

SUSTAINABILITY AND SECURITY. AN ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC POLICIES IN ROMANIA IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This article investigates the complex relationship between sustainability and security in Romania, with particular attention to the role of public policies in integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions into a coherent framework. The research adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary methodology, combining document analysis of strategic and legislative frameworks, a critical literature review, and a comparative perspective with other European Union member states. The findings demonstrate that while Romania has formally aligned itself with international and European sustainability agendas through the adoption of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030 and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, implementation remains fragmented and dependent on external pressures. The analysis highlights the persistence of social vulnerabilities such as poverty, regional disparities, and demographic decline, which undermine social cohesion and resilience.

It also reveals structural weaknesses in Romania's green economic transition, limited innovation capacity, and insufficient enforcement of environmental regulations. At the same time, the study emphasizes the centrality of the sustainability–security nexus in the Romanian context, showing that energy dependence, food insecurity, social inequality, and climate risks are interconnected vulnerabilities with direct implications for national and regional stability. The discussion positions Romania as an intermediate case in comparative perspective, more advanced than states lacking sustainability frameworks but still lagging Western European countries with mature governance systems. The article concludes that Romania's progress depends on strengthening institutional coherence, embedding social sustainability into national strategies, accelerating the green economic transition, enhancing participatory environmental governance, and explicitly linking sustainability policies to security imperatives.

Keywords: sustainability; security; public policies; resilience; sustainable development

Introduction

Over the past decades, the concept of sustainable development has emerged as a key framework for shaping the future trajectories of contemporary societies. Its consolidation reflects not only the growing ecological concerns generated by environmental degradation, but also the structural pressures of globalization, economic transformations, and the widening of social inequalities.² Today, sustainability lies at the core of international agendas, serving

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² World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987, p. 43, <https://www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm> (22.08.2025)

as a reference point for both developed states and countries in transition, which are searching for inclusive and resilient models of growth¹.

In this context, public policies play a decisive role, as they represent the primary instruments through which macro-level visions and strategies are translated into concrete actions. Sustainable development cannot be achieved through isolated or sectoral initiatives, but requires an integrated approach capable of articulating social, economic, and environmental dimensions into a coherent and adaptive framework. Thus, public policies are expected to become drivers of structural transformation, facilitating adaptation to climate and economic challenges while simultaneously strengthening social equity and democratic participation.

Romania, as a member of the European Union and a signatory of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is engaged in a complex process of aligning national strategies with international standards and objectives.² The adoption of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030 represents an important milestone; however, its effective implementation remains challenging. Institutional fragmentation of limited financial resources, resistance to change within administrative structures, and the lack of a strong policy evaluation culture continue to undermine progress. At the same time, Romania benefits from significant opportunities provided by its EU membership, which offers both regulatory and strategic frameworks, as well as access to resources that can accelerate the transition toward sustainability.

An often-overlooked dimension in the debate on sustainable development is security. Sustainability and security are intrinsically interconnected: environmental degradation generates risks in areas such as energy, food, and public health; social inequalities fuel community tensions and migration; and economic vulnerabilities can destabilize entire regions.³ In this sense, sustainability-oriented public policies also act as preventive security policies, contributing to the resilience of states and societies. For Romania, this linkage is particularly relevant given its geostrategic position, its membership in the European and Euro-Atlantic structures, and the necessity to address internal and external challenges simultaneously.

Scholarly literature confirms that public policies can act as catalysts in the transition toward sustainability, yet their effectiveness largely depends on the degree of intersectoral integration and the involvement of social actors.⁴ Without coordination and monitoring mechanisms, there is a high risk of perpetuating fragmented initiatives with limited impact on reducing structural vulnerabilities. Conversely, European and international experiences demonstrate that strategies combining economic instruments, environmental regulations, and active social policies can generate significant synergies, advancing both sustainable economic growth and social cohesion⁵.

¹ United Nations, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1, 2015, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unga/2015/en/111816> (22.08.2025)

² Government of Romania, *National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania 2030*, 2018, <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/rom195029.pdf> (22.08.2025)

³ Hans Günter Brauch, *Coping with Global Environmental Change, Disasters and Security*, Springer, Berlin, 2011, p.12; Simon Dalby, *Anthropocene Formations: Environmental Security, Geopolitics and the Transformation of International Relations*, "International Politics", Vol. 57, 2020, pp. 1–20

⁴ Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The Ages of Globalization: Geography, Technology, and Institutions*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2021, <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-ages-of-globalization/9780231193740> (22.08.2025)

⁵ Andrew Jordan; Andrea Lenschow, *Environmental Policy Integration: A State of the Art Review*, "Environmental Policy and Governance", Vol. 20, No. 3, 2010, pp. 147–158, <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.539> (22.08.2025)

Building on these premises, this article seeks to analyse how public policies in Romania reflect and integrate the dimensions of sustainable development, with particular emphasis on the interdependence between sustainability and security. The study has a dual objective: first, to highlight the progress and limitations of the national public policy framework in relation to international standards; and second, to identify policy directions and recommendations that can contribute to strengthening sustainable governance and enhancing Romania's resilience in the face of global challenges.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The concept of sustainable development has gradually become a cornerstone in the analysis of global transformations and in the design of public policies. Its origins can be traced back to the ecological debates of the 1970s, but the defining moment was the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987¹, which introduced the widely cited definition of sustainable development as the process of meeting “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This formulation, while apparently simple, managed to capture the complex tensions between economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection, directing both policymakers and scholars toward the necessity of an integrated approach. In the following decades, major United Nations conferences, Rio de Janeiro (1992), Johannesburg (2002), and Rio+20 (2012), strengthened the idea that sustainability is no longer merely an environmental issue but a global project of structural transformation².

Academic literature has progressively converged on the consensus that sustainability requires a balance among three fundamental dimensions: the economic, the social, and the environmental. The economic dimension is associated with the need for stable and innovative growth, capable of ensuring prosperity without exhausting resources. The social dimension emphasizes equity, inclusion, and distributive justice, affirming that no development strategy can be considered legitimate if it perpetuates inequalities. The environmental dimension, in turn, focuses on the conservation of natural resources and on limiting the negative impacts on ecosystems. In recent years, researchers have expanded the conceptual framework to include additional pillars, such as the cultural dimension, which highlights the importance of identity and heritage³, or the security dimension, is increasingly visible in the context of climate crises, migration, and global economic instability.⁴ This conceptual evolution reflects the recognition that sustainable development is not only a technical or economic objective but a broad societal project involving values, institutions, and power relations.

