



Standard Eurobarometer



European
Commission

EUROBAROMETER 70

PUBLIC OPINION IN EUROPEAN UNION

Autumn 2008

NATIONAL REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ROMANIA

Standard Eurobarometer 70 / Autumn 2008 – TNS Opinion & Social

The survey was requested and coordinated by the Directorate General Communication.
This report was produced for the European Commission Representation in Romania.
This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission.
The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

Abbreviations

EB	Eurobarometer
EB70	Eurobarometer 70, autumn 2008. Similarly, other figures after EB indicate the issue number.
EU27	EU with 27 Member States, after Romania's and Bulgaria's accession
NMS10	Group of new Member States, 2004 accession wave
EU15	Group of old Member States
2008/2	Autumn issue of the EB 2008. Spring and autumn EB issues are marked with /1 and, respectively, /2 for the year that precedes the marking in question

The database analysed in the report was produced by means of the EB70 survey.

For Romania, data were gathered between 07.10.2008 and 03.11.2008, on the basis of a representative sample at national level, involving 1.053 persons, aged 15 years and over. The error margin for the sample is +/- 3.1% for a trust level of 95%.

The EB70 survey was carried out between 06.10.2008 and 06.11.2008, under the coordination of TNS Opinion&Social, upon the request of the European Commission. Data were gathered from the 27 EU Member States, the 3 candidate countries - Croatia, Turkey and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia -, plus the Turkish Community of Cyprus. For technical sampling details, please see annex with technical specifications provided by TNS Opinion&Social.

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Synthesis: Inequalities and decline during crisis¹

How did social Europe look like, from the EB70 point of view, in autumn 2008? Were the signs of the financial crisis' already acknowledged in the social space?

Yes, but with strong differences between countries, regions and dimensions of public awareness. The best barometer of perceptions, at social level, as regards economic changes is optimism or, more generally, people's expectations.

You refer to personal expectations or at the level of society?

First, to personal expectations. The first reaction people have when they are told a crisis is expected at the level of society is to redefine their own expectations. What will happen to my job, how much will I earn, how will I pay my taxes and debts? These are the initial reactions. Next, a public image begins to build up as to future situation of the national economy, the labour market and the EU economy. In this public image regarding the crisis, mass-media, politicians and experts have a major role to play. The media's and public's (as the aggregate of individual opinions) image of the crisis interact. The survey allows for the aggregation of individual opinions, which can explain the public opinion on the crisis and crisis situations, through interpretation.

The word "crisis" was not very often used neither by mass-media, nor by politicians, before November 2008, the month of the official launch of the electoral campaign. Can we say, in this context, that signs of the international economic crisis were already influencing Romanians' state of mind, as measured in October 2008?

It is as hard to say when the crisis started in Romania, as it is to pinpoint the moment when the post-communist transition period ended. Undoubtedly, as per the data in EB70 that we discuss, at the time of the survey, October 2008, the state of mind in Romania was fundamentally changed as compared with spring 2008. Over the last 5 years - since when the systematic analysis of EB data has also been carried out for Romania – such strong variations in Romanians' state of mind as in 2008 have never been recorded. These are, most likely, social echoes of the crisis as initially manifested in the Western countries. In structuring the Romanian public opinion's reaction to the international crisis, in-country families of Romanians' working abroad acted as real-life social resonating chambers. Through them, but also through the internet, the crisis effect was propagated from West to East, in the public's awareness. Of course, there were also internal factors, linked to the local and regional economic dynamics, but they are more difficult to identify.

¹ Self-conducted interview (Dumitru Sandu). As for the previous issue, EB69, I have adopted the formula of an executive summary/synthesis elaborated as a self-conducted interview starting from what the collected data "tell us" in relation to potential mass-media interests, as perceived by me. The report itself is centred on describing and, partially, explaining Romanians' state of mind at the end of 2008 in European context. Comparisons in time are mostly made in the short term, as compared to beginning of 2008, in order to highlight the dynamics of Romanians' state of mind in time of crisis, in relation to evolutions in the other EU Member States. The report also acts as a thematic and methodological synthesis in relation to previous issues carried out for Romania, starting with autumn 2004 (EB62). In this respect, the analysis grants a special attention to:

