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## POVERTY AND HUMAN SECURITY: A STUDY OF INDIVIDUAL PERCEPTIONS

<b>Abstract:</b>	<p><i>Poverty is one of the fundamental problems of the contemporary world. A wide range of actors treats it as a priority, from states and international organisations to businesses, communities, and individuals. The goals focus on increasing levels of social cohesion and economic well-being, as well as achieving visible progress in reducing scarcity at the international level. This thesis aims to analyse the relationship between poverty and personal security empirically. To test the relationship between the two variables, we use semi-structured interviews to highlight individuals' perceptions of the insecurity generated by various forms of poverty.</i></p> <p><i>The qualitative approach allows for a detailed investigation of the types of deprivation present in different geographical areas of Romania, as well as their connection with subjective representations of security. To ensure the authenticity of the paper, a triangulation process was applied using secondary data from surveys and official reports. The topic is crucial for security studies because the issue of scarcity has been high on the broader security agenda. Initially associated with vulnerabilities and risks at the individual level, poverty has gradually become a central concern of state actors. Analysed in terms of its effects (social exclusion, illiteracy, radicalisation), it has become a source of unpredictability at the level of action. The relevance of this study lies in the novelty it brings to the literature by analysing the relationship over the period 2019–2022.</i></p> <p><i>The chosen interval is significant due to the proliferation of systemic threats, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, which generated medical, economic or security effects. The data analysed confirmed an increase in the feeling of insecurity, against the background of exacerbated economic disparities, both in the immediate living environment and in public spaces. The pandemic period also created a generalised fear of the medical effects of the pandemic, directly linked to the failure to comply with the imposed distancing rules.</i></p>
<b>Keywords:</b>	<b>Poverty; income; human security; perceptions; development</b>
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### Introduction

Poverty, one of the fundamental problems of the contemporary world, influences the development of individuals and the relationship between the state and the civil component of society.<sup>1</sup> Both state policymakers and international organisations have increased their interest in reducing poverty and, by implication, the disparities between social strata.<sup>2</sup> The projected goals have been framed around increasing social cohesion and economic well-being, subsequently operationalised as relevant objectives for international actors. The

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Unwin, *No end to poverty*, “The Journal of Development Studies”, Vol. 43, No. 5, 2007, p. 945, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220380701384596> (10.03.2025)

<sup>2</sup> Gabriela Neagu, *Percepția populației asupra stării societății*, “Revista de Inovație Socială”, No. 1, 2012, p.11

representation of poverty as a threat to human security opens new perspectives associated with the broader security agenda, with perceptions of the issue providing an opportunity to explore people's vulnerabilities and lived experiences.<sup>1</sup> Relating perceptions of poverty to human security implications shapes a research agenda on how the issue of scarcity can have a wider impact on the security of individuals.

Several studies have linked poverty and security, particularly since the 1990s, when the broader agenda of security studies encompasses the economic, environmental and societal sectors.<sup>2</sup> Although human security is described in the literature with conceptual ambiguity, some approaches identify it with the absence of threats and others with “the protection which society accords to each citizens, for the conservation of person, his property and his rights”<sup>3</sup>. One aspect is stable, however, namely that the problems associated with the human security spectrum, including poverty, relate mainly to individuals and less to the state.

Until now, the relationship between poverty and human security has been approached from a theoretical perspective, with theories emerging from literature that exploit the causality between the two concepts<sup>4</sup>. Two theories, modernisation and dependency theories, associate poverty with “a threat to human security”<sup>5</sup>. Empirically, perceptions of poverty and personal security have been studied in isolation, with little effort to link the two variables. This relationship is especially important for understanding how individuals' perceptions of poverty influence their security. To address the existing gap in the literature, this paper aims to emphasise the relationship between perceptions of poverty and human security in Romania in 2019-2022, an aspect identified as under-researched in the writings in the field of security studies. This study aims to answer the question “How is poverty perceived in relation to human security?”, using a theoretical framework focused on the two issues and an analysis of primary data collected through interviews.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Defining poverty*

In literature, complex definitions have been attributed to the problem of poverty, starting from maximising the economic meaning and reaching the relevance of individual determinism as a constant in the fight against poverty. Resulting from an accumulation of factors, studies on the causes of poverty have concluded that there are both economic and non-economic factors that can generate deprivation.<sup>6</sup> Other authors have attached to the concept characteristic of multidimensionality, which they have explained by appealing to empirical circumstances: “employment situation, low income level, family dimension, marital status, alcoholism, education”, all of which are inherently linked to poverty.<sup>7</sup> Empirical studies that aim to determine the broad characteristics of poverty “evidence abounds that poverty has dimensions that transcend these simplistic and prescriptive definitions”<sup>8</sup>. One of the broadest definitions found on the specialised literature on poverty integrates several areas of interest for the study of the issue. It identifies the relationship between needs and minimally acceptable living conditions and the developmental qualities of the individual as part of society. Poverty consists in any form of inequity, which is a source of social exclusion, in the distribution of the living conditions essential to human dignity. These living conditions correspond to the capabilities of individuals, households and communities to meet their basic needs in the following dimensions: income (1) education (2)

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<sup>1</sup> Nuria Lorenzo-Dus, Steve Marsh, *Bridging the gap: Interdisciplinary insights into the securitization of poverty*, “Discourse&Society”, Vol. 23, No. 3, May, 2012, p. 276, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926511433453> (10.03.2025)

<sup>2</sup> Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, Jaap de Wilde, *Securitatea: un nou cadru de analiză*, CA Publishing, Cluj-Napoca, 2011, p. 9

<sup>3</sup> Shehu Enoch Amila, Baiyi Viniru Luka, *Poverty as a Threat to Human Security in Nigeria*, “International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)”, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2020, p. 158

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 159

<sup>5</sup> *Idem*

<sup>6</sup> Leonor Pereira da Costa, José G. Dias, *Perceptions of poverty attributions in Europe: a multilevel mixture model approach*, “Quality&Quantity”, Vol. 48, No. 3, May, 2014, p. 1410, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-013-9843-3> (15.03.2025)

<sup>7</sup> *Idem*

<sup>8</sup> Rufus B. Akindola, *Towards a Definition of Poverty: Poor People's Perspectives and Implications for Poverty Reduction*, “Journal of Developing Societies”, Vol. 25, No. 2, April, 2009, p. 123, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796X0902500201> (10.03.2025)

health (3) food/nutrition (4) safe water/sanitation (5) labour/employment (6) housing (living environment) (7) access to productive assets (8) access to markets (9) community participation/social peace (10)<sup>1</sup>.

Following the approaches identified in the literature, poverty is defined in this paper as a social process with numerous causes and manifestations, the core of the problem being the financial and social deprivation that individuals experience within their communities. The global scale of poverty, the interest of state actors in alleviating the phenomenon and the insecurity of communities experiencing one form of poverty are leading to growing interest in this subject, the consequences of which can be visualised in several areas. The multidimensional nature of poverty, which is determined by numerous conceptual approaches (economic, social, cultural, individual, etc.), indicates the problem's capacity to explore vulnerable social sectors and underpins the formation of social perceptions of the subject. Most of the approaches identified in specialised writings associate poverty with pecuniary aspects such as insufficient income and the inability of vulnerable groups to access well-paid jobs. This creates a series of causes and effects of poverty that can take the form of a causal cycle that causes, propagates, and makes it more difficult to live on the poverty line.

#### *Defining human security*

Originally defined as “a special form of politics”<sup>2</sup>, human security is a broad range of actions that protect people from a variety of threats. Scholars, international organisations and national governments have opened the concept of 'human security' to the public, which has given increased attention to the well-being of people facing various threats.<sup>3</sup> The concept is gaining several definitions due to the numerous approaches identified in the literature, its particularities shaping theoretical debates and having a particular significance in relation to the issue of poverty. One of the conceptual approaches to human security is offered by the School of Rights and the Rule of Law, which provides a definition by referring to the serious threats arising from “the denial of fundamental rights such as the right of minority (self-determination) and the lack of the rule of law”<sup>4</sup>. With “safety from chronic threats” as its object of reference, human security not only shifted the focus from the state to the individual but claimed the legitimate responsibility of state actors to protect individuals<sup>5</sup>. The focus on the individual rather than the state has delimited the explanations offered in support of the concept of human security. The breadth of the notion has come to provide benchmarks and an awareness of the complex problems facing humanity.