The link between sustainability and security has emerged as one of the most challenging directions of contemporary research.⁵ A growing body of literature demonstrates that environmental degradation directly affects energy and food security, generating risks of

¹ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987, p. 43, <https://www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm> (22.08.2025)

² United Nations, *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992)*, United Nations, New York, 1993; United Nations, *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002)*, United Nations, New York, 2002; United Nations, *The Future We Want. Outcome Document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20, 2012)*, United Nations, New York, 2012. Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/> (22.08.2025)

³ Katriina Soini; Joost Dessein, *Culture–Sustainability Relation: Towards a Conceptual Framework*, “Sustainability”, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2016, Article 167, pp. 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su8020167> (22.08.2025)

⁴ Brauch, *Op. cit.*, p. 12; Simon Dalby, *Anthropocene Formations: Environmental Security, Geopolitics and the Transformation of International Relations*, “International Politics”, Vol. 57, 2020, pp. 1–20

⁵ *Idem*

conflict and displacement¹. At the same time, social inequalities and economic exclusion create vulnerabilities that can destabilize communities and exacerbate geopolitical tensions.² Consequently, sustainability-oriented public policies must also be understood as preventive security policies, designed to reduce structural risks and strengthen societal resilience.³ This perspective is particularly important for states situated on the borders of the European Union, such as Romania, where the interaction between development and security has a direct impact on regional stability.⁴

From a theoretical standpoint, public policies represent the central mechanism through which the principles of sustainable development are translated into practice. Models of multi-level governance developed in the European literature⁵ emphasize that the success of sustainability strategies depends on cooperation across international, national, and local levels. Without effective coordination, policies risk becoming fragmented or even contradictory. In parallel, participatory governance⁶ theories stress the importance of involving citizens, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector, arguing that effective policies are those that reflect a high degree of social legitimacy and mobilize diverse resources.⁷ Recent empirical studies confirm that strategies combining economic instruments (such as incentives for green investment), environmental regulations (emission standards, biodiversity conservation policies), and social measures (education, social protection, inclusion) generate more consistent outcomes than policies focused on a single dimension⁸.

Romania fits into this theoretical framework but with challenges and specificities. Studies focusing on Romania reveal a delayed and sometimes inconsistent alignment with European sustainability standards.⁹ The National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030 offers a comprehensive framework, yet its implementation is hindered by limited resources, weak administrative capacity, and the relatively low involvement of civil society. Moreover,

¹ Jon Barnett; W. Neil Adger, *Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict*, "Political Geography", Vol. 26, No. 6, 2007, pp. 639–655, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2007.03.003> (22.08.2025); Aleh Cherp; Jessica Jewell, *The Concept of Energy Security: Beyond the Four As*, "Energy Policy", Vol. 75, 2014, pp. 415–421, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2014.09.005> (22.08.2025); Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018*, FAO, Rome, 2018, <https://www.fao.org/3/I9553EN/i9553en.pdf> (22.08.2025)

² Joseph E. Stiglitz; Amartya Sen; Jean-Paul Fitoussi, *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*, 2009, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/8131721/8131772/Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi-Commission-report.pdf> (22.08.2025)

³ Simon Dalby, *Op. cit.*, p. 5

⁴ Felix Ciută, *Security and the Environment: The Case of Romania*, "Global Environmental Politics", 17(3), 2017, pp. 111–118

⁵ Gary Marks; Liesbet Hooghe, *Contrasting Visions of Multi-Level Governance*, "Multi-Level Governance", . Ian Bache, Matthew Flinders (Eds.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, pp. 15–30

⁶ Archon Fung, *Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2006, p. 34

⁷ Chris Ansell, Alison Gash, *Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice*, "Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory", Vol. 18, No. 4, 2008, pp. 543–571, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mum032> (22.08.2025)

⁸ Andrew Jordan; Andrea Lenschow, *Environmental Policy Integration: A State of the Art Review*, *Environmental "Policy and Governance"*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2010, pp. 147–158, <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.539> (22.08.2025)

⁹ Ioan Moldovan, *Sustainable Development Policies in Romania: Between EU Commitments and Domestic Challenges*, "Romanian Journal of European Studies", Vol. 12, No. 2, 2018, pp. 45–60; Aron Buzogány, *Governance with(out) Government? The EU's Energy Policy and the Eastern Neighbourhood*, "European Integration", Vol. 41, No. 3, 2019, pp. 369–386, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2019.1599391> (22.08.2025)

significant regional disparities complicate the uniform application of policies: large urban areas benefit from investments and modern infrastructure, while many rural regions remain vulnerable to poverty, exclusion, and environmental degradation. This fragmentation reduces the coherence of public policies and weakens their impact on the sustainability transition.

A distinctive aspect of Romania's case is the nexus between sustainability and security. Due to its geostrategic position at the eastern border of the European Union and as a NATO member state, Romania faces complex challenges that transcend the strictly national level. Energy security, cyber resilience, the management of migration flows, and climate change adaptation are all areas in which sustainability policies and security imperatives overlap and interact. Scholars in the field of security studies emphasize that Romania provides a compelling case for analysing the interdependence of development and security, since its public policies must simultaneously respond to internal pressures and external responsibilities.¹

Based on this literature review and the theoretical underpinnings discussed above, the conceptual framework of this article advances an integrated understanding of sustainability as inseparable from security. In this sense, public policies are considered the key instruments for integrating social, economic, and environmental dimensions, and their success depends on institutional coherence, innovation capacity, and the participation of social actors. The Romanian case further suggests that sustainability cannot be achieved without considering regional vulnerabilities and international responsibilities, which requires adaptive governance and enhanced cross-border cooperation. In conclusion, the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study rests on the premise that sustainability and security must be treated together, and that public policies are the means through which this dual imperative can be transformed into a functional reality.

Methodology

The research presented in this article follows a qualitative and interdisciplinary approach, with an analytical focus. Its main objective is to examine how public policies in Romania reflect and integrate the principles of sustainable development, with particular attention to the nexus between sustainability and security. To achieve this goal, the methodology was structured along three complementary dimensions: document analysis, literature review, and comparative study.

