking by Spain (22.2% for households without dependent children and 30.7% for those with dependent children) and Bulgaria (29.7% and 30.3%, respectively). At the bottom of the ranking were countries such as the Czech Republic (11.5% and 12.4%), Finland (18.3% and 12.1%), and Slovenia (18.4% and 9.6%). It is noteworthy that in these latter countries, the risk of poverty was higher in households without children—unlike in most other countries, where poverty was more prevalent in households with children.

According to data from the National Institute of Statistics (INS), in 2023, one in five Romanians was affected by poverty. The relative poverty rate (AROP) stood at 21.1%, marking only a 0.1 percentage point decrease compared to the previous year. The rate was 0.5 percentage points higher among men than women (21.3% vs. 20.8%). One of the factors contributing to the reduction in poverty was the role of social transfers. In fact, if pensions and other transfers had not been paid, nearly half of the population (47.1%) would have fallen below the relative poverty threshold, with this situation being particularly acute among the elderly (65 years and older).

INS data also indicate that limited financial resources prevented some individuals from affording basic goods, making payments, or accessing products essential to a decent standard of living. As with the poverty rate, the most affected by severe material and social deprivation were individuals aged 65 and over (23.7%), with women being disproportionately affected (55.1% women vs. 44.9% men).³

Another factor contributing to the deepening of poverty is the very low work intensity:

“In 2023, among individuals aged up to 65 years, 718,000 were living in households with very low work intensity (households in which working-age adults were engaged in economic activities for less than 20% of their potential work capacity). Compared to the previous year, the share of individuals in households with very low work intensity increased by one percentage point (5.2% compared to 4.2%)” (ibid.).



Note: ranked on households with dependent children.

(*) Provisional.

(*) 2022.

(*) 2021.

(*) 2020.

Fig. 6. People at risk of poverty or social exclusion in households with or without dependent children 2023(ilc_peps03n).

Thus, statistical data confirm that, in 2023, a significant number of Romanians were exposed both to the risk of poverty and to living in households with very low work intensity, while also experiencing material deprivation.

Of course, these indicators can also be correlated with labor force statistics for a more comprehensive understanding of the poverty phenomenon.

³ idem

However, at the European level, we can conclude that Romania is, unfortunately, among the poorest countries in the EU.

It would be interesting to explore whether this phenomenon is the result of a particular work culture specific to the Balkan region—characterized by the saying “it’ll be fine anyway” (las-o că merge și așa)—or the outcome of historical factors that required the activation of defense and self-preservation mechanisms. Alternatively, it might reflect a religious component specific to the Romanian Orthodox identity, standing in contrast to what remains in the history of sociology as the “Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism.” Regardless of which of these factors may be the root cause, the statistical data clearly confirm the stereotype that “Romanians are poor.”

Are Romanians obese?

The obesity index based on Body Mass Index (BMI) is the indicator that measures the share of obese individuals according to their BMI. BMI is defined as a person’s weight in kilograms divided by the square of their height in meters. Individuals aged 18 or over are considered obese if they have a BMI equal to or greater than 30. Other categories include: underweight (BMI less than 18.5), normal weight (BMI between 18.5 and less than 25), and pre-obese (BMI between 25 and less than 30). The overweight category (BMI $\geq$ 25) combines both the pre-obese and obese groups.

According to this indicator, Romania ranks fourth among EU countries with the highest prevalence (59.7%), followed by Finland (59.8%), Latvia (60.4%), and Malta (62.5%). At the opposite end are Italy (41.9%), France (46.4%), Cyprus (47.9%), Netherlands (48.3%), Belgium (48.9%), Luxembourg (49.7%), Spain (51.2%), Austria (52.7%), Ireland (53%), Portugal (53%), Sweden (53.2%), Bulgaria (53.7%), Denmark (54.6%), Greece (54.9%), Slovenia (55.7%), Czechia (56.5%), Estonia (57.4%), Croatia (58.1%), Hungary (58.4%), Poland (58.4%), Slovakia (58.4%), Lithuania (59.4%), Romania (59.7%), Finland (59.8%), Latvia (60.4%), and Malta (62.5%).

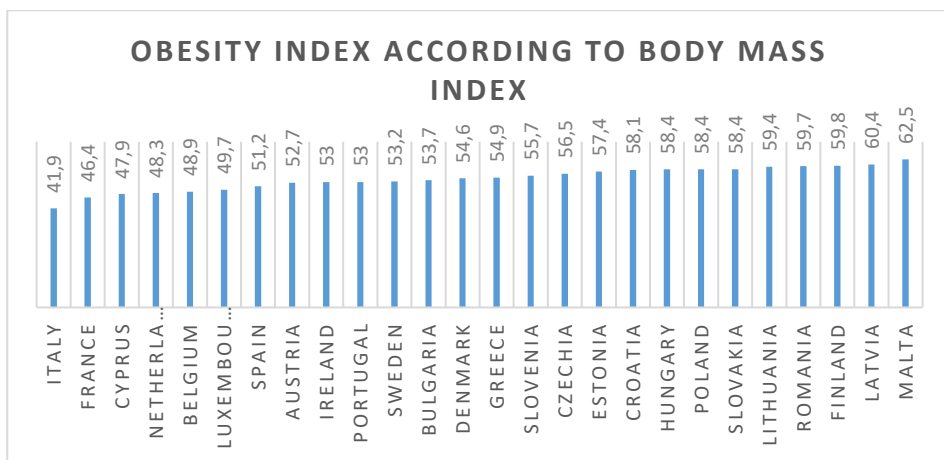


Fig. 6. Obesity index based on Body Mass Index (BMI)
Source: Eurostat (sdg_02_10)