Criticisms of the concept of human security focus on the following characteristics: vague, incoherent, arbitrary, and difficult to operationalise. In this regard, Roland Paris criticises previous scholars for the definitions associated with the concept of 'human security' because of their vagueness and expansiveness, failing to provide guidance on policy objectives<sup>6</sup>. Another important issue that has marked the international debate on human security centres around state's involvement in effectively managing its citizens' protection. Some scholars have recognised in their research that human security “is not about transcending or marginalizing the state” but is “about ensuring that states protect their people”<sup>7</sup>. Under this rubric of setting state priorities around the welfare of the individual, some scholars have expressed concern about the legitimacy of states using greater control in society in the name of protection<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Louis-Marie Asselin, *Analysis of Multidimensional Poverty: Theory and Case Studies*, “Economic Studies in Inequality, Social Exclusion and Well-Being”, Springer New York, New York, 2009, p. 3

<sup>2</sup> Edward A. Kolodziej, *Security and International Relations*, “Themes in International Relations”, Reprint, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 22

<sup>3</sup> Ronald F. Inglehart, Pippa Norris, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Understanding Human Security: The 2011 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture*, “Scandinavian Political Studies”, Vol. 35, No. 1, March, 2012, pp. 71–72, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2011.00281.x> (15.03.2025)

<sup>4</sup> Hawre Hasan Hama, *State Security, Societal Security, and Human Security*, “Jadavpur Journal of International Relations”, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2017, p. 14, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973598417706591> (11.03.2025)

<sup>5</sup> Giorgio Shani, *Human Security as Ontological Security: A Post-Colonial Approach*, “Postcolonial Studies”, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2017, p. 4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2017.1378062> (15.03.2025)

<sup>6</sup> Giorgio Shani, Makoto Satō, Mustapha Kamal Pasha, *Protecting Human Security in a Post 9/11 World: Critical and Global Insights*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007, p. 6

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7

<sup>8</sup> *Idem*

In conclusion, since the end of the twentieth century, human security has been a concept reiterating the many problems facing humanity. Starting the application of fundamental human rights and even going as far as identifying solutions to alleviate poverty, human security aims to maximise both individual and collective well-being and security. The involvement of state actors in prioritising individual security has reorganised the international agenda for problem-solving, with the imminent link between state and citizen being reconfigured. In addition to state actors having to actively contribute to maximising human security in diverse contexts, individuals also have a particular role. They “contribute to increasing security by identifying threats and implementing solutions aimed at improving their own security”<sup>1</sup>. In this paper, starting from the inclusion of personal security in the human security paradigm, the term of reference will be personal security.

## Literature Review

Poverty is an issue that influences the lives and interactions between individuals<sup>2</sup>. Evolution or involution configures a dynamic of poverty in which trends, seasonality or timing of experiences are the benchmarks of traditional studies that focus on historical moments and narratives of poverty.<sup>3</sup> The social situation associated with poverty-related disadvantage fluctuates in relation to both the temporal dimension and other factors such as welfare policies, individual effort, severity of the condition, etc.<sup>4</sup>. Intensified international efforts to recognise the vulnerabilities that poverty causes among communities are also drawing attention to states of insecurity<sup>5</sup>. Some authors argue that poverty and insecurity are related problems that hinder individual and collective development<sup>6</sup>. Other authors have argued that security “is both a feeling and a reality”<sup>7</sup>, which reveals the importance people attach to maximising security as a basic need. The first chapter's objectives are the dynamics of poverty and the perceptions that form around it, as well as understanding of the conceptual evolution of the term 'security'. Therefore, in the theoretical chapter, I conceptualise the terms, review the literature, and construct the analytical framework of this paper.

The vulnerabilities caused by poverty among certain population sectors have raised concerns about the measurability of this social state with a view to the subsequent use of tools to alleviate or combat it. Treating poverty as a state of individual or collective insecurity makes it possible to subjectively assess several factors, which the specialist literature attempts to systematise to give the subject a clear shape. However, 'perceptions' and 'realities' are not always consistent, and outsiders' perceptions of what constitutes security and insecurity are not always the same as insiders' perceptions of what constitutes security and insecurity<sup>8</sup>. For this reason, understanding poverty as a perception can be achieved through a brief analysis of studies that have assessed people's tendencies to categorise themselves as poor, identifying some constants that allow the shaping of common attributes. I therefore propose in this sub-section to identify some studies that have focused on assessing perceptions of poverty in different geographical areas and then highlighting commonalities.

At the macro level, perceptions of poverty among national governments often suggest a one-sided view because they “often view poverty only as a result of the internal political and social workings of developing

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<sup>1</sup> Janusz Gierszewski, *Personal Security within the Human Security Paradigm*, “Security Dimensions International & National Studies”, No. 23, 2017, p. 62

<sup>2</sup> Călin Anastasiu, Cătălin Zamfir, *Dicționar de sociologie: urmat de indicatori demografici, economici, sociali și sociologici*, Dicționarele Babel, București, Babel, 1993, p. 50

<sup>3</sup> Maria Vaalavuo, *Poverty Dynamics in Europe: From What to Why*, Working Paper 03/2015, “Publications Office of the European Union”, Luxembourg, 2015, p. 6, <https://doi.org/10.2767/956213> (20.03.2025)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5

<sup>5</sup> Mariana Chilton, Michelle Chyatte, Jennifer Breau, *The Negative Effects of Poverty & Food Insecurity on Child Development*, “The Indian Journal of Medical Research”, Vol. 126, No. 4, October 2007, p. 262

<sup>6</sup> Angela Ajodo-Adebanjoko, Ugwuoke Okwudili Walter, *Poverty and the Challenges of Insecurity to Development*, “European Scientific Journal”, Vol. 10, No. 14, May 2014 Edition, p. 361, <https://www.ejournal.org/index.php/esj/article/view/3985> (25.03.2025)

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Schneier, *The Psychology of Security*, in Serge Vaudenay (Ed.), *Progress in Cryptology – Africacrypt 2008*, Springer Berlin Heidelberg, Berlin, Heidelberg, 2008, p. 50

<sup>8</sup> Sandra J. MacLean, *A Decade of Human Security: Global Governance and New Multilateralisms*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2010, p. 11

countries, and not as a part of the larger, global forces reshaping the economic landscape”<sup>1</sup>. Consistent with this view, policy responses also fairly limit the problem of scarcity, with economic development seen as an “effective and efficient cure for poverty, regardless of the country’s history or current social, economic, or political conditions”<sup>2</sup>. At the level of communities where chronic forms of poverty are found, some scholars demonstrate how certain social underclasses isolate themselves within cities or rural areas, “concentrating poverty”. In specific contexts, “(...) poor people develop a weak labour-force attachment, which signifies for Wilson their marginal position due to limited job opportunities and limited access to informal networks through which jobs are often obtained” shows that the problem does not coexist with the desirability of work as a motivation to get out of poverty<sup>3</sup>. Thus, one of the solutions identified at the theoretical level for poverty alleviation is economic and social change through sectoral public policies<sup>4</sup>.

While researchers and specialists in the sciences dealing with the issue of poverty have developed theoretical triggers, theories or assumptions about this social condition, the World Bank produced a report in 2000 entitled “Voices of the Poor”, which was based on studies that explored how individuals define security about their own economic and social status<sup>5</sup>. Aiming to “deepening the idea of human security by incorporating the perspectives of the poor in the security and development policy debate”<sup>6</sup>, the report provided the public with a particular way in which vulnerable people self-assess their state of well-being. This participatory approach shapes people's perceptions of well-being, i.e. the lack of adequate levels of it, and synthesised four dimensions of reference in the perception of poverty: income stability, predictability of daily life, protection from crime and psychological security<sup>7</sup>. People's needs revolved around pecuniary aspects, vulnerability to violence and psychological security that coexist both as a feeling and as a reality.<sup>8</sup> This allows me to state that poverty as a perception is represented by a set of situations that individuals go through in particular, and their relationship with security is provided by individual or collective expectations<sup>9</sup>. The omnipresence of threat, instability and poverty in people's everyday concerns established some conclusions of the report based on the dimensions of security: deficiencies in access to resources and secure income, hunger specific to food insecurity, health insecurity among poor people as a prerequisite for deaths from infectious and parasitic diseases, and in terms of community security, tensions and conflicts were noted due to limited access to opportunities<sup>10</sup>.