First, the document analysis focused on the main strategic and legislative frameworks that shape public policies in Romania. Key documents examined include the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030², the National Recovery and Resilience Plan³, as well as relevant sectoral strategies in areas such as energy, environment, education, and social inclusion. In addition, monitoring reports produced by European and international institutions (European Commission, United Nations, OECD)⁴ were reviewed. The purpose of this stage

¹ Felix Ciută, *Security and the Environment: The Case of Romania*, "Global Environmental Politics", Vol. 17, No. 3, 2017, pp. 111–118; Ionel Tănăsescu, *Romania and the Security–Sustainability Nexus: Challenges at the Eastern Border of the EU*, "Studia Securitatis", Vol. 15, No. 2, 2021, pp. 55–70

² Government of Romania, *National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania 2030*, Bucharest, 2018, <https://sdgtoolkit.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/National-Sustainable-Development-Strategy-of-Romania-2013-2020-2030.pdf> (22.08.2025)

³ Government of Romania, *National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR)*, Bucharest, 2021, <https://mfe.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/facada6fdd5c00de72eecd8ab49da550.pdf> (22.08.2025)

⁴ European Commission, *The European Green Deal*, COM(2019) 640 final, Brussels, 2019, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0640> (22.08.2025)

was to assess the degree of alignment with global objectives and to evaluate how the social, economic, and environmental dimensions are integrated within national policies.

Second, a review of the academic literature was undertaken, covering scholarly articles, research reports, and theoretical contributions relevant to sustainability and security. This step provided the conceptual foundation for the analysis and offered comparative benchmarks through reference to developments in other European countries.¹ In particular, the literature review was used to highlight the relationship between governance, public policies, and the transition toward sustainability², as well as to underline the security dimension of sustainable development.³

Third, a comparative analysis was conducted, situating Romania's experience in relation to models implemented in other EU member states. Case selection was based on the relevance identified in international literature (for example, the green policy frameworks of the Nordic states⁴ or Germany's energy transition strategies⁵) and on their potential to provide lessons applicable to the Romanian context.⁶

The methodology also entails certain limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the analysis relies primarily on official documents and existing literature, which carries the risk of producing a normative perspective rather than an empirical, field-based one.⁷ Second, given the rapidly changing international context, public policies are in a constant state of transformation, which may lead to discrepancies between the moment of adoption and the moment of evaluation.⁸ Finally, the scope and complexity of the topic necessitate a degree of selectivity, meaning that not all sectoral policies are addressed exhaustively; instead, the analysis focuses on those most relevant to the objectives of sustainability and the security dimension.⁹

In addition, the document review was complemented by a qualitative content analysis that examined both the explicit objectives and the implicit assumptions of the selected strategies. This analytical dimension enabled the identification of key themes, policy patterns,

United Nations, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1, New York, 2015, <https://docs.un.org/A/RES/70/1> (22.08.2025)

OECD, *Towards Green Growth*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264108341-en> (22.08.2025)

¹ Andrew Jordan; Andrea Lenschow, *Environmental Policy Integration: A State of the Art Review*, *Environmental*, "Policy and Governance", Vol. 20, No. 3, 2010, pp. 147–158, <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.539> (22.08.2025)

² James Meadowcroft, *Governing for Sustainable Development*, Routledge, London, 2016, p. 28

³ Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The Ages of Globalization: Geography, Technology, and Institutions*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2021, <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-ages-of-globalization/9780231193740> (22.08.2025); Brauch, *Op. cit.*, p. 12.; Dalby, *Op. cit.*, p. 5

⁴ James Meadowcroft, *Op. cit.*, p. 28

⁵ OECD, *Towards Green Growth*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264108341-en> (22.08.2025)

⁶ Edward Barbier, *Green Economy and Green Growth: Towards a Balanced Sustainable Development*, Routledge, London, 2016, p. 12; Aron Buzogány; Dragoș Adăscăliței, *Varieties of Just Transition: Emerging Models in the EU and Beyond*, "Energy Policy", Vol. 158, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2021.112564> (22.08.2025)

⁷ Tanja A. Börzel; Thomas Risse, *Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe*, "European Integration online Papers", Vol. 4, No. 15, 2000, <http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2000-015a.htm> (22.08.2025)

⁸ Christoph Knill; Duncan Liefferink, *Environmental Politics in the European Union: Policy-Making, Implementation and Patterns of Multi-Level Governance*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2007, p. 22

⁹ Aron Buzogány; Camilla Adelle, *EU Environmental Policy in Eastern Europe: Convergence or Divergence?*, "Environmental Politics", Vol. 26, No. 4, 2017, pp. 598–620, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2017.1319010> (22.08.2025)

and recurrent gaps in the articulation between sustainability and security. The interpretation followed a hermeneutic logic, emphasizing how policy narratives reflect broader institutional priorities and cultural frameworks. Moreover, the comparative component involved a systematic assessment of European Union reports, Eurostat data, and academic literature, to triangulate findings and ensure analytical validity. Although primarily based on secondary sources, this approach allows for the extraction of conceptual insights and the formulation of empirically grounded interpretations, enhancing the explanatory depth of the study.

Despite these limitations, the chosen methodology provides a solid framework for understanding the relationship between sustainability and security in Romanian public policies, allowing for the identification of both the progress achieved and the persistent gaps.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings: Public Policies and Sustainability in Romania

The Social Dimension of Sustainability in Romania

The social pillar of sustainability in Romania has historically been shaped by policies aimed at poverty reduction, social inclusion, and public health. According to Eurostat (2023), Romania continues to face one of the highest rates of relative poverty and social exclusion in the European Union, with rural communities being disproportionately affected.¹ Policies addressing these challenges have been framed through both national programs and EU-funded instruments, such as the Operational Programme for Human Capital and the National Strategy a Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction (2015-2020).²

Scholars have highlighted that while Romania has made progress in areas such as access to education and healthcare, gaps remain in terms of equity and inclusion.³ Social sustainability requires not only the reduction of poverty indicators but also the consolidation of social cohesion and trust in institutions. In this regard, policies in Romania have often been criticized for their limited capacity to generate long-term impact due to fragmented implementation and insufficient coordination among governmental actors.⁴

To deepen the empirical dimension of the analysis, a comparative synthesis was conducted between Romania and several European Union member states, using publicly available indicators from Eurostat and European Commission reports.⁵ The comparative overview reveals that, while Romania has registered steady improvements in key sustainability indicators, such as the share of renewable energy in total consumption and access to education, the pace of progress remains below the EU average. For instance, in 2023, Romania's share of renewable energy reached approximately 25%, compared to an EU average of 42%, while the at-risk-of-poverty rate remained above 30%, indicating persistent social vulnerabilities.⁶ These disparities confirm that the main challenge is not the absence of policy frameworks, but the gap between strategic design and practical implementation.