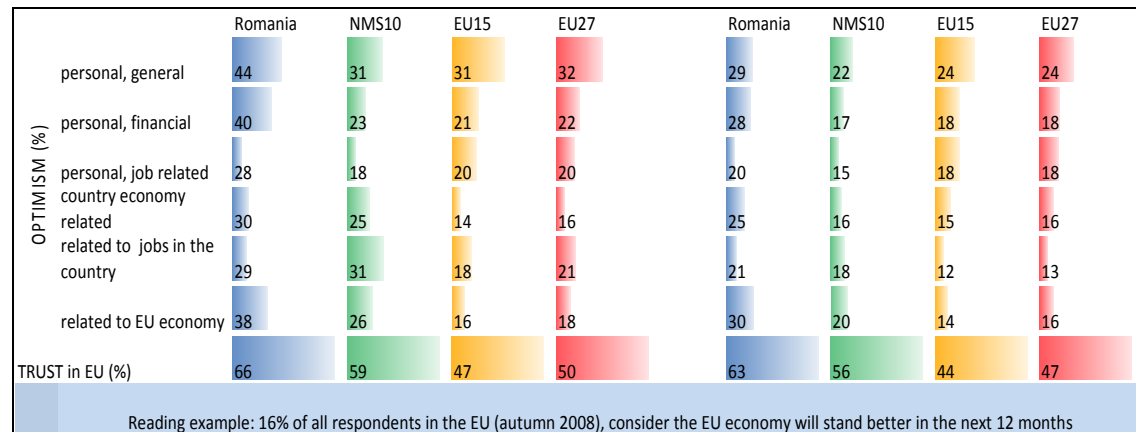
- typology of the different states of mind resulting from the satisfaction-optimism ratio,
- dynamic optimism (of people considered as optimist discontented persons),
- report between the material capital, measured at national level through the GDP, and the state of mind one, at national level,
- relevance of socio-cultural macro-regions at EU level in analysing state of opinion in the Union,
- multilevel analysis (taking into account, simultaneously, factors at individual and country level in determining the state of mind).

Annexes 1 (regression models), 2 (satisfaction degree per social worlds and macro-regions) and 3 (substantiation of EU Member States indexing based on socio-cultural macro-regions) to the report are destined mainly to specialists.

Are Romanians still, in this crisis context, the EU's "optimists"?

Yes and no. No, as they are no longer ranked second from the top, in descending order, amongst the Member States in terms of optimism (spring 2008), but third, following Sweden and Denmark and at relatively similar levels with France and the UK. Sweden registered an optimism index of 38%, followed by Denmark (34%), France (30%), Romania (29%) and the UK (28%).²

The main change is not in standing, but in level of optimism. For the total EU, the average level of personal optimism in relation to people's "own life, in general" has dropped 8 percentage points. In Romania, though, the decrease is almost double, at 15 percentage points (between a 44% optimism level in March 2008 to 29% in October, same year).



Has Romania witnessed, within Europe, the highest decline in personal optimism levels?

No. Similar declines were witnessed in Lithuania, Malta and, within a close range, UK (Chart 10). Anyway, we cannot talk of a specific Romanian phenomenon in this process. The deepest drops in personal optimism levels (measured through support for the opinion that, in 12-months time, people's own life "in general" will be better) took place in countries that had very high levels, of over 40%, as regards optimism in spring 2008 (Sweden, Denmark, UK, France, Malta, Romania).

Can the decline in optimism be summarised in a diffuse perception, such as "we will most likely have worse living conditions"?

No. The public perception of the consequences of the crisis is more specific. People judge their future taking into account specific elements, such as income, job, consumption opportunities, taxes, etc. In the case of Romanians, for example, over the same period of time of 6 months, financial optimism also witnesses a drastic reduction. The percentage of people who consider their household's financial situation will be better in 12-months' time goes down from 40% (March 2008) to 28% (October 2008). Similarly, optimism in relation to their work situation goes down by approximately 8 percentage points. These trends are observed, but to a lower extent, in the average of the NMS10. Crisis-related psychological shock in relation to personal optimism affected the population in the old EU Member States (EU15), but to a lesser extent.