The existing consensus on the primacy of human needs in the applicability of human security has generated international debates on the concept's appropriation in African thinking. The impact of poverty in this geographic space “which prescribe that security institutions have a role to play in poverty reduction”<sup>11</sup>, and idealised the purposes of human security. Food insecurity and climate change facing the African territory have consequently shaped people's perceptions of poverty. Thus, relying mainly on agriculture and natural resources that are susceptible to floods and droughts caused by climate change, countries such as The Gambia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Zambia locate communities where urban poverty rates fluctuate around 50%<sup>12</sup>. This reality where poverty patterns influence the nature of development of regions or communities (the literature emphasises that poverty in Africa is not homogeneous but can be classified as chronic, borderline or

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<sup>1</sup> Nadeja Ballard, *Globalization and Poverty*, Chelsea House Publ, Philadelphia, Pa, 2006, p. 89

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*

<sup>3</sup> Mark Gould, *Race and Theory: Culture, Poverty, and Adaptation to Discrimination in Wilson and Ogbu*, “Sociological Theory”, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1999, p. 173, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00074> (25.03.2025)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p.174

<sup>5</sup> *Idem*

<sup>6</sup> K. Hussein, D. Gnisci, J. Wanjiru, *Security and Human Security: An Overview of Concepts and Initiatives; What Implications for West Africa?*, “Issues Paper. Sahel and West Africa Club”, OECD, 2004, p. 13

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 13–14

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Schneier, *Op.cit.*, p. 50

<sup>9</sup> K. Hussein, D. Gnisci, J. Wanjiru, *Op.cit.*, p. 31

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 15

<sup>12</sup> Kempe Ronald Hope Sr., *Climate Change and Poverty in Africa*, “International Journal of Sustainable Development&World Ecology”, Vol. 16, No. 6, December 2009, p. 454, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504500903354424> (01.04.2025)

occasional<sup>1)</sup> also deepens class antagonisms. For example, “black Africans still perceive themselves as lacking enough food and income to meet all their household needs” while whites or Indians “never or seldom experience shortages of food and income”<sup>2)</sup>. On the European continent, communities vulnerable to poverty are analysed from several perspectives; individualistic explanations contribute to understanding perceptions of the subject and are treated in detail in the literature. Some authors theorise that the institutional structure of each welfare regime frames how the public perceives the poor and the unemployed, but also self-interested perspectives: “there are studies that support the assumption that those who perceive themselves to be poor are more likely to agree with the external cause of poverty than people well above the poverty line”<sup>3)</sup>. Regardless of the approach, poverty as a perception among vulnerable communities contributes to the creation of an identity that legitimises the characteristics of people experiencing disadvantage. Dealing with poverty as a perception complements theoretical approaches to the causes of people's insecurity at both individual and collective levels. The literature thus points to a conceptual difference between the perception and the feeling of security as social constructs: “Security is the actual state of being free from threat, while the sense of security is the cumulative effect of a set of subjective and objective factors”<sup>4)</sup>.

### Poverty and the Security Dimensions

The notion of “security” is complex and often debated in specialised literature. Most people look at security in an antinomic way, identifying more easily the state associated with insecurity, e.g. an individual/group/state's life/members or livelihoods are threatened.<sup>5)</sup> Given the numerous classifications made of the concept after 1991, when a terminological reform practically took place, the issue of poverty has been briefly discussed about food security, as well as human, environmental or economic security. Although theoretical discussions continue due to tendencies to understand “the wide range of conflicting perceptions and perspectives of actors about security”<sup>6)</sup>, the intervention of subjects such as individuals, international organisations or compact groups allows a rethinking of the way security is understood at these levels. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development “poverty encompasses different dimensions of deprivation that relate to human capabilities including consumption and food security, health, education, rights, voice, security, dignity and decent work”<sup>7)</sup>, the implications of these dimensions lead to a multilevel approach to poverty and related perceptions. The numerous connections between the dimensions of security and poverty also make it necessary to visualise how specialised works approach the issue in relation to food security - a sub-category of human security, which is why highlighting the congruent aspects in this area is necessary for a general understanding of the subject.

The focus on the human dimension of security has, since the 1990s, reiterated social and economic interactions that have at their core the primacy of human beings<sup>8)</sup>. The priorities on the United Nations agenda, such as the particular rights of children in war zones, proposals to tackle transnational crime or the refugee problem<sup>9)</sup>, have concretised both the traditional spectrum of threats (those of a military nature, for example) and the non-traditional ones corresponding to poverty, disease or education<sup>10)</sup>. Pivoting on this categorisation of the nature of threats to individuals, two schools of thought associated with the field have developed: one school of

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<sup>1)</sup> *Idem*

<sup>2)</sup> Yul Derek Davids, Amanda Gouws, *Monitoring Perceptions of the Causes of Poverty in South Africa*, “Social Indicators Research”, Vol. 110, No. 3, 2013, p. 1202, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-011-9980-9> (05.04.2025)

<sup>3)</sup> Johanna Kallio, Mikko Niemelä, *Who Blames the Poor?*, “European Societies”, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2014, pp. 3–7

<sup>4)</sup> Rihards Bambals, *Human Security: An Analytical Tool for Disaster Perception Research*, “Disaster Prevention and Management”, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2015, p. 153, <https://doi.org/10.1108/DPM-06-2014-0106>, (15.03.2025)

<sup>5)</sup> Edward A. Kolodziej, *Op.cit.*, p. 1

<sup>6)</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3

<sup>7)</sup> Fikret Berkes, *Poverty Reduction Isn't Just about Money: Community Perceptions of Conservation Benefits*, in Dilys Roe et al. (Eds.), *Biodiversity Conservation and Poverty Alleviation: Exploring the Evidence for a Link*, Vol. 1, 2012, p. 271, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118428351.ch17> (22.03.2025)

<sup>8)</sup> Catia Gregoratti, *Social Science. History, Disciplines, Future Development& Facts Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/human-security> (13.04.2025)

<sup>9)</sup> Paul D. Williams, *Security studies: an introduction*, Routledge, London; New York, 2008, p. 279

<sup>10)</sup> Gregoratti Catia, *Op.cit.*

thought focuses on “freedom from want” (the primacy of economic, health, food, social and environmental problems), and the second school of thought focuses on the elimination of the use or threat of force or violence against people, which would translate into “freedom from fear”<sup>1</sup>. At a narrow level, human security approaches revolve around people's basic needs and introduce the prevention of elements that can disrupt social life.

Associating poverty with its multidimensionality<sup>2</sup>, the specialised literature captures this issue as an integrated part of human security, and the consensus among researchers is in line with the approach that international institutions give to these concepts. In addition to the specialists who subscribe to the arguments of the conceptual revolution of the 1990s on security, we also find critics of the empirical usefulness of human security in academic and political circles under the premise of hostility and scepticism to operationalise the concept and use it in social research<sup>3</sup>. The re-dimensioning of security has coincided with the coming to the fore of a persistent problem in most societies: poverty. Implicitly, the assessment of the living conditions of individuals has coincided with the redefinition of security, with the resolution of this long-standing problem being a major issue in the contemporary world. Understanding human security through a bottom-up approach translated into maximising problems at the individual level for international cooperation of state actors<sup>4</sup>. Thus, systematically identifying people's problems, incorporating them into sectoral policies and then, the implications of state management in the solution component was a process whose objective was to improve the quality of life. The disparate dimensions of human security capture the importance of poverty as an international problem in different socio-cultural arenas, from conflict-torn states to actors within which extreme poverty defines a specific social sector<sup>5</sup>. In line with the diverse social situations monitored worldwide, the United Nations stated goal of the cross-cutting approach to human security proposes to clarify the importance of poverty as a dimension and benchmark: (...) human security includes the right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair, stressing that all individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential<sup>6</sup>.