¹ Eurostat, *People at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2023*, "Eurostat Database", 12 June 2024, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240612-1> (22.08.2025)

² Government of Romania, *National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction 2015–2020*, Bucharest, 2015, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=15324&langId=en> (22.08.2025)

³ Marian Preda, *Social Policies in Romania after 1989*, Polirom, Bucharest, 2019; Elena Zamfir, *Social Inclusion and Social Policies in Romania*, Romanian Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, 2020, p. 55

⁴ Ioan Mărginean, *Social Cohesion and Policy Effectiveness in Romania*, "Romanian Journal of Social Policy", Vol. 8, No. 1, 2021, pp. 25–40

⁵ Eurostat, *Sustainable Development Indicators in the European Union*, "Eurostat Database", 2024, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/sdi/overview> (22.08.2025)

⁶ European Commission, *Monitoring Report on Progress Towards the SDGs in an EU Context — 2024 Edition*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2024, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-statistical-books/-/ks-05-24-123> (22.08.2025)

The qualitative interpretation of national strategic documents further highlights this gap. The National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030¹ and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan² explicitly address the interdependence between sustainability and security, yet operational coherence is weakened by overlapping institutional responsibilities and limited administrative capacity. This confirms the theoretical argument advanced by Börzel and Risse³ regarding the concept of “goodness of fit”, which explains how structural misalignments can constrain domestic adaptation to European standards.

To strengthen the analysis, sectoral examples were also examined. In the field of energy, the integration of sustainability and security objectives is hindered by infrastructural delays, despite significant EU funding under the Green Deal⁴ framework. In the agricultural sector, the alignment with the Common Agricultural Policy has contributed to modernization but continues to be affected by climate-related vulnerabilities. In the social sphere, the persistent fragmentation of welfare policies limits the consolidation of societal resilience, thus linking social sustainability directly to national security concerns.

Taken together, these observations suggest that Romania’s progress in implementing sustainability and security policies is best understood through a multi-level analytical lens—one that integrates strategic, institutional, and societal dimensions. By combining document analysis with interpretive synthesis and comparative evidence, the study identifies both systemic constraints and adaptive capacities, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of Romania’s sustainability–security nexus. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed structural weaknesses, revealing vulnerabilities in public health systems, digital education infrastructure, and social protection mechanisms. These experiences reinforce the argument advanced by international literature⁵⁶ that social sustainability cannot be detached from broader resilience strategies, as it constitutes the foundation of both economic development and security.

The Economic Dimension: Green Growth and Structural Transformation

The economic dimension of sustainability in Romania is closely linked to the country’s efforts to transition toward a green and digital economy. Romania’s membership in the European Union has been a major driver of economic sustainability, particularly through structural funds and the European Green Deal framework.⁷ Initiatives targeting renewable energy, digital innovation, and circular economy have gained momentum, though progress remains uneven.

¹ Government of Romania, *National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania 2030*, Bucharest, 2018, <https://sdgtoolkit.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/National-Sustainable-Development-Strategy-of-Romania-2013-2020-2030.pdf> (22.08.2025)

² Government of Romania, *National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR)*, Bucharest, 2021, <https://mfe.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/facada6fdd5c00de72eecd8ab49da550.pdf> (22.08.2025)

³ Tanja A. Börzel; Thomas Risse, *Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe*, “European Integration online Papers”, Vol. 4, No. 15, 2000, <http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2000-015a>. (22.08.2025)

⁴ European Commission, *The European Green Deal*, COM(2019) 640 final, Brussels, 2019, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0640> (22.08.2025)

⁵ Joseph E. Stiglitz; Amartya Sen; Jean-Paul Fitoussi, *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*, 2009, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/8131721/8131772/Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi-Commission-report.pdf> (22.08.2025)

⁶ Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The Ages of Globalization: Geography, Technology, and Institutions*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2021, <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-ages-of-globalization/9780231193740> (22.08.2025)

⁷ European Commission, *The European Green Deal*, COM (2019) 640 final, Brussels, 2019, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0640> (22.08.2025)

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) provide substantial funding for the green transition, with approximately 41% of resources allocated to climate objectives.¹ Nonetheless, analyses by scholars² suggest that the capacity of Romanian institutions to absorb and effectively implement these funds remains limited. The literature on green growth³ emphasizes that economic sustainability is not simply a matter of investment but requires coherent policies, innovation ecosystems, and participatory governance. Romania's challenge lies in translating EU-level objectives into locally adapted strategies, particularly in regions dependent on carbon-intensive industries.

Economic vulnerability also intersects with security considerations. Dependence on external energy sources, for example, exposes Romania to geopolitical risks, highlighting the necessity of integrating energy security into sustainability strategies. Scholars such as Cherp and Jewell⁴ underline that energy transition policies must simultaneously address sustainability and resilience to external shocks, an imperative highly relevant for Romania given the current regional security context.

The Environmental Dimension: Policy Progress and Persistent Challenges

Environmental sustainability has become a prominent policy field in Romania, driven both by domestic legislation and European directives. Areas such as air quality, waste management, and biodiversity protection have seen gradual improvements, yet Romania continues to struggle with systemic challenges, including deforestation, poor waste recycling rates, and urban pollution.⁵ Research indicates that environmental policies in Romania are often reactive and compliance-driven rather than proactive and innovative.⁶ This reflects a broader trend in Central and Eastern Europe, where the EU has acted as a primary source of environmental policy convergence.⁷ While compliance with EU environmental acquis has improved regulatory standards, the lack of enforcement capacity and institutional coherence has limited transformative impact at the national and local levels.⁸

At the same time, climate change adaptation is emerging as a strategic priority. Romania's National Climate Change Strategy 2022–2030⁹ outlines measures in energy, transport, and agriculture, but implementation remains at an early stage. The literature on