² Romania's optimism level (29%) does not significantly differ from that of France (30%), according to test results $t=0.536$, for $p=0.01$. Otherwise said, although the level for France is up 1%, as compared to Romania, the two estimated percentages through independent samples are not differing in a significant way. One cannot say that, on average, French people (at the level of the whole population and not the sample) are more optimist than Romanians. This is the reason why I have considered the two levels (for Romania and France) as equal ("rank-linked" in statistical terms). Similarly, the optimism level for Romania is not significantly different from the one of UK ($t=0.251$, meaning non-significant for $p=0.01$). This is the reason for ranking Romania third, and not forth, in terms of optimism.

Beyond the personal horizon, how do Romanians see their future, at country level?

With concern, especially as regards their jobs. In this field, optimism levels went down from 29% to 21% between March and October 2008. Similar changes were registered in the NMS10, while, in EU15, the extent was lesser. Nevertheless, although declining, Romanians' optimism, both at personal and country level, has remained above the EU average. During a crisis, levels change, while hierarchies remain, mostly, the same.

What's Romania's place, in terms of people's state of mind, amongst the new EU Member States? Or compared with the old Member States?

In this respect, we should think nuances. We are accustomed, based on data in previous EB issues, but also on a certain methodological inertia, to compare Romania with NMS10 and say its people's state of mind is getting closer to this group and differs seriously from that in EU15. Of course, this comparison is useful. I believe, nevertheless, that if we prefer to still use the old dichotomy between the old and new Union, the images we obtain are quite unclear. In certain aspects, it is more useful to make comparisons between socio-cultural macro-regions of the Union (Chart 1), between the Northern and Southern, Eastern, Central-Eastern and Western bands³. Such groups differ significantly between themselves in terms of material capital, but also as regards configurations of individual modernity, of state of mind. Romania, for example, is very similar to Bulgaria, Lithuania and Latvia, in terms of low level of economic development.

The same 4 countries from the Eastern band are also similar as regards the low level of satisfaction with life. Together with Estonia, the third Baltic country, they form the Eastern band of the EU.

The Northern band in the EU – composed of Sweden, Denmark, Finland, UK and Ireland – is an extremely well-defined group. Here we register the life satisfaction and optimism pole in the EU, the maximum level of trust in the justice system and a low level of concern as regards the future of job opportunities.

The Southern band, in its turn, composed mainly of Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal, is one that is closer, for certain indexes, to the Eastern and Central-Eastern bands than the Western and Northern ones. Concerns over own job, for example, is extremely high (40%), comparable to the situation in the Central-Eastern band and very far from the one in North and West EU.

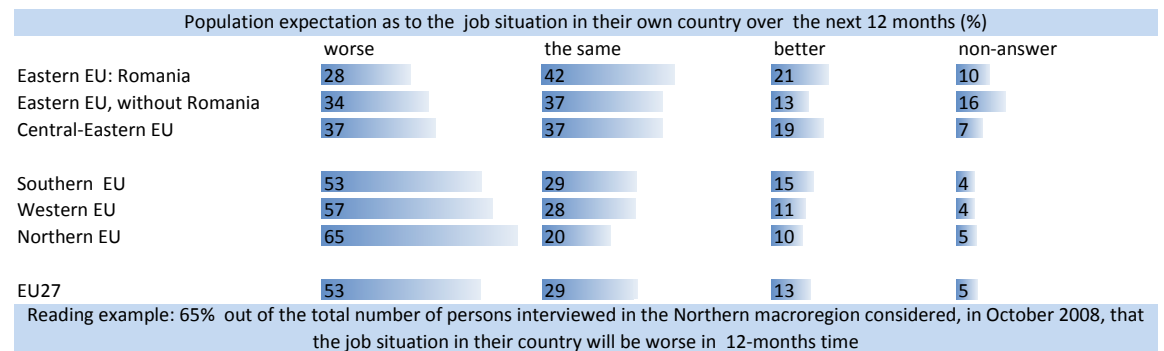
³ The five socio-cultural groups that I use in the report are an adaptation of the classification system used in specialised literature for the analysis of socio-demographic profiles at European level (see, for example, *State of World Population 2007. Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth*, UNEPA 2007). Within the framework of such international classifications, distinctions are made between Northern, Western, Southern and Eastern Europe. The classification I propose for analyses within the EU includes the Baltic countries not in Northern Europe, but in the Eastern one, together with Romania and Bulgaria. The reason is their location at the Eastern borders of the EU and the low level of economic development. Moreover, I have made a distinct group within the EU (the Central Eastern one), composed of Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia, all Member States located in central Europe, characterised by common history and a level of economic development above the one in the Eastern band. For details of argumentation, see supplementary analyses in annex 1.