Although the socio-economic domain governs most interpretations of poverty due to the operationalisation of deprivation, the emergence of the 'war on poverty' has led to a reinterpretation of the meanings of this phenomenon. Thus, the terminology proposed by Kaldor in terms of the traditional use of the concept of 'war' argues against the structure. Globalisation and the reduction of traditional wars raise awareness of the association of the term 'war' with ways of combating poverty.<sup>7</sup> Although the persistence of deprivation over time makes both individuals and the state structures of which they are part vulnerable, the international commitments that are made to reduce poverty are a first step towards understanding the applicability of human security. Major contributions in the literature focus on the relationship between poverty and human security with a view to maximising individual security. Presented both as a state of insecurity and as a threat to international economies, poverty and, implicitly, the perception of it is often associated with the lack of resources and the effects it produces in society through the interaction between individuals. Thus, the evolution of the concept of human security has captured the growing interest of researchers and policymakers to mitigate the effects of poverty and related problems.

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<sup>1</sup> Monica den Boer, *The Viability of Human Security*, edited by Jaap de Wilde, Amsterdam University Press, Erscheinungsort nicht ermittelbar, 2008, pp. 150–151

<sup>2</sup> Erik Thorbecke, *Multidimensional Poverty: Conceptual and Measurement Issues*, in Nanak Kakwani, Jacques Silber (Eds.), *The Many Dimensions of Poverty*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, London, 2013, p. 3, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230592407\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230592407_1) (26.03.2025)

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Ellen Bal, Oscar Salemink, *A world of insecurity: anthropological perspectives on human security*, Anthropology, Culture and Society, Pluto Press, London, 2010, p. 2

<sup>4</sup> Yuzuru Matsuoka, Mamoru Yoshida, *Challenges for human security engineering*, Springer, New York, 2014, p. 20

<sup>5</sup> Paul D. Williams, *Op.cit.*, p. 286

<sup>6</sup> Dorothy Estrada Tanck, *Human security and human rights under international law: the protections offered to persons confronting structural vulnerability*, Hart Publishing, Portland, Oregon, 2016, p. 4

<sup>7</sup> Monica den Boer, *Op.cit.*, p. 152

### Analytical framework

The literature review identified several approaches to the relationship between people's perceptions of poverty and the concept of human security. One of the meanings attributed to the concept "poverty" captured in the literature is that of "lack of income", which will be used in this paper. Thus, I will analyse people's perceptions of poverty in Romania from 2018 to 2020 and their relationship with elements that make up human security. How perceptions of poverty influence people's security in the communities they are part of summarises the objective of this thesis. Throughout the paper, I will focus on two major factors that shape individuals' perceptions of poverty: insufficient income in the community of belonging and limited opportunities in the labour market. Eurostat reports on the evolution of poverty in Romania support the representativeness of these factors on the targeted problem. For example, the state actor was confronted with a poverty risk rate of 23.4 per cent in 2020<sup>1</sup>, which demonstrates the economic nature of the problems governing the lives of individuals facing poverty and the vulnerabilities that it potentiates.

Reiterating the aim of this paper, which is to visualise the extent to which the perception of the economic dimension of poverty affects people's perceptions of individual security, I will consider in the final paragraphs of this section other potential factors influencing these perceptions: age, educational level, area of residence and experience with insecurity. As an important factor in people's perceptions of poverty, income insufficiency is one of the economic components of the study of poverty. Income insufficiency leads to an economic condition whose impact on the individual is felt both in terms of the fulfilment of basic needs, as represented by Maslow<sup>2</sup>, and in terms of the deepening of social divisions and the vulnerability of individuals to their own needs. Romania faces difficulties in securing an income that would allow a decent standard of living, and the population without a stable source of income is a particular group at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Income dynamics and financial instability increase the risk of exposure to poverty.

Limited job opportunities are another relevant factor in determining people's perceptions of poverty. Economically advantaged communities (those with thriving businesses or where investment is taking place, where educational standards are constantly adapting to the labour market) will have a more diverse range of opportunities in terms of what employers offer. In contrast, rural areas experiencing the effects of migration and with a predominantly ageing population will have fewer employment opportunities and possibilities. The psychological component arising from restricted employment opportunities is also an important aspect in studying perceptions of poverty. The first indicator of personal safety, the degree of safety felt on the street in the community to which one belongs, is one of the components of human security in the social environment. By this factor, I want to emphasise the perception of safety in certain individual contexts, such as walking in the street, going to the shop, etc. Safety means security; it must be permanent in any context or activity that people carry out; it represents the guarantee for the absence of dangers that could disrupt the life of the individual or the community to which he/she belongs. The perception of street safety refers to the "subjective assessment of the risk and the magnitude of its consequences" and is directly influenced by experiences or contextual situations<sup>3</sup>. Another indicator of perceptions of personal security is home protection. Putting in place advanced security systems to protect a dwelling can mean a high risk of burglary existing in the territorial area. People, in their constant attempt to protect their livelihood and property from possible external threatening agents, implement security measures to maximise their safety. The absence or presence of such measure's shapes people's perceptions of their security state.

The last factors I will refer to in this section are age, education, area of residence and experience with insecurity. Their role in influencing perceptions of individual security brings to the foreground the different ways in which people understand and evaluate their own state of security in each environment/context. The level of education an individual attains makes a major contribution to shaping perceptions of personal security. This factor summarising the educational pathway refers to institutionalised educational progress and the body of

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<sup>1</sup> European Union, *At-risk-of-poverty rate*, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm010/default/table?lang=en> (13.04.2025)

<sup>2</sup> Eugene W. Mathes, *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a Guide for Living*, "Journal of Humanistic Psychology", Vol. 21, No. 4, October 1981, p. 69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00221678810210040> (12.04.2025)

<sup>3</sup> Sergio F. Acosta, Jorge E. Camargo, *City Safety Perception Model Based on Visual Content of Street Images*, 2018 "IEEE International Smart Cities Conference (ISC2)", IEEE, Kansas City, MO, USA, 2018, p. 1



information associated with a given level of training. Through education, the individual not only assimilates a body of information but also interacts, acquires and adapts knowledge and perceptions. In this paper, the level of education influences people's perceptions of security.

The area of residence of individuals (rural or urban) is particularly important due to the configuration and nature of differentiated social relations. Thus, if the rural environment is characterised by low population density, closer social relations and predominantly agricultural economic activities, the urban environment will have different characteristics that may influence people's way of life and, consequently, their perceptions of certain issues. Opposition to rural areas, cultural diversification, communication routes and services are just some distinguishing features of urban areas subject to rural-urban disproportion. However, “the perceived tranquillity, changelessness and security offered by rural areas continues to attract in-migrants from towns and cities” while the latter face new insecurities for some social groups<sup>1</sup>. Some sociological researchers have concluded that “people's perceptions are formed within a societal and historical context as much of an individual's knowledge is socially derived, rather than the result of direct experience”, which demonstrates the dependent relationship between individuals and the places in which they<sup>2</sup>. Insecurity can have a different meaning for everyone, and experiences are the main contributors to the formation of perceptions of security/insecurity. In relation to the theme of the study, by “experience with insecurity”, I refer to previous situations of insecurity that people have faced in the social environment in relation to personal or family security.