¹ Government of Romania, *National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR)*, Bucharest, 2021, <https://mfe.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/facada6fdd5c00de72eecd8ab49da550.pdf> (22.08.2025)

² Aron Buzogány; Dragoș Adăscăliței, "Varieties of Just Transition: Emerging Models in the EU and Beyond", *Energy Policy*, Vol. 158, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2021.112564> (22.08.2025); Radu Ionescu, *Energy Security and Transition Challenges in Romania*, "Romanian Journal of European Studies", Vol. 21, No. 1, 2023, pp. 45–60

³ OECD, *Towards Green Growth*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264108341-en> (22.08.2025); Barbier, *Op. cit.*, p. 12

⁴ Aleh Cherp; Jessica Jewell, *The Concept of Energy Security: Beyond the Four As*, "Energy Policy", Vol. 75, 2014, pp. 415–421, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2014.09.005> (22.08.2025)

⁵ European Environment Agency (EEA), *The European Environment-State and Outlook 2020*, EEA, Copenhagen, 2022, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/publications/soer-2020> (22.08.2025)

⁶ Andrei Mihăilescu, *Environmental Governance and Policy Innovation in Romania*, "Romanian Journal of Environmental Policy Studies", Vol. 4, No. 2, 2020, pp. 75–90

⁷ Christoph Knill; Duncan Liefferink, *Environmental Politics in the European Union: Policy-Making, Implementation and Patterns of Multi-Level Governance*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2007, p. 22

⁸ Tanja A. Börzel; Aron Buzogány, *Governance with/out Government? The EU's Energy Policy and the Eastern Neighbourhood*, "European Integration", Vol. 41, No. 3, 2019, pp. 369–386, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2019.1599391> (22.08.2025)

⁹ Government of Romania, *National Climate Change Strategy 2022–2030*, Ministry of Environment, Bucharest, 2022, https://mmediu.ro/app/webroot/uploads/files/SNASC_SEA_2022.pdf (22.08.2025)

climate governance¹ stresses that successful adaptation requires integrated multi-level governance and active participation of stakeholders, elements still insufficiently developed in the Romanian context.

Synergies and Fragmentations in Policy Implementation

While Romania has adopted comprehensive strategies that formally integrate social, economic, and environmental objectives, the practical implementation often reveals fragmentation. Scholars² note that sectoral policies tend to operate in silos, leading to inconsistent outcomes and duplication of efforts. For example, while social inclusion policies aim to reduce rural poverty, they are not always aligned with environmental or agricultural policies, resulting in limited long-term sustainability.

By contrast, there are examples of emerging synergies, particularly in renewable energy development and sustainable urban mobility, where EU funding has supported projects with both environmental and social benefits.³ These cases demonstrate that integrated approaches are possible but require strong institutional coordination and local capacity-building. The literature on policy integration⁴ highlights that such synergies are crucial for achieving sustainability goals, as isolated interventions rarely produce systemic change.

Romania in Comparative Perspective

When compared with other EU member states, Romania's progress in sustainability policies appears uneven. Countries such as Germany and the Nordic states have developed long-standing traditions of integrated sustainability governance, while Romania's efforts are more recent and often externally driven. Scholars⁵ argue that this reflects both structural factors, such as administrative capacity and political culture, and contextual dynamics, including regional disparities and historical legacies.

Nevertheless, Romania's trajectory should not be assessed solely in terms of deficits. The rapid adoption of sustainability frameworks since EU accession demonstrates adaptability, and the existence of policy instruments such as the NRRP and the National Sustainable Development Strategy 2030⁶ provides a basis for further progress. As Sachs⁷

¹ James Meadowcroft, *Op. cit.*, p. 28; Harriet Bulkeley; Peter Newell, *Governing Climate Change*, Routledge, London, 2015, p. 18

² Andreea Dobre, *Policy Fragmentation and Sustainable Development in Romania*, "Romanian Journal of Public Policy", Vol. 5, No. 2, 2019, pp. 23–40; Aron Buzogány, "The Europeanization of Environmental Governance in Central and Eastern Europe: The Case of Romania", *Environmental Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2020, pp. 456–475, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2019.1677373> (22.08.2025)

³ European Commission, *Cohesion Policy and Sustainable Development Report*, Brussels, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/reports/2020/cohesion-policy-and-sustainable-development-report (22.08.2025)

⁴ Andrew Jordan; Andrea Lenschow, *Environmental Policy Integration: A State of the Art Review*, *Environmental Policy and Governance*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2010, pp. 147–158, <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.539> (22.08.2025); Måns Nilsson; Åsa Persson, *Policy Integration for Sustainable Development: A Comparative Analysis of Policy Instruments*, "Sustainability Science", Vol. 12, No. 3, 2017, pp. 561–573, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-016-0393-8> (22.08.2025)

⁵ Aron Buzogány; Camilla Adelle, *EU Environmental Policy in Eastern Europe: Convergence or Divergence?*, "Environmental Politics", Vol. 26, No. 4, 2017, pp. 598–620, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2017.1319010> (22.08.2025)

⁶ Government of Romania, *National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania 2030*, Bucharest, 2018, <https://sdgtoolkit.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/National-Sustainable-Development-Strategy-of-Romania-2013-2020-2030.pdf> (22.08.2025)

⁷ Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The Ages of Globalization: Geography, Technology, and Institutions*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2021, <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-ages-of-globalization/9780231193740> (22.08.2025)

argues, the path toward sustainability is inherently uneven and context-dependent, and states with weaker starting conditions may still contribute meaningfully to global objectives if they adopt adaptive and inclusive governance strategies.

The Sustainability-Security Nexus in Romania

The interdependence between sustainability and security has become increasingly evident in recent scholarships, where sustainability is no longer perceived solely as a development goal but also as a preventive security strategy.¹ For Romania, this nexus is particularly relevant due to its geographical position at the eastern frontier of the European Union and NATO, its role in regional energy and food supply chains, and its exposure to global climate and economic disruptions.