Statistics show that, at the European level, the proportion of overweight individuals aged 16 and over in 2022 was 50.6% of the total population. Romania recorded an index of 58.9%, which is high compared to other EU countries, with even higher rates reported in Latvia (59.2%), Finland (59.2%), and Malta (62%).

At the opposite end were Belgium (48.2%), Bulgaria (52.9%), and the Czech Republic (55.4%).

In terms of gender distribution, Romania shows a higher prevalence of overweight males under the age of 16 compared to females (57.1% for males versus 41% for females). These figures exceed the EU averages of 43.3% for males and 29.2% for females.

Romania also ranks poorly in terms of the proportion of overweight individuals by gender and age. The indicator for 2022 again shows values above the EU average.

Share of overweight people aged 16 years or over, 2022

(%)

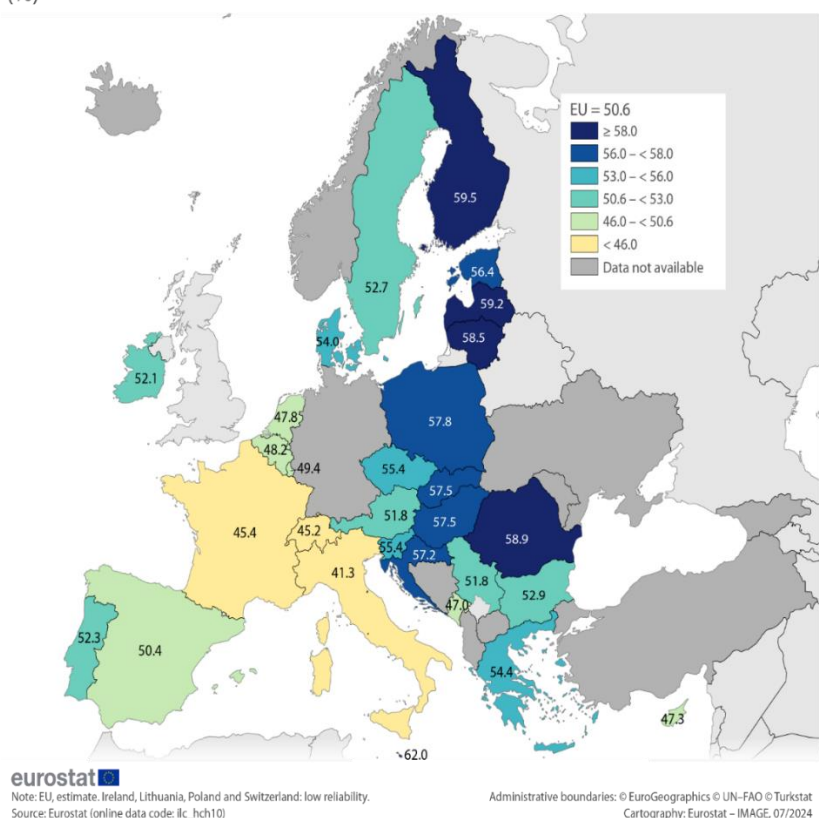


Fig. 7. Share of overweight people aged 16 or over, 2022

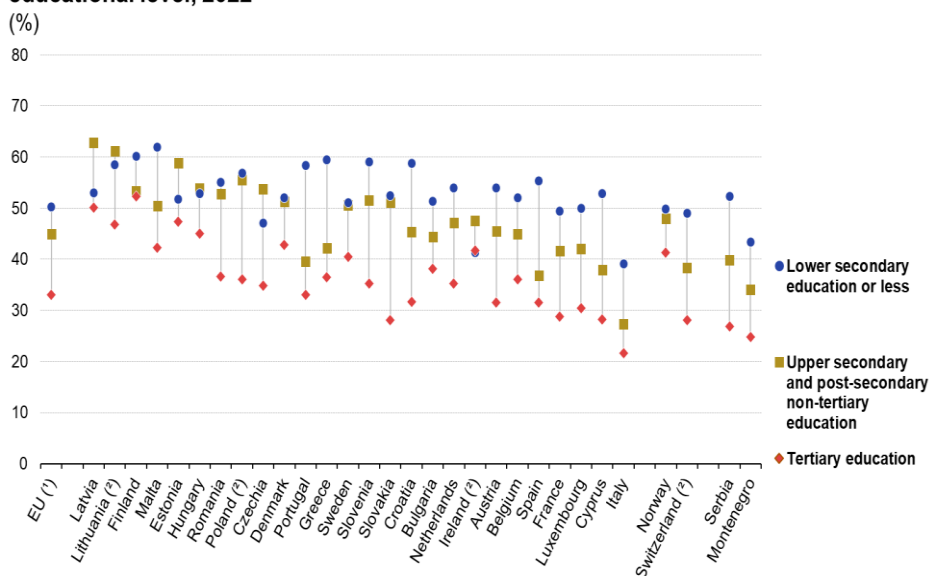
Source: Eurostat (ilc_hch10)