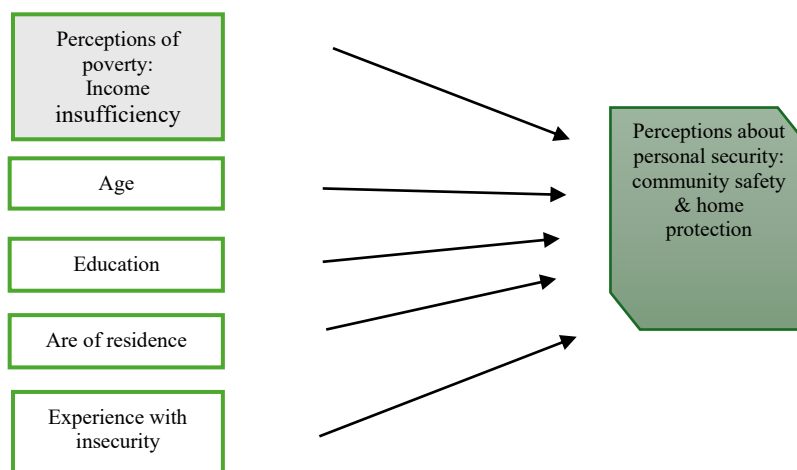


Figure 1. Analytical framework<sup>3</sup>

## Methodology

### Case selection

Areas such as poverty, immigration or social inequality link the research work of ethnographers and qualitative researchers with the evaluation coming from economists, demographers or sociologists<sup>4</sup>. This research-evaluation dynamic captures the importance of case selection, “that not only generate theory but also somehow speak to empirical conditions in other cases (not observed)”<sup>5</sup>. From a methodological point of view,

<sup>1</sup> John Vail, Jane Wheelock, Michael James Hill, *Insecure times: living with insecurity in contemporary society*, Routledge, London New York, 1999, p. 19

<sup>2</sup> Hui Li (et al.), *Factors Influencing Residents' Perceptions, Attitudes and Behavioral Intention Toward Festivals and Special Events: A Pre-event Perspective*, “Journal of Business Economics and Management”, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2018, p. 290, <https://doi.org/10.3846/jbem.2018.5536> (10.04.2025)

<sup>3</sup> Author's own elaboration based on literature review

<sup>4</sup> Mario Luis Small, ‘How Many Cases Do I Need?’: *On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research*, “Ethnography”, Vol. 10, No. 1, March 2009, p. 5, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138108099586> (05.04.2025)

<sup>5</sup> *Idem*

there are two ways in which case selection can be achieved: single-case or multiple-case selection<sup>1</sup>. In single case selection, the qualitative research literature identifies a classification of case studies according to the characteristics they summarise typical, extreme, deviant, diverse, and influential<sup>2</sup>. The typical case provides a representation of a phenomenon or exemplifies a stable relationship<sup>3</sup>. Researchers choose to select them to “better explore the causal mechanisms at work in a general, cross-case relationship”<sup>4</sup>. In short, the typical case brings to the fore a general understanding of the problem under study<sup>5</sup>. By exemplifying 'what is considered to be a typical set of values, given a general understanding of a phenomenon', the selection of the representative case creates a context in which descriptive features and causal relationships are harmoniously analysed<sup>6</sup>. In this study, Romania is a representative case for assessing how perceptions of poverty have evolved socially in relation to personal security. Poverty dynamics show specific characteristics from one state actor to another, and the tendency of people to condition poverty on the economic component (see theoretical framework) is predominant at the social level. The process of democratisation after the fall of communism and, implicitly, the gradual shift from centralised to market economy have made people's ability to have an adequate standard of living vulnerable. Romania is an illustrative case for research into the dynamics of perceptions of poverty. This aspect is also supported by Eurostat statistics, which rank Romania negatively in terms of the at-risk-of-poverty rate.

Romania is also a representative case for promoting human security at the social level through specific measures. The recognition of interdependence between security threats and elements of human security is recognised in Romania's National Security Strategy. If, at the normative level, there are provisions that subscribe elements of individual security to the social environment, this paper aims to highlight what people's perceptions of human security are in specific situations. The period chosen for analysis, 2019-2022, illustrates how perceptions of poverty have evolved given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The health crisis brought about by the pandemic has, in addition to a curtailment of fundamental rights, required a rethinking of people's security in different environments, from spending time outdoors to specific workplace activities. An important point to note about this period is that the results cannot apply to the whole of 2022 because it is not finalised. The main argument behind this time frame is the time when the interviews were carried out (March-April 2022), which conditions the timeliness of the primary data on the reference period of the analysis. Having highlighted the differences in perceptions of poverty over the indicated period, the study aims to analyse their link with perceptions of human security.

### Data Collection Method

The data collected for this paper cover the dimensions outlined in the analytical framework: perceptions of poverty and individual security. Related to the perception of poverty, two subdivisions are prioritised: income insufficiency and limited opportunities. In terms of perceptions of personal security, I will consider the level of safety in the community and the protection of housing. This paper utilises qualitative research to find explanations for people's perceptions of poverty in relation to human security. Qualitative characteristics refer to “research about persons’ lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions, and feelings as well as about organisational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations”<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, this paper uses qualitative data collected through interviews to analyse perceptions.

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<sup>1</sup> Jason Seawright, John Gerring, Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options, “Political Research Quarterly”, Vol. 61, No. 2, 2008, p. 306, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907313077> (30.03.2025)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p.294

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 299

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*

<sup>5</sup> Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, David Collier, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, Oxford Handbooks of Political Science, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, p. 647

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 648

<sup>7</sup> Md Shidur Rahman, *The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods in Language Testing and Assessment Research: A Literature Review*, “Journal of Education and Learning”, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2016, p. 103

The use of the interview has many advantages: it can be applied to all segments of the population, it is flexible and orientated towards the interviewee rather than the standard, and it can be used to explain questions that the respondent cannot understand.<sup>1</sup> Investigating the focus group hypotheses for idea generation, Fern concluded some assumptions related to the advantages and disadvantages of individual interviews: high quality of ideas an aspect of great usefulness for research, the time needed for the conduct (30-45 minutes) can sometimes be tiring and therefore an interviewer can only conduct 5-6 interviews per day.<sup>2</sup> Highlighting a lot of information, the effectiveness of an interview also depends on the way it is structured, one of the criteria to be respected being the order of the questions asked to the participants<sup>3</sup> through the interview grid. Using the interview as a primary data collection method, this paper aims to highlight how perceptions of poverty influence human security. To this end, the study will assess through interviews the individual views and motivations of the respondents about perceptions of poverty and personal security. The method of semi-structured interviews is an important concern of qualitative researchers because of the respondents' viewpoints that provide authenticity to the data collected<sup>4</sup>. This type of interview has become popular due to its flexibility and versatility as a method of data collection and can be combined with other tools in the methodological approach<sup>5</sup>. In this study, the criterion used in the selection of interview participants is diversity to emphasise the most varied perceptions on the proposed topic. The interview is applied to the general population, with variations in age, gender, residence environment, and level of education, in March-April 2022. Respondents have a diverse profile, localised in several areas of Romania (Cluj, Neamț, Iași, Bucharest). Some of them identify with the status of “student”, while others are people in the labour market: teachers, servants, unemployed, retired elderly people (Annex 1 gives an overview of the profiles of the interviewees). The number of interviews that are used to collect primary data is 20, with respondents chosen based on diversity.

### Data Analysis Method

In this paper, the method of analysis used is the 'deductive thematic method'. In the literature, the term “thematic analysis” is integrated into the category of qualitative analyses, which present themes and classifications relating to data<sup>6</sup>. Suitable for any study that operates with interpretations of qualitative data, thematic analysis has a number of advantages: it is systematic, requires the understanding and collection of data appropriate to the research topic, and offers the opportunity for a broader understanding of any problem under study<sup>7</sup>. Another important characteristic, namely its flexibility, refers to the possibility of analysing a wide range of types of data, from those labelled as 'traditional' collection methods (interview or focus group) to textual data, diaries, online discussion forums or other media sources<sup>8</sup>. The concept of 'thematic analysis' is associated with three objectives in terms of examining data: commonalities, differences and relationships<sup>9</sup>. In deductive thematic analysis, refining certain findings or understanding theories is both a goal and a pre-existing framework<sup>10</sup>. The

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<sup>1</sup> K. N. Krishnaswamy, Appa Iyer Sivakumar, *Management research methodology: integration of principles, methods and techniques*, Pearson Education, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 307–308

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 308

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey R. Marczyk, David DeMatteo, David Festinger, *Essentials of research design and methodology*, Essentials of behavioral science series, John Wiley&Sons, Hoboken, N.J, 2005, p. 117

<sup>4</sup> Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, Fifth Edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford; New York, 2016, p. 6