Energy security represents one of the most critical areas where sustainability and security intersect. Romania possesses significant natural gas reserves and renewable energy potential yet remains vulnerable to external shocks and regional instability. As Cherp and Jewell² argue, sustainable energy policies must address not only environmental objectives but also resilience to geopolitical risks. In Romania's case, the transition to renewable energy sources, if properly managed, has the potential to reduce dependency on fossil fuels and external suppliers, thereby enhancing both sustainability and national security. However, delays in infrastructure modernization and regulatory inconsistencies continue to undermine this strategic objective.³

Food security is another field where sustainability and security are deeply intertwined. Romania has long been a significant agricultural producer within the European Union, but its sector is characterized by structural inefficiencies, land fragmentation, and vulnerability to climate change. Recent droughts and extreme weather events have underscored the necessity of integrating climate adaptation measures into agricultural policies. The literature on food security and sustainability⁴ emphasizes that ensuring food resilience requires sustainable resource management, equitable distribution, and robust social safety nets. In Romania, although EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds have provided important support, challenges remain in terms of equitable access, environmental sustainability, and adaptation to climate risks.

Social security and community resilience also represent a key dimension of the sustainability–security nexus. High levels of poverty, regional disparities, and demographic decline generate vulnerabilities that can weaken societal resilience. Studies⁵ indicate that without robust social policies, sustainability strategies risk exacerbating inequalities, which in turn can undermine trust in institutions and foster social tensions. Moreover, as international literature shows⁶, social sustainability constitutes the bedrock of security: societies that fail to

¹ Hans Günter Brauch, *Coping with Global Environmental Change, Disasters and Security*, Springer, Berlin, 2011; Simon Dalby, *Anthropocene Geopolitics: Globalization, Security, Sustainability*, University of Ottawa Press, Ottawa, 2020, available at: <https://press.uottawa.ca/en/anthropocene-geopolitics.html> (22.08.2025)

² Aleh Cherp; Jessica Jewell, *The Concept of Energy Security: Beyond the Four As*, "Energy Policy", Vol. 75, 2014, pp. 415–421, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2014.09.005> (22.08.2025)

³ Radu Ionescu, *Energy Security and Transition Challenges in Romania*, "Romanian Journal of European Studies", Vol. 21, No. 1, 2023, pp. 45–60

⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018*, FAO, Rome, 2018, <https://www.fao.org/3/I9553EN/i9553en.pdf> (22.08.2025); Jennifer Clapp, *Food*, 3rd Edition, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2021, p. 14

⁵ Marian Preda, *Social Policies in Romania after 1989*, Polirom, Bucharest, 2019; Elena Zamfir, *Social Inclusion and Social Policies in Romania*, Romanian Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, 2020, p. 55

⁶ Joseph E. Stiglitz; Amartya Sen; Jean-Paul Fitoussi, *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*, 2009,

provide equitable opportunities and protection for vulnerable groups are more exposed to political instability and external shocks.

Finally, climate change and environmental risks are emerging as direct security concerns for Romania. Floods, droughts, and extreme temperatures are no longer isolated phenomena but recurrent events with significant economic and social costs. The Romanian National Climate Change Strategy (2022–2030)¹ acknowledges these risks, yet implementation remains limited. As argued by Barnett and Adger², environmental change acts as a “threat multiplier,” exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and generating new forms of insecurity. In Romania, this dynamic is already visible in the agricultural sector, water management, and public health, where insufficient adaptation measures risk undermining both sustainability and security goals.

Taken together, these areas illustrate that in Romania the sustainability–security nexus is not a theoretical construct but a practical reality. Energy independence, food resilience, social cohesion, and climate adaptation are all policy fields where the objectives of sustainability and the imperatives of security overlap. As Dalby³ suggests, the challenge for states is not to treat sustainability and security as separate agendas but to develop integrated strategies where environmental, economic, and social policies are explicitly linked to security and resilience outcomes. For Romania, this implies moving beyond compliance-driven approaches toward a proactive governance model that addresses vulnerabilities in a holistic manner.

In summary, the integrated analysis confirms that Romania’s sustainability–security nexus is defined by a dynamic tension between strategic convergence and implementation gaps. The findings discussed above provide the empirical and conceptual basis for the concluding section, which outlines the main lessons and policy implications derived from this research.

Building on the empirical assessment presented above, this section integrates the analysis and discussion of findings, linking the observed policy patterns with theoretical frameworks and comparative perspectives. This integration provides a comprehensive view of how sustainability and security interact in the Romanian context, highlighting both achievements and structural challenges in the implementation of public policies.

The analysis of Romanian public policies in relation to sustainability and security confirms the broader findings of the international literature that states undergoing institutional transition frequently adopt sophisticated strategic frameworks but face significant difficulties in their effective implementation. This discrepancy between formal convergence and practical performance has been theorized by Börzel and Risse⁴ through the concept of goodness of fit, which posits that the degree of compatibility between European standards and domestic institutional structures determines the success of adaptation. In

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/8131721/8131772/Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi-Commission-report.pdf> (22.08.2025); Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The Ages of Globalization: Geography, Technology, and Institutions*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2021, <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-ages-of-globalization/9780231193740> (22.08.2025)

¹ Government of Romania, *National Climate Change Strategy 2022–2030*, Ministry of Environment, Bucharest, 2022, https://mmediu.ro/app/webroot/uploads/files/SNASC_SEA_2022.pdf (22.08.2025)

² Jon Barnett, W. Neil Adger, *Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict*, “Political Geography”, Vol. 26, No. 6, 2007, pp. 639–655, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2007.03>. (22.08.2025)

³ Simon Dalby, *Anthropocene Geopolitics: Globalization, Security, Sustainability*, University of Ottawa Press, Ottawa, 2020, <https://press.uottawa.ca/en/anthropocene-geopolitics.html> (22.08.2025)

⁴ Tanja A. Börzel; Thomas Risse, “Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe”, *European Integration online Papers (EIoP)*, Vol. 4, No. 15, 2000, <http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2000-015a.htm> (22.08.2025)

Romania's case, the adoption of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030¹ and alignment with the 2030 Agenda mark substantial steps toward convergence, yet shortcomings in administrative capacity, institutional coherence, and financial resources result in a situation of formal rather than substantive compliance. This dynamic illustrates how structural limitations continue to influence Romania's ability to translate European commitments into effective national governance.

In comparative terms, when compared with Western European states, where sustainable governance has long-standing traditions—such as the constitutional integration of sustainability in the Nordic countries or the federal structures in Germany—Romania remains at an early stage, where policies are often reactive and externally driven. Jordan and Lenschow² have shown that in Western Europe sustainability has been mainstreamed through gradual processes grounded in social consensus and strong democratic institutions. In Romania, by contrast, the process is accelerated by European Union pressures, which contributes to incomplete internalization of principles and challenges in translating them into coherent sectoral policies.