	Eastern		Central-Eastern (Pol., Czech., Hung, Slov., Slovak.)	Southern (Portug., Spain, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Malta)	Western (Germany, Austria, Belgium, France, Lux., Netherlands)	Northern (Sweden, Denmark, Finland, UK, Ireland)	EU27
	Romania	Bulgaria and Baltic states					
% satisfied with life	47	49	73	69	84	89	77
% optimist	29	20	22	24	21	29	24
% trusting justice	25	24	35	42	57	60	48
% trusting Parliament	19	11	17	33	42	39	34
% trusting EU	63	57	56	48	47	32	47
% concerned over payment of monthly bills	57	65	45	60	37	37	46
% concerned over decline in purchasing power	30	46	36	53	61	44	51
% dissatisfied with own job situation	32	40	28	40	18	18	26

Reading example: 40% out of Southern macro-region citizens are dissatisfied with their job situation

Can we talk of a clear differentiation of perceptions on crisis between the groups of countries or socio-cultural macro-regions?

Undoubtedly, yes. As an example, I will refer to jobs. At the time of the survey, almost two-thirds of citizens in the Northern countries – Sweden, Denmark, Finland, UK, Ireland – felt that, in 12 months' time, the situation in terms of job opportunities will be worse in their countries. Otherwise said, the financial crisis will influence the labour market. The relevant percentage was lower in Western and Southern EU Member States, but also over 50%. In Central-Eastern and Eastern Member States, the percentage was considerably lower (37% and, respectively, 30%).



Romania, Poland and Bulgaria were, in October 2008, the EU Member States the least worried by the effects of the crisis on the labour market (their levels of concern being under 30%).