<sup>5</sup> Hanna Kallio et al., *Systematic Methodological Review: Developing a Framework for a Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview Guide*, “Journal of Advanced Nursing”, Vol. 72, No. 12, December 2016, p. 2, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031> (01.04.2025)

<sup>6</sup> M. Ibrahim, *Thematic Analysis: A Critical Review of Its Process and Evaluation*, “West East Journal of Social Sciences”, Vol. 1, No. 1, December 2012, p. 40

<sup>7</sup> *Idem*

<sup>8</sup> Carla Willig, Wendy Stainton-Rogers, *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology*, The Sage handbook of, Second edition, SAGE, London, 2017, p. 22

<sup>9</sup> William James Gibson, Andrew Brown, *Working with qualitative data: an integrated guide*, SAGE, Los Angeles, 2009, p. 128

<sup>10</sup> Michelle E. Kiger, Lara Varpio, *Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data: AMEE Guide No. 131*, “Medical Teacher”, Vol. 42, No. 8, 2020, p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1755030> (06.04.2025)

purpose of this mode of coding is to “evaluate existing knowledge rather than to generate new knowledge.”<sup>1</sup> The steps involved in applying a deductive approach are subjectively interpreted by different authors in qualitative research. Deductive thematic analysis constantly relates to prior knowledge associated with the research topic, the shift from 'general' to 'specific' intended to bring out new context<sup>2</sup>.

Topics	Codes/Subtopics	Sentences matching the codes
<b>Poverty</b>	Low income	There are many people with insufficient income (who also have one or more dependent children) for survival I consider that most incomes are insufficient given the costs of a decent living To me, poverty means lack of a decent living, for example, a balanced diet generated by insufficient income
	Limited job opportunities	(...) The pandemic period was the hardest in terms of opportunities, and now they are trying to get back to the life and dynamics of before the pandemic, and they are looking for new employees (...) Many are choosing to go abroad to realise their ideals. Young people are especially the most disappointed by these limited opportunities
<b>Human security</b>	Safety in the community	I and my family should be able to always move around safely (...) there are a lot of conflicts in my community about freedom of opinion. (...) I would not have the security to express myself freely without being judged
	Home protection	Most people I know have installed surveillance cameras and alarm systems I consider the main tools for home protection in my locality to be cameras, guard and protection services, and alarm systems. (...), some people who can afford the purchase of such tools and who have a better material situation

Table 1. Data coding examples<sup>3</sup>

## Analysis

### *Romanians' Perceptions of Poverty*

The paper confirms the influences that perceptions of poverty have on personal security. Many respondents rated poverty as one of the primary causes of both social and personal insecurity. The dependence of all activities on the financial factor, and therefore on income, underlines the insecurity felt by vulnerable groups in the face of insufficient income and the inability to meet minimum needs. Examination of the interviews we conducted shows that people tend to understand poverty regarding income. The expenses necessary for everyday life indicate a lack of money and even the impossibility of meeting basic needs. Analysis of the responses brings to the fore several meanings that respondents attribute to poverty, ranging from limitation, financial conditionality, and inability to meet needs or necessities to emotional meanings such as hopelessness. The phrase “living from today to tomorrow” was also associated with poverty. At the same time, we identified among the interviewees an awareness of the hardships that vulnerable people experience in the face of insufficient financial

<sup>1</sup> Eva Thomann, Martino Maggetti, *Designing Research With Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA): Approaches, Challenges, and Tools*, “Sociological Methods & Research”, Vol. 49, No. 2, May 2020, p. 10, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124117729700> (06.04.2025)

<sup>2</sup> Satu Elo, Helvi Kyngäs, *The Qualitative Content Analysis Process*, “Journal of Advanced Nursing”, Vol. 62, No. 1, p. 111, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04569.x> (06.04.2024)

<sup>3</sup> Author’s own elaboration based on collected data (semi-structured interviews)

resources. Either having had experiences of poverty themselves or having visualised examples in their community, the interviewees provided exhaustive descriptions of how they perceive poverty, identifying effects, causes and characteristics. In principle, most respondents emphasised the interrelationship between insufficient income and poverty. As the main determinant, income that is far too low coexists with the impossibility of purchasing the necessities of life, constraining certain actions that play a vital role in the development of the individual.

For example, a large majority of those we interviewed perceived poverty about empirical situations, ranging from restricting children from poor families from attending an institutionalised form of education to the generational perpetuation of poverty. Thus, the respondents described the relationship between insufficient income and education, they underlined the insecurity to which uneducated people are exposed in the social environment, their marginalisation being inherent: "I can underline that poverty generates a lack of education and, implicitly, a lack of chances to change socio-economic status" (R6). Personal insecurity generated by insufficient income, with reference to stunted educational development, was highlighted in the interviews as one of the systematic problems faced by vulnerable sectors of the population. Basically, the interviewees suggested the existence of a causal cycle that leads to children not being able to go to school: 'It is not new in Romania that a child drops out of education at an early age because of insufficient family income. Poor people and their deviant behaviours can create toxic environments for the families and communities in which they live(...)' (R8) Poverty understood in terms of insufficient income threatens, as we observe in the interviewees' answers, the personal security of individuals. In the first place, the people concerned live in insecurity, we are referring here to families or individuals who do not earn enough income to live on: "People with lower incomes are more prone to insecurity, they are more vulnerable than those with satisfactory incomes." (R10) The fact that personal security is one of the concerns of individuals denotes how vulnerable the poor feel to the permanency of their own financial situation. Second, insufficient income leads to certain behaviours among vulnerable people. These can turn into real insecurity factors for those around them: "People who do not have enough to eat certainly do not have the security of tomorrow, they can sometimes have violent reactions or commit crimes to ensure their minimum food, thus affecting the security of others". (R18) Asked about their views on the income in Romania in relation to the needs felt by citizens, respondents had three types of answers. A representative proportion of them consider that people's incomes are low and insufficient in relation to the efforts made in the workplace. Respondents explicitly referenced to the minimum wage level that some families must manage, highlighting the high costs of utilities, rent and food. Some of the characteristics attributed by interviewees to income were very low, insufficient, and low. They also emphasised that with very low incomes, they cannot achieve a good quality of life or an average level of well-being. The insufficiency of income that a family face determines certain decisions regarding their diet and a shift of people towards cheap products: "I see people very much balancing prices against their health. I see people in the market who choose to buy the cheapest without paying attention to the content of the product" (R14) From this description we observe not only people's consumerist tendencies but also the self-imposed limitations of their income.

The last category of respondents emphasised the huge discrepancies between the average salaries in the European Union and Romania, which explains young people's decisions to go abroad and the widespread phenomenon of migration. The family context or their own experiences have determined this variation in the answers regarding income in Romania. As exemplified, income as an indicator of poverty capitalises on situations in which most people cannot meet their needs with the minimum wage. Lack of income makes survival impossible. With many families facing financial problems, the deterioration of living conditions below an accepted minimum standard becomes a reality.

People's perceptions of poverty are based on their own experiences and how the social climate propagates or exacerbates certain problems. Visible changes in one's community, an increase in the number of people claiming social assistance, or even one's inability to meet expenses are just some of the issues that can influence perceptions of poverty. For example, perceptions of poverty among rural respondents have been influenced by the pandemic period, the mismanagement of local resources, the economic migration of people to more developed countries, and the bankruptcy of local businesses. For urban areas, the changes that took place were directly related to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, the cessation of some companies' activities or

the reduction in the flow of investors. These changes directly impacted respondents' perceptions, with poverty being perceived as an insecurity of personal security.