The social dimension of sustainability highlights another specificity of the Romanian case. Contemporary literature on social sustainability³ emphasizes that sustainable development cannot be conceived without reducing inequalities and fostering social cohesion. In Romania, the persistently high levels of poverty and exclusion, particularly in rural areas, demonstrate that social policies have not yet created the conditions for an inclusive sustainability transition. Unlike the Nordic countries, where active welfare policies and universal protection systems underpin social cohesion, Romania follows a fragmented model where inclusion measures are often temporary and heavily dependent on external funding. This situation reflects Esping-Andersen's⁴ theory of welfare regimes, with Romania situated within a hybrid model marked by limited resources and weak administrative capacity. The persistence of these conditions directly affects national resilience, linking social sustainability to security outcomes.

The economic dimension further reveals tensions between the objectives of green growth and the structural realities of the Romanian economy. The literature on green growth⁵ underscores that economic sustainability requires not only investments in green infrastructure but also profound transformations in production and consumption models, grounded in innovation and energy efficiency. In Romania, however, economic policies remain constrained by a reliance on carbon-intensive industries and difficulties in absorbing EU funds, which limit long-term impact. In contrast, Germany has successfully linked its

¹ Government of Romania, *National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania 2030*, Bucharest, 2018, available at: <https://sdgtoolkit.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/National-Sustainable-Development-Strategy-of-Romania-2013-2020-2030.pdf> (22.08.2025)

² Andrew Jordan; Andrea Lenschow, *Environmental Policy Integration: A State of the Art Review*, "Environmental Policy and Governance", Vol. 20, No. 3, 2010, pp. 147–158, <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.539> (22.08.2025)

³ Joseph E. Stiglitz; Amartya Sen; Jean-Paul Fitoussi, *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*, 2009, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/8131721/8131772/Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi-Commission-report.pdf> (22.08.2025); Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The Ages of Globalization: Geography, Technology, and Institutions*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2021, <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-ages-of-globalization/9780231193740> (22.08.2025)

⁴ Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *Social Foundations of Post-industrial Economies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999

⁵ Edward Barbier, *Op. cit.*, p. 12; OECD, *Towards Green Growth*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264108341-en> (22.08.2025)

Energiewende with industrial innovation, whereas Romania still lacks innovation ecosystems that could sustain global competitiveness. These disparities show that economic vulnerability continues to intersect with energy dependence and institutional capacity, reinforcing the connection between sustainability and security.

The environmental dimension equally confirms Knill and Liefferink's¹ observation that environmental policies in Central and Eastern Europe have largely been shaped by the process of Europeanization rather than domestic demand. In Romania, while legislative standards have significantly improved, enforcement remains problematic, generating a paradox: on paper, Romania has ambitious policies, but in practice illegal deforestation, urban pollution, and low recycling rates persist. By contrast, countries such as Austria and the Nordic states have transformed environmental policies into drivers of innovation and competitiveness, demonstrating that effectiveness depends not only on regulation but also on political culture and institutional capacity.

A key finding of the analysis concerns the sustainability–security nexus. Recent scholarship² has shown that climate change, energy vulnerabilities, and social inequalities are not merely development issues but security risks that can destabilize international order. Romania illustrates this nexus in multiple ways: energy security depends directly on the transition toward renewable resources; food security is increasingly threatened by climate variability; and social security is weakened by regional disparities and mass labor migration. In this respect, sustainability policies in Romania cannot be evaluated merely as development tools but must be understood as preventive security measures. This reinforces the conceptual claim that sustainable development and security are mutually constitutive, particularly in fragile or transitional governance systems.

From a regional perspective, the comparative experience of Poland offers an instructive contrast. While both Romania and Poland face challenges related to coal dependency and tensions between sustainability objectives and energy security, Poland has pursued a more securitized approach to its energy transition³, even at the cost of criticism regarding its alignment with European climate goals. Romania, by contrast, has adopted a more flexible position, but risks being locked into structural dependency if reforms are not accelerated.

Taken together, these findings confirm the hypothesis that sustainability and security form an inseparable binomial, and that public policies are the principal vector of integration. Romania occupies an intermediate position: formal convergence with European standards is evident, but effective implementation remains constrained by internal weaknesses. International literature⁴ provides comparative insights demonstrating that sustainability is neither uniform nor linear but contextual and gradual, shaped by resources, institutions, and political will. Romania can still make a meaningful contribution to global sustainable development and security objectives if it manages to overcome fragmentation and develop an adaptive governance model capable of integrating the social, economic, environmental, and security dimensions into a coherent vision. This synthesis provides the empirical foundation

¹ Christoph Knill; Duncan Liefferink, *Environmental Politics in the European Union: Policy-Making, Implementation and Patterns of Multi-Level Governance*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2007

² Hans Günter Brauch, *Op. cit.*, p. 12; Simon Dalby, *Anthropocene Geopolitics: Globalization, Security, Sustainability*, University of Ottawa Press, Ottawa, 2020, <https://press.uottawa.ca/en/anthropocene-geopolitics.html> (22.08.2025)

³ Kacper Szulecki, *Poland's Energy Policy: Between Security, Sustainability and Sovereignty*, "Energy Research & Social Science", Vol. 39, 2018, pp. 38–47, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2017.10.059> (22.08.2025)

⁴ James Meadowcroft, *Op. cit.*, p. 28

for the concluding section, which formulates the main lessons and policy implications derived from the study.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research undertaken in this article demonstrates that Romania, like many states in Central and Eastern Europe, has made important formal advances in aligning with global and European sustainability agendas, yet continues to face significant challenges in translating these commitments into effective policies and measurable outcomes. The adoption of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030¹ and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan² has created the institutional framework for convergence with the Sustainable Development Goals and the European Green Deal, but the persistence of administrative fragmentation, political volatility, and resource limitations reveals that such frameworks remain, to a large extent, declarations of intent rather than fully operationalized instruments of transformation. This situation echoes the broader findings of the Europeanization literature³, which has long emphasized that compliance with external requirements does not necessarily guarantee substantive adaptation or domestic ownership of sustainability agendas.