	Males	Females	Total (both sexes)						
	16 years or over		16 years or over	16 to 24 years	25 to 34 years	35 to 49 years	50 to 64 years	65 to 74 years	75 years or over
EU	58.7	43.0	50.6	20.3	37.9	49.8	59.6	63.6	57.7
România	67.3	51.1	58.9	19.8	45.6	59.6	71.7	75.1	65.2

Fig. 8. Proportion of overweight individuals, by gender and age, 2022 – comparison between EU average and Romanian average

Source: Eurostat

Share of females aged 16 years or over who were overweight, by educational level, 2022



Note: ranked on the overall share of females who were overweight. Germany: not available.

(¹) Estimates.

(²) Low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_hch10)

Fig. 9. Proportion of women aged 16 and over who were overweight, by level of education, 2022

Source: Eurostat (ilc_hch10)

When examining the distribution of overweight women by education level, it can be observed that, in Romania, most overweight women have a low level of education—an issue also found in the majority of European countries.

The higher the level of education, the lower the proportion of overweight women.

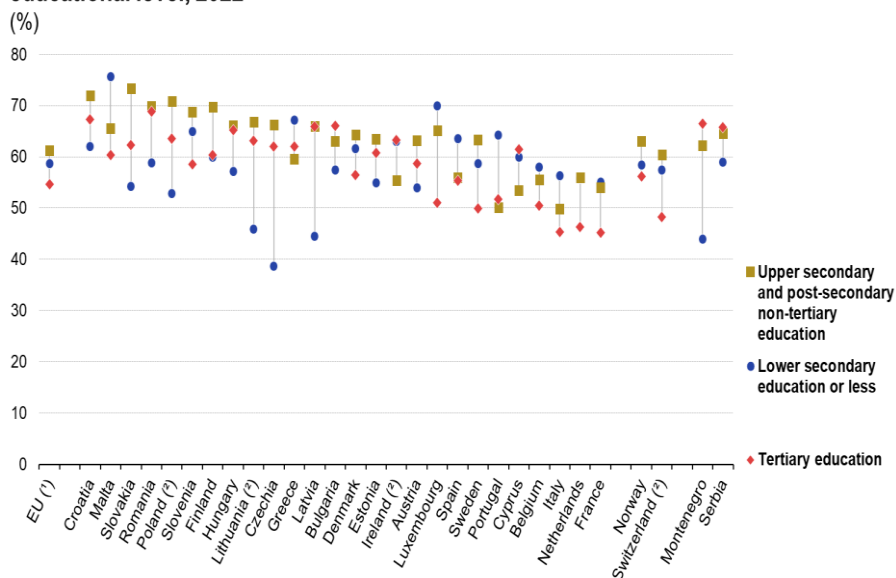
In contrast, for men, the situation is reversed. The higher their level of education, the higher the obesity rate.

More specifically, statistics show that the most overweight men are those who have completed upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education. This trend is observed both in Romania and across the European Union.

Thus, we can say that obesity can be correlated with education level.

As with the other two stereotypes analyzed, we can deduce that these characteristics associated with Romanians result from a combination of factors. Whether we speak of historical, religious, cultural, or educational factors, the statistical data clearly support certain mental patterns and stereotypes about Romanians.

Share of males aged 16 years or over who were overweight, by educational level, 2022



Note: ranked on the overall share of males who were overweight. Germany: not available.

(*) Estimates.

(*) Low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_hch10)

Fig. 10. Proportion of men aged 16 and over who were overweight, by level of education, 2022

Conclusions

Stereotypes are embedded both in individual consciousness and in collective consciousness, being closely tied to the life of society. A number of theories and interpretations have been developed concerning stereotypes, focusing on the ways in which they influence the dimensions of public opinion—whether individual, social, psychosocial, political, or communicational.

In the formation of public opinion, stereotypes may have no influence at all, or they may reflect and amplify already established views in the public sphere, thereby contributing to shifts in public opinion. A relevant example is the selection of news stories, which illustrates how the elements that shape public opinion are often determined by the external environment.

Therefore, stereotypes function as mental mechanisms designed to help individuals comprehend and decode the vast amount of information that is otherwise difficult to examine in detail. While stereotypes can serve as real tools for understanding certain social phenomena, they may also contain too little truth to be genuinely useful in understanding reality—thus potentially distorting one's perception of it.

The stereotypes analyzed in this study regarding Romania show that Romanians are not thieves, as commonly believed; they are more overweight than the general perception suggests; and they are indeed poorer compared to other Europeans. Hence, statistical data can disprove several widely held public stereotypes, thereby reshaping public perceptions regarding specific social characteristics.

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