In Romania, homeless people or beggars on the streets have undergone a process of segmentation in certain areas. This action is defined as a 'micropolitics of fusion and dissection linking different populations to specific territories'.<sup>280</sup> In practice, the creation of shelters for the homeless aimed to 'attract the very poor away from the city centre and towards the periphery', with population segmentation being realised about sources of income. However, although some policies have aimed to filter demographics along economic lines, beggars, both housed and homeless, have continued to be present in urban centres. The insecurity that poverty creates in certain areas has led to the prominence of these policies to improve the social security environment. Interviewees also perceived poverty in terms of the behaviours of vulnerable people, "looking around us and noticing that some children, young or old people are living on the poverty line, they also have tendencies of violence in society associated with theft." (R3)

#### *Limited Employment Opportunities*

Poor people are often stigmatised by society, as their marginalisation on the periphery of communities limits their employability. Lack of or limited employment opportunities creates insecurity for all people seeking to integrate into the labour market. In the delimitation of employment opportunities, generalized patterns of insecurity have spread. Both the requirements and the distribution of job offers are principles governed by the need for human sourcing. Respondents brought to the fore the negative predisposition of human societies to stigmatise vulnerable people: "Stigmatisation and discrimination are again profound for those who suffer financially" (R16), which hinders their ability to integrate into the community and the labour market. The seemingly limited environment to which poor people can relate is often unattractive in terms of employment opportunities, with different forms of work in rural areas dominated by different forms of work that are paid in cash, food or other items essential for living. Capitalising on perceptions of poverty through the lens of insufficient income and limited employment opportunities brings to the forefront the opinions and experiences of Romanians in the last four years related to these topics. The contribution to the literature by analysing the subjective perceptions of poverty in Romania and their correlation with personal security synthesises the vulnerabilities and risks that scarcity causes among disadvantaged groups and society. Dissatisfaction with the standard of living, wage discrepancies compared to the rest of Europe, and the excessive scarcity of employment opportunities denote society's perceptions of poverty and imminence.

#### *Perceptions of Individual Security*

From the perspective of analysing perceptions of individual security, through this study, we have identified several threats that exist in the community, and which are the main tools people use to secure their property. Among the threats expressed by the respondents were also the violent behaviours of people living in poverty or on the border of poverty. These perceptions prompted respondents to take additional security measures for themselves and their possessions. The different ways respondents defined personal security are subjective and influenced by their own experiences. Most participants associated security with peace of mind, lack of physical danger and respect for human rights. A relatively small number of respondents understood the concept by appealing to digital safety and data protection in this environment. In contrast, others explicitly referred to financial security and making a decent living by meeting needs. Thus, some interviewees explained their security by appealing to the existence of financial resources that would enable them to have a certain standard of living. Other respondents broadly defined the concept of 'personal security'. Interviewees pursuing university studies in fields such as security studies, political science, or medicine conceptualised the term along several dimensions, giving concrete situations as examples: personal security, we think, highlights several nuances and meanings. First, it can mean the absence of the bare minimum problem. We mean here that a person maximises his personal security if he can afford adequate food and social life. At the same time, this concept can mean the absence of imminent or foreseeable danger (R4).

#### *Safety in the Community*

By analysing the questions in the interview grid, we realised that the vast majority of those we interviewed were able to provide a clear definition of individual security concerning specific domains or contexts. Thus, we had participants who referred to personal security in the online environment, in their daily activities about certain living standards. At the same time, some responses aimed to explain the threats that the poverty of others in the

community poses to personal security: “I think that people who commit theft or are violent to get something that is not theirs make the safety of a community very vulnerable. Poverty, I think, underlies these behaviours, not having enough to eat basically” (R14).

Asked what personal safety in the community means to them, respondents gave a wide range of answers, covering aspects of living in the community. Thus, some participants referred to respect for oneself, property and the environment, while others assessed community safety in terms of access to diversified employment and quality products. Some interviewees gave examples of situations in their communities where personal safety is not guaranteed. For example, community issues exposed in social media can cause insecurities among the public depending on the positions they take in relation to a given situation: “In my community there are a lot of conflicts about freedom of opinion. Every word is analysed and reinterpreted on social media. If I was now a public person in my community, a person to express my opinions, I would be harassed for my opinions”(R10). In order to highlight how perceptions of poverty influence individuals' personal security, we embedded questions in the interview grid to identify, based on the answers, the main sources of insecurity. Thus, the main threats identified by the interviewees were criminal acts, the lack of empathy of people in the community in emergencies, and the violent behaviour of poor people such as beggars or homeless people. The generation of insecurity by the human factor was associated in the answers with the presence of beggars on the streets: (...) there are also some disturbing factors that negatively influence the tranquillity of the area. One security problem in this respect is the presence of large numbers of child beggars on the streets. Perhaps the fact that they have not received an institutionalised elementary education leads them to behave violently, both physically and verbally. There are also young teenagers in this situation (Interview 14). Different threat perceptions highlight how people relate to their own security and their environment. Experiences play a vital role in perceiving certain threats as more salient. By assessing perceptions of personal security, we were able to identify the main views of community safety, visualise the main threats to individuals and outline the level of security associated with the environments from which respondents come.

#### *Home Protection*

Home protection is one of the benchmarks when people want to optimise the security of their living space. The need to secure the home is an intrinsic part of the general need for security, and in this sense, people tend to be pre-emptive when implementing specific systems. Through the interview grid, we assessed both the respondents' perceived need to secure their homes with different tools and the main items that other citizens in the community use to increase their level of security. The perception of personal security as seen through the prism of home protection reflects on the one hand, how individuals are cautious in relation to threats in society. On the other hand, preventive conduct aimed at increasing safety takes the form of various actions that can increase the level of security felt in the living environment. When asked about the reasons for acquiring modern security systems (audio-video surveillance cameras, alarms), most respondents explained the permanent need to feel safe and have a sense of peace of mind. Other interviewees reiterated the existing threats in the community in which they live, stating that these threats led them to implement active measures to protect their homes.

People living on the poverty line and their behaviours pose threats to individuals' personal security. Respondents emphasised this assumption to motivate the implementation of home security systems. Because poverty can generate a high level of delinquency, people tend to increase their level of security. Thus, a significant proportion of the interviewees emphasised the need they felt to improve the protection of their homes, prompted by theft by vulnerable members of the community: “poverty affects the material and physical spheres. In the material and physical spheres, I am referring to the use of certain acts: street theft, violent housebreaking, threats, all motivated by poverty and therefore lack of money” (R13).

Another approach that reveals the impact of perceptions of poverty on personal security from a housing protection perspective is the insecurity of vulnerable people. A range of respondents emphasised how people living on the poverty line are directly affected by high levels of insecurity. The main motivation behind these responses is precisely the financial inability of certain sections of the population to have a decent living, secure housing and income: “There are many people who cannot afford certain personal security schemes, they can barely meet their basic needs. Somehow the financial side causes some dependencies” (R18)

*Factors Influencing Perceptions of Personal Security*

Age, education, area of residence or experience with insecurity influence perceptions of personal security. These factors energise inter-human relations and coordinate one's experiences towards forming opinions and views. Thus, in this section, I analyse these factors to identify differentiated response categories in terms of perceptions of personal security.

**Age.** One of the main differences between people is age. In perceptions and thinking, age differences reflect disproportionalities in people's experience, knowledge and different ways of relating to their own security risks. In the interviews conducted, the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic was often identified by respondents as a constant feature in the lives of Romanians over the last 3 years. It was described as a direct threat to personal security as well as shaping Romanians' perceptions of poverty. The restrictions imposed and the stoppage of many activities have increased the number of people on technical unemployment as well as those living on the verge of poverty: “ (...) the impact of the pandemic has certainly been felt negatively in terms of people's standard of living. If we look only at sectors such as tourism, which have had to stop their activities, we must consider the problems faced by both entrepreneurs and their employees (R 4). To emphasise the age difference and the perception of risk, I evaluate two answers given by the interviewees, the first given by a 40-year-old and the second given by a 19-year-old. The first respondent emphasised that the virus posed a direct threat to health. The perception of individual safety was altered by the presence of a threat that could cause health problems: if we refer to the spread of the COVID-19 virus, there was a period when the crowdedness of the city, especially in areas frequented by many people, created a direct threat to my health and that of my family (R11). Young people tend to perceive the experience during the pandemic as a restriction to their usual activities. Thus, the second respondent, compared based on age, emphasised the threat to personal security in terms of stopping the development and relocation of activities online: given the development of the COVID-19 pandemic, this virus directly threatened personal security. In addition to this, all the work in high school and part of the university period was carried out online, which is why we had to stay isolated from each other, adopt new learning methods and adapt (R20).