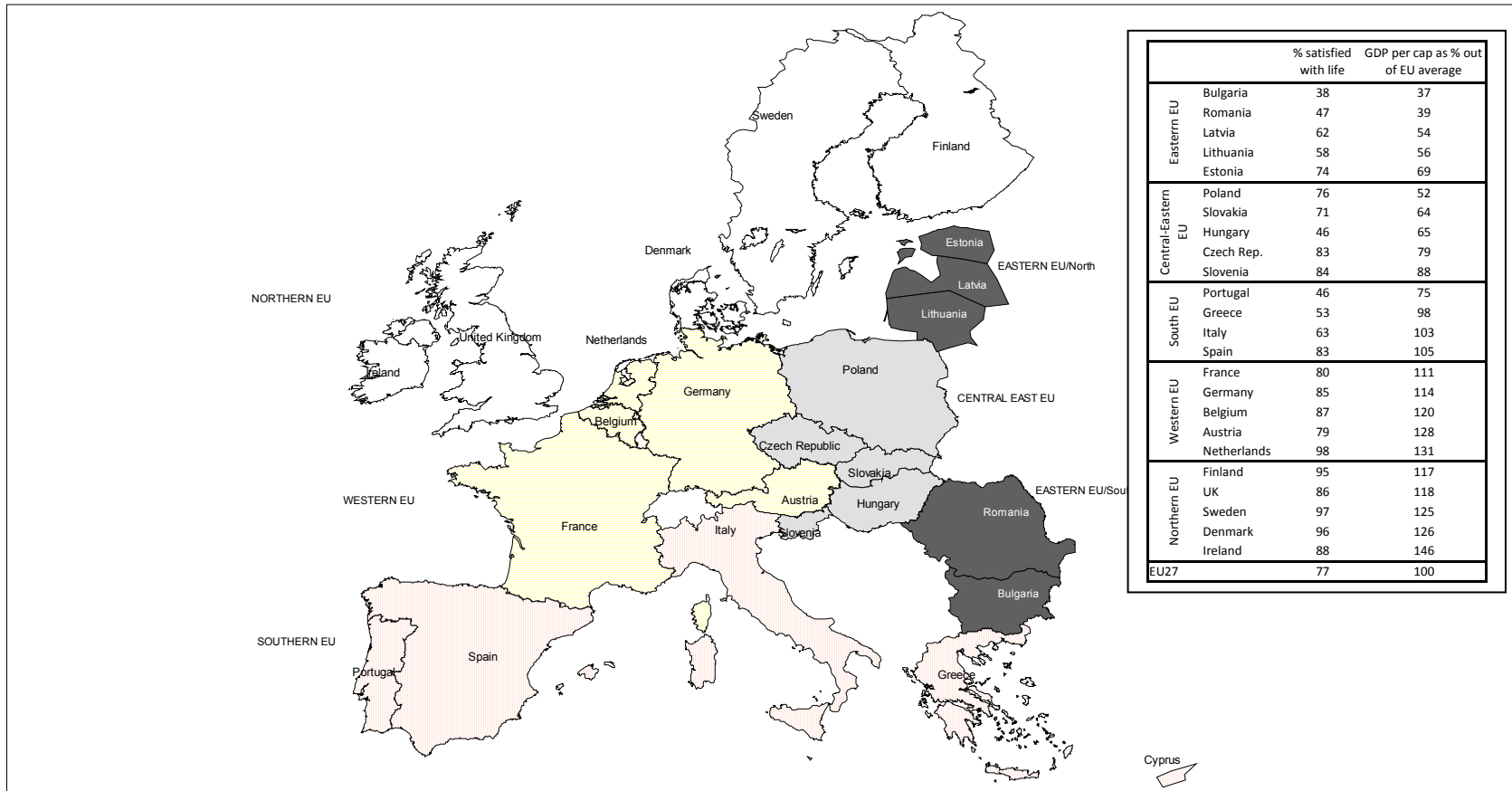


Chart 1. The five socio-cultural macro-regions of the EU, significant for major differences in terms of population's state of mind and economic situation.

In the chart, I have not included details for Malta, Luxembourg and the Republic of Cyprus, taking into consideration the fact the small representative samples from this countries result in unstable values for indexes, with a high error margin for representativeness. Each of the five groups has an exception, borderline case. Estonia, Slovenia and The Netherlands are more developed than the countries in their group, as decided by geographical location and history. Similarly, they have levels of satisfaction consistently different from the group. In the Southern band, Portugal is the exception, with a level of economic development lower than the countries in its group. The satisfaction level with life is correspondingly reduced.

In the discussion up to now, you have focused on the perception of the future, on optimism vs. pessimism. If we change the way we see it and analyse people's state of mind in relation to the current situation or the current situation as compared with the past, are the differentiation lines that you mentioned maintained? Where is Romania from this point of view?

Relating, at a feelings level, to the current situation is defining hierarchies of different orientations, structured, nevertheless, for the same socio-cultural macro-regions. As an example, I will analyse the topic of monthly bills. People who declare, within the EU27, they have difficulties in paying their monthly bills represent 46% of the poll. For the countries in the Western and Northern part of the Union, the percentage in question is considerably lower (only 37%). In countries from the Central-Eastern band of the Union (Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Slovenia), concern regarding the payment of bills is very close to the EU average. Those who are most concerned about these difficulties are citizens from the Southern band, as well as from the Eastern one, with percentages close to 60%.

In central and Eastern Europe, including Romania, the main concern is with the payment of the monthly bills, more so than worries about the job situation or a reduction in purchasing power. Countries in the Southern band are characterised by a model of generalised concern, while the ones from the Northern band by a generalised assurance about life. In the Western EU, the main concern is the reduction in purchasing power.