A second conclusion that emerges from the analysis is that social sustainability remains the weakest pillar of Romania's sustainability architecture. Despite improvements in access to education and healthcare and the availability of European Union support, high levels of poverty, regional disparities, and demographic decline continue to undermine resilience. The literature on welfare regimes and social sustainability⁴ underscores that societies lacking robust social protection systems and inclusive opportunities are structurally vulnerable to both internal instability and external shocks. Unlike the Nordic states, where social sustainability is embedded in universalist welfare regimes that facilitate green transitions and foster trust in institutions, Romania remains constrained by a hybrid and fragmented model that depends heavily on external funding and lacks institutional coherence. The sustainability agenda in Romania, therefore, cannot progress significantly without a comprehensive rethinking of social policy as a foundation of resilience and as an integral component of security.

The economic dimension illustrates a similar paradox. Romania has unprecedented access to financial resources through the European Green Deal⁵ and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan⁶ and has made rhetorical commitments to the transition toward a green

¹ Government of Romania, *National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania 2030*, Bucharest, 2018, <https://sdgtoolkit.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/National-Sustainable-Development-Strategy-of-Romania-2013-2020-2030.pdf> (22.08.2025)

² Government of Romania, *National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR)*, Bucharest, 2021, <https://mfe.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/facada6fdd5c00de72eecd8ab49da550.pdf> (22.08.2025)

³ Tanja A. Börzel; Thomas Risse, *Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe*, "European Integration Online Papers", Vol. 4, No. 15, 2000, <http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2000-015a.htm> (22.08.2025)

⁴ Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, pp 35-36; Joseph E. Stiglitz; Amartya Sen; Jean-Paul Fitoussi, *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*, 2009, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/8131721/8131772/Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi-Commission-report.pdf> (22.08.2025); Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The Ages of Globalization: Geography, Technology, and Institutions*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2021, <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-ages-of-globalization/9780231193740> (22.08.2025)

⁵ European Commission, *The European Green Deal*, COM (2019) 640 final, Brussels, 2019, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0640> (22.08.2025)

⁶ Government of Romania, *National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR)*, Bucharest, 2021, <https://mfe.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/facada6fdd5c00de72eecd8ab49da550.pdf> (22.08.2025)

and digital economy, yet its structural reliance on carbon-intensive sectors, weak innovation ecosystems, and limited administrative capacity impede systemic change. In contrast, countries such as Germany, through the *Energiewende*, or Sweden, through eco-innovation policies, have demonstrated that sustainable growth requires not only financial investment but also long-term industrial strategies, consistent policy frameworks, and the cultivation of innovation networks. The literature on green growth¹ emphasizes that the absence of such systemic conditions risks perpetuating dependency and leaving the country at the periphery of European competitiveness, unless reforms are accelerated and coupled with socially just transition policies that prevent the marginalization of vulnerable regions².

The environmental dimension highlights the limitations of compliance-driven approaches. Romania has adopted ambitious environmental standards under EU pressure, but enforcement remains weak, and environmental degradation continues to undermine both sustainability and security. Issues such as illegal logging, insufficient waste management, and recurring urban pollution confirm that the mere adoption of legal frameworks does not guarantee substantive change³. Comparative literature⁴ emphasizes that transformative environmental governance requires policies to be internalized within cultural practices and societal norms, accompanied by education, public participation, and local empowerment. Romania has yet to make this transition, and if environmental governance remains largely externalized and reactive, its impact will remain limited.

Perhaps the most significant conclusion relates to the sustainability–security nexus, which in Romania is not a theoretical abstraction but a tangible reality. Energy dependency exposes the country to geopolitical risks, food insecurity is exacerbated by climate variability and structural inefficiencies in agriculture, social inequality and mass migration weaken community resilience, and climate change generates increasingly frequent and costly natural hazards. These vulnerabilities confirm the argument advanced by scholars such as Brauch⁵ and Dalby⁶ that sustainability must be understood as a preventive security strategy. In the Romanian context, this nexus is even more salient due to the country's geostrategic position at the eastern frontier of the European Union and NATO, where sustainability failures have direct implications for regional stability and national security.

Taken together, these findings indicate that Romania occupies an intermediate position: more advanced than states that have yet to internalize sustainability frameworks but still lagging Western European countries where sustainability is embedded in institutional and societal practices. The trajectory of Romania should therefore not be evaluated solely in terms of deficits, but also in terms of adaptive potential and institutional learning. The rapid adoption of sustainability frameworks since EU accession illustrates a degree of flexibility and openness, which can be leveraged if domestic institutions succeed in moving from formal compliance to substantive implementation. This shift requires greater institutional coherence,

¹ Barbier, *Op. cit.*, p. 12; OECD, *Towards Green Growth*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264108341-en> (22.08.2025)

² Aron Buzogány; Dragoș Adăscăliței, *Varieties of Just Transition: Emerging Models in the EU and Beyond*, "Energy Policy", Vol. 158, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2021.112564> (22.08.2025)

³ European Environment Agency (EEA), *The European Environment - State and Outlook 2020*, EEA, Copenhagen, 2022, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/publications/soer-2020> (22.08.2025)

⁴ Andrew Jordan; Andrea Lenschow, *Environmental Policy Integration: A State of the Art Review*, *Environmental Policy and Governance*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2010, pp. 147–158, <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.539> (22.08.2025); James Meadowcroft, *Op. cit.*, p. 28

⁵ Hans Günter Brauch, *Op. cit.*, p. 12

⁶ Simon Dalby, *Anthropocene Geopolitics: Globalization, Security, Sustainability*, University of Ottawa Press, Ottawa, 2020, <https://press.uottawa.ca/en/anthropocene-geopolitics.html> (22.08.2025)

stronger participatory governance, and a redefinition of sustainability not as an external obligation but as an internal priority linked directly to resilience and security¹.

In conclusion, Romania's path toward sustainability and security is incomplete and fraught with challenges, yet it also holds transformative potential. The integration of social, economic, environmental, and security dimensions into coherent public policies remains the primary condition for progress, and success depends on political will, administrative innovation, and societal engagement. If Romania manages to move from declarations to implementation, from dependency to innovation, and from vulnerability to resilience, it has the capacity not only to consolidate its own stability but also to contribute meaningfully to global objectives of sustainable development and security.

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¹ James Meadowcroft, *Op. cit.*, p. 28; Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The Ages of Globalization: Geography, Technology, and Institutions*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2021, <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-ages-of-globalization/9780231193740> (22.08.2025)

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