**Education.** At the level of this study, respondents presented diverse educational backgrounds. We selected, based on diversity, both university graduates and labour market participants with vocational schooling. Those respondents with a social or political science background referred to human security conceptually and empirically, while the other participants chose to refer to their own experiences.

**Area of residence.** Rural-urban differences in Romania are identifiable in several areas. Regarding the issue of poverty, the area of residence usually represents only one of the many dimensions or only one of the influential factors of poverty in Romania, without any systematic study of the differences/similarities between urban and rural poverty<sup>1</sup>. Regarding perceptions of human security, our study aims to visualise the respondents' tendencies related to this topic according to their areas of residence. As mentioned earlier, most respondents are rural residents, while the rest live in rural areas. A proportion of respondents living in rural areas rate their personal security in terms of community cohesion and harmony. In general, communities in these areas, being even smaller in numbers, benefit from a higher level of cohesion, but can be more easily destabilised in the face of certain serious problems. The existence of norms, customs and traditions at the community level complements interactions between people and limits malicious actions, especially by the residents of the community in question: ‘unpleasant events happen quite rarely in rural communities because people know each other well and social stigma works as a moral censor for different actions’ (R2) Perception of security in urban areas is associated with a greater presence of local authorities which increase the sense of security: being in an urban area, we are talking here about the presence of more authorities that ensure the security of citizens, from the police and gendarmerie to the civic sense present in the morals of each person (R4). Area of residence is an important factor in shaping perceptions of personal security. Differences in perceptions in this respect coexist with the level of cohesion of the community in question, the frequency of interactions and the prominence of disturbing factors.

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<sup>1</sup> Elisa Paraschiv, «Problema Sărăciei în Comunitățile Urbane și Rurale din România», “Revista Română de Sociologie”, 2008, p. 424



***Experiences with insecurity.*** Analysing the interviews we conducted reveals that most participants had no experiences where their personal safety was directly threatened. The examples we received centred in indirect threats that generated a relative level of fear. Thus, some of the respondents felt threatened by the consequences of the pandemic and its associated impositions, but also by the deviant behaviours of some individuals/social groups: “Alcohol, cheap and accessible drugs can make poor people insecure for those around them, they can become violent” (R8). Experiences with insecurity at an individual level were relatively few among the respondents. This leads perceptions of human security to relate either to the experiences of others or to their own knowledge about maximising it in different contexts. Perceptions of poverty influence individuals' personal security. Through this analysis, we identified two approaches among respondents related to this relationship. The first one refers to how poverty causes violent behaviours among vulnerable people that can create insecurities at the social level. Respondents gave various examples, ranging from beggars becoming verbally and physically violent to situations where people living on the edge of poverty resort to theft to survive, fuelled by poor economic situations. In this way, poor people become factors of insecurity for the safety of others. The second approach we have identified is summarised by the insecurity generated by poverty among vulnerable people. Interviewees related poverty expressed in terms of insufficient income and limited employment opportunities to insecurity. More specifically, poor people are in a permanent state of insecurity because they cannot afford to fulfil their basic survival needs. They may make poverty-influenced decisions that may jeopardise their personal security and, by extension, their lives. These approaches were complemented by analysing factors that may influence perceptions of personal security, such as area of residence, age, education and experience with insecurity. These factors led to a categorisation of the responses, and the mapping of differences in perceptions relevant to the study.

## Conclusions

This paper aimed to analyse how perceptions of poverty influence individuals' personal security by providing an answer to the research question “How is poverty perceived about human security?” Using the responses from 20 semi-structured interviews, we analysed the period 2019-2022. The findings reveal that in the period 2019-2022, respondents perceived poverty and the behaviours of people on the borderline of poverty as a threat to their personal security, and they had to preserve their safety through specific measures to secure their properties, especially their homes. Equally importantly, interviewees' perceptions of poverty also reflected personal security issues for vulnerable individuals or communities. Thus, some arguments revolved around the vulnerability of people living in poverty, with issues such as food needs, the burden of labour market integration or restricted access to education being prioritised in the responses. In other words, the essence of the answer to the research question lies in the way Romanians associate poverty with a state of insecurity at an individual level.

The findings point to the problems Romania faces in poverty and the personal insecurity it generates. The two components investigated have a twofold effect on personal security: they may diminish the sense of security in social interactions (the perception that poor people can be violent represses possible interactions with them), but they may also create insecurities for poor people by restricting access to resources, opportunities and services. Equally importantly, both categories of individuals (those with sufficient income and those living on the poverty line) experience a direct threat to their personal security from scarcity. On the one hand, insecurity may take the form of a feeling generated by stereotypes or previous events for those who associate the poor with the possibility of disruption to their security. On the other hand, actions in the social sphere, and financial hardship that do not allow a minimum standard of living, directly affect the personal security of those experiencing poverty.

The personal security of individuals in the community is also closely correlated with groups living in poverty. The behaviour of the latter, prone to acts of physical and verbal violence, and theft, conditions people's safety. These assertions are supported by the respondents' responses, which emphasised the insecurity they feel in the community, and how local authorities intervene to quell and resolve such events. Deviant actions resulting from the needs exacerbated by poverty turn individuals into factors of insecurity for the community and, by extension, for the individuals. On the other hand, social stereotyping of the poor contributes to the deepening of existing social class divisions and makes it more difficult to integrate them into various collective structures.

Poverty is thus perceived as a threat to human security, both for those living on its borders and for the rest of the community.

The results confirm, in the context of Romanian society, the emphasis on poverty (understood in terms of income) in the respondents' perceptions, an aspect also found in previous research that assessed the dynamics of penury. Romanians profile perceptions of poverty on an amplified note, hence the considerable differences between perceptions and statistical measurements. Thus, although insufficient income is associated to a considerable extent with poverty due to the inability to buy necessities, this can also be linked to non-conforming living standards or citizens' dissatisfaction with leadership. From the assessment of perceptions of personal security, we identified the main threat the behaviours generated by deprivation, as well as other related issues. These include ethnic communities and their lack of integration, marginalisation on financial criteria or the conditioning of education to pecuniary aspects. The implications for the literature are that the relationship between poverty and personal security is centred on the dynamics of perceptions, which can be exploited at the institutional level. This emphasises, by reference to the empirical environment, the actual way in which individuals relate their security to the existence of social problems such as poverty.

The analysis part of this paper is limited by the number of participants in this study, and the results cannot be generalisable by its qualitative nature. Thus, the main problem that can be identified is the impossibility of applying these results to similar social constructs or case studies. In addition, due to the limited time, the questions in the interview grid focussed exclusively on the analytical dimensions, limiting the possibility of identifying other issues related to the topic. In future research designed to deepen this analysis, focus groups could lead to more elaborate discussions and opinions by which passive participants could also step out of their comfort zone. Finally, the qualitative nature of this study coexists with criticisms of qualitative research that highlight the lack of transparency, namely how and in what way the researchers arrived at certain conclusions.<sup>1</sup> Further research could strengthen existing findings by investigating the motivations behind perceptions of poverty and personal security.

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#### Annex 2: Interview guide

1. In your opinion, what are the main problems facing our country now?
2. What do Romanian citizens face the main financial challenges?
3. What does poverty mean to you?
4. How do you think incomes in Romania compare to the needs of citizens?  
How do you rate your income level compared to the average income in Romania?
5. Can you tell me whether, in the last three years, any changes have influenced the occurrence of poverty in your community?  
· Do you know if there are people in your locality who are unable to provide for their survival needs?
6. How do you assess the evolution of employment opportunities in the Romanian labour market in the last 3 years? To what extent have you or someone in your family faced employment difficulties?
7. What does it mean for you? 'personal security'?
8. How would you characterise the area in which you live in terms of security?
9. What does personal safety in your community mean to you? - What do you consider to be, in your opinion, the greatest threat to personal safety?  
· To what extent has street violence or theft occurred in your community in the last 3 years?
10. Can you tell me about situations in the last 3 years where your safety was directly threatened?
11. What do you consider to be the main tools to protect housing in your locality?  
· Please tell me whether you consider purchasing one necessary.
12. How do you think the disadvantages caused by poverty affect a person's security in Romanian society?