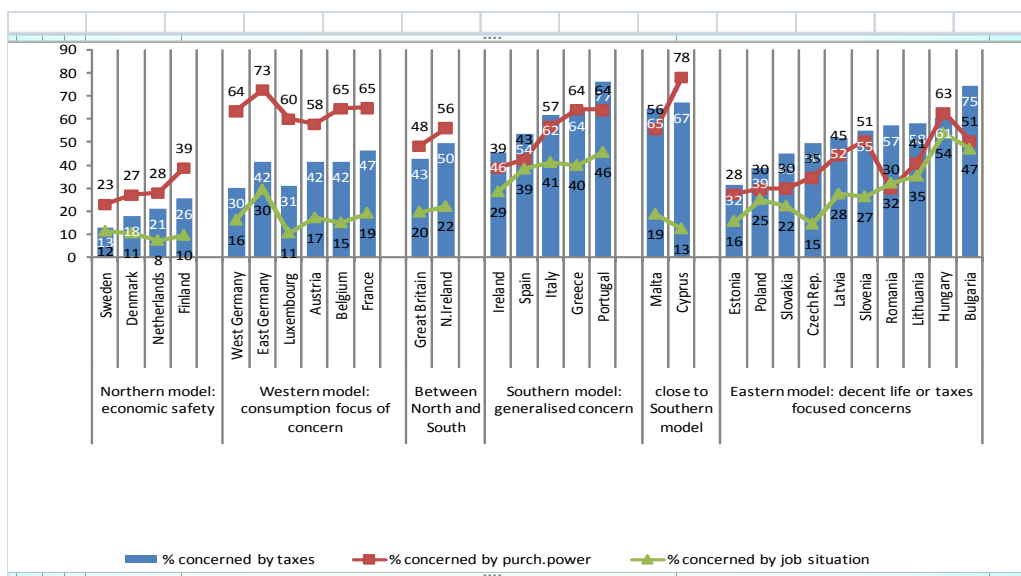


Chart 2. The percentage of persons concerned about monthly taxes, reduction in purchasing power of own household and job security, per country

Do we learn anything on particular aspects of the living costs as perceived by Romanians from this Eurobarometer?

Yes. A significant example seems to me to be the access to energy for consumption purposes. Only 16% of Romanians consider that energy prices are accessible (the way the questionnaire translated into Romanian the term *affordability*). The same percentage is recorded in the UK. Does this mean that costs in relation to access to energy for consumption purposes have the same negative impact on both Romanian and British people? If things are taken out of context, for example, by ignoring the level of average income in both countries, the reply to the question is affirmative. I think it is more prudent to make such comparisons between groups of countries with similar levels of GDP.

From this point of view, Romania is comparable mainly with the countries in the Eastern band (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Bulgaria). In this group of countries, on average, the percentage of people considering access to energy is achieved at an acceptable cost is 45%. This means the feeling of over-priced energy is more acute in Romania than in the countries it is compared with. In Bulgaria, for example, a country with a relatively similar GDP (37% of EU average, in 2007, according to EUROSTAT data) to Romania (39% of EU average), the percentage of people that perceive energy-related costs in a positive way is 44%, almost triple that observed in Romania.

If comparison is made not only for the energy-related, but all living costs, then it will be hard to meet "happy Romanians", because only 8% of the population considers them acceptable (as compared with 21%, the average percentage at EU level).

Of course, such a survey mainly allows comparisons to be made between countries or macro-regions. Can the data collected tell us anything about differences in the state of mind within each country? Are Romanians from different regions, thinking the same things about their own lives?

The question is, mostly, rhetorical. Of course, the answer is "no". Asked about the current situation in their "area of residence", 70% of Romanians argue they are satisfied or very satisfied with it (as compared with 79%, the EU average, and 66%, the average for the Eastern macro-region of the EU). The answer summarises evaluations linked to the quality of the public space in the area of residence in terms of social services, access to services, quality of social relations, availability of jobs, salaries' level, etc. From this point of view, the most content with quality of their public space or of their area of residence are Romanians from development region Centre (83%). Less content, but nevertheless over the national average, are Romanians from the capital city and from development regions North-West and West.

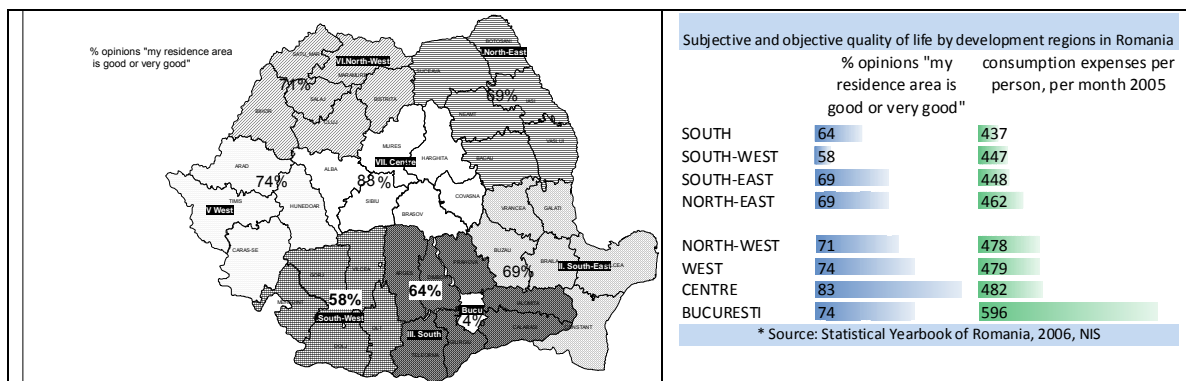


Chart 3 Percentage of persons that consider situation in their area of residence is "good or very good" and average costs per person, per development regions in Romania

Reading example: 58% of people residing in development region South-West consider the situation in their residing area as good or very good

The dissatisfaction pole is in Oltenia, development region South-West (with only 58% people content with their area of residence). One could point out that, in this context, the state of mind, subjective in its nature, is not separated from the objective reality. The level of consumption per person, as an indicator of incomes, is strongly correlated with the evaluations provided. From the point of view of this analysis, it is not Moldova that is the poorest region in Romania, but most likely Oltenia. It is possible that migration abroad for work purposes, stronger and dating back longer in Moldova than in Oltenia, plays an important role in the explaining of the mentioned difference.

Talking about migration abroad. Do we find out new things about this phenomenon, in relation to Romania, from this survey?

Migration is not one of the major themes of this Eurobarometer issue. There is only one question in the questionnaire about the ideology behind migrating abroad. Respondents were asked for their opinion on the issue “if children from COUNTRY would have a better life if migrating to another country”. Across the whole of the EU, almost a quarter of respondents consider migration abroad would provide a better future for their children. As expected, the percentage of pro-migration people is significantly higher in the new member states, meaning 36% (even 37% in the case of Romania). Surprisingly though, the same high percentage is registered in the Northern countries of the EU. Otherwise said, the pro-migration ideology is as powerful in the East, as in the North. The motivation is, nevertheless, most likely to be different. Migration from the East is centred on economic reasons, on the prospects of having a decent living. For people from the Northern band, the motivation is different. In the UK's case, for example (with close to 50% respondents arguing in favour of a pro-migration ideology), the reasons are, most likely, associated with discontent about environment, living costs or crime levels.

What about gender differences in perceiving the crisis, can they be made more precise?

Across the EU as a whole, in terms of employed population, women (27%) tend to be more concerned as regards the financial situation of the household in the near future, in 12 months' time, than men (24%). In Romania, the relevant percentages are 21% (women) and 18% (men). The only macro-region where there is no difference in percentages is Western Europe. As regards people's concerns about the future of their own job, indices are strongly differentiated between gender categories in the different countries and macro-regions. In Romania, from the total number of employed men, only 14% are concerned over the future of their job, considering that their situation will worsen. In the case of women, the relevant percentage is even lower (9%). In the EU overall, at the level of the employed population, the two percentages are relatively equal. In the Northern band, the situation is similar to that of Romania, while in the Southern band the percentages are inverted, with women (21%) being more concerned than men (16%).

The crisis we talked about in this interview represents change in the, let's hope, short- or medium-term. Are changes in the long-term taken into consideration in any way in the survey?

Yes, especially if referring to perceptions people have of the consequences of the continental processes that started with the fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1989. Almost two-thirds of people interviewed argue these processes have led to the EU's strengthening, with another almost half of the population considering the processes in question had also had a positive effect on their own country. Only a quarter of the population considers they have directly benefited from these processes. Citizens from Central-Eastern countries, especially from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, are the most content with the changes brought about by events and processes associated with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Citizens from the Eastern countries, including Romania, have a more reserved opinion, their level of contentment being under the EU average as regards these effects both at country and personal level.