

„PNRR: Fonduri pentru România modernă și reformată!”

POLICY BRIEF

The presence of well-being in Romanian strategic documents: Where we are and where to go from here

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1. Executive summary

This policy brief examines how well-being is addressed in Romanian strategic documents. It finds that the concept has gained visibility but remains insufficiently consolidated as a cross-sectoral policy objective with clear indicators, institutional responsibilities, and implementation mechanisms.

Romania's accession to the European Union created new opportunities for integrating well-being-related concepts into national strategies, particularly through alignment with EU priorities in social inclusion, cohesion, health, education, sustainability, and quality of life. More recently, two major factors have contributed to a renewed interest in well-being: Romania's alignment with OECD frameworks, in the context of its candidacy for OECD membership, and the increased policy relevance of well-being during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The central challenge is to transform well-being from a sporadic and sector-specific reference into a stable, cross-sectoral, and long-term public policy priority.

The paper argues that Romania is now at an important strategic moment. It can move from the sporadic and fragmented presence of well-being in strategic documents towards a more coherent, measurable, and institutionally assumed approach. To achieve this, well-being should be adopted as a strategic objective across governments, integrated into a wider health and social development framework, correlated with European Union priorities, and supported by specialised education and training programmes. Romania also needs stronger expertise, better indicators, and clearer connections between well-being, social capital, territorial inequalities, public services, and governance capacity.

2. The emergence of well-being in Romanian strategic thinking: A recent and uneven trajectory

The emergence of well-being in Romanian strategic documents reflects a recent and uneven trajectory. Historically, the concept was not a major policy priority in the contemporary

sense of quality of life, mental health, social participation, environmental conditions, work–life balance, subjective well-being, and human development.

During the communist period, one could speak of a form of planned well-being, but this was defined according to the ideological framework of the party-state. Well-being was not understood as an individual and collective condition shaped by rights, freedoms, subjective satisfaction, personal development, or participatory governance. Rather, it was subordinated to the official objectives of socialist planning, collective production, and state-defined social progress. In this context, the concept could not develop as an autonomous and multidimensional public policy concern.

After 1989, Romania entered a long and difficult transition period. In the 1990s and 2000s, well-being was certainly important for citizens, but other priorities dominated the public agenda. Economic restructuring, poverty reduction, social protection, institutional transformation, administrative reform, democratisation, market liberalisation, and later EU accession absorbed much of the political and strategic attention. **In this period, well-being was not absent, but it was rarely framed explicitly as a central policy objective. It was more often indirectly connected to employment, income, social assistance, education, health, or regional development.**

Romania's integration into the European Union created a new context in which well-being-related themes began to gain traction. Concepts such as social inclusion, cohesion, quality of life, sustainable development, access to services, human capital, resilience, and territorial disparities became more visible in strategic documents. However, this insertion was not always coherent. In some cases, Romanian strategies adopted European vocabulary in a rather mimetic way, reproducing external frameworks without sufficiently adapting them to national specificities. In other cases, well-being-related objectives appeared only partially, without strong indicators, clear institutional responsibilities, or implementation mechanisms. Nevertheless, visible progress was made. **The second major step occurred in recent years, under the combined pressure of two broader processes.** On the one hand, Romania's candidacy for OECD membership has encouraged closer attention to international frameworks that measure development beyond GDP and place stronger emphasis on quality of life, governance, social trust, and human well-being. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic made the importance of well-being impossible to ignore. As in many European countries, the pandemic revealed the deep connections between health, mental health, work, education, family life, digital access, public services, inequalities, and territorial vulnerabilities. Romania

is therefore at a favourable but demanding policy juncture. The task is to determine whether well-being remains a marginal reference, functions as a sectoral concern, or is becoming a genuine cross-cutting objective supported by implementation capacity.

3. Mapping the presence of well-being in Romanian strategic documents

A content analysis of twelve Romanian national strategies reveals encouraging but uneven progress. Well-being appears across several policy fields, yet it is seldom operationalised as a standalone objective. In most documents, it is addressed indirectly through quality of life, social inclusion, human capital, health, education, territorial cohesion, resilience, and access to services.

The social dimension of well-being is the most consistently present across the analysed strategies. The National Health Strategy 2023–2030 places well-being at the centre of its intervention, treating health as a structural determinant of individual and collective well-being and emphasising prevention, equity of access and integration of care. The National Strategy for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction 2022–2027 reflects a life-cycle approach to well-being through integrated interventions targeting children, people with disabilities, the elderly, the Roma, and other vulnerable groups. The National Employment Strategy 2021–2027 frames decent work, economic security and inclusion as factors in reducing poverty and supporting personal empowerment, while the National Housing Strategy 2022–2050 treats adequate housing as a fundamental right and basic condition of well-being, influencing health, education and social participation. The National Youth Strategy 2024–2027 explicitly mentions increased well-being among young people as an objective, covering housing, employment, civic participation, health and cultural needs. Digitalisation features as a well-being-adjacent concern in the National Strategy for Research, Innovation and Smart Specialization 2022–2027, which promotes innovation as a mechanism for solving societal challenges including health and social inclusion. Demographic challenges such as ageing, rural depopulation and territorial disparities are addressed through Romania's Territorial Development Strategy, which links quality of life directly to access to infrastructure, basic services and economic opportunities across regions.

The content analysis confirms that the concept of well-being is used directly in several strategies but remains mostly implied through adjacent concepts in others. In terms of alignment with international frameworks, the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030 explicitly integrates the UN 2030 Agenda, while the National Employment and Competitiveness strategies reflect EU priorities around digital and green transition. The approach across the twelve strategies remains fragmented by sector, as each strategy addresses well-being from within its own domain without a shared framework or cross-cutting coordination mechanism.

In policy documents, well-being is correlated with a range of life domains including labour market, health, education, income, sustainable development, and related social spheres.

The analysis of the selected strategies identifies several thematic clusters. The social dimension, including health, labour market access, poverty reduction, and education, is the most consistently included. The environmental and sustainability dimension emerges through strategies on green jobs, sustainable development, and housing, framing the green transition as an ecological necessity and an opportunity to improve quality of life. Territorial development emphasises spatial equity, infrastructure access, and balanced urban - rural development as pathways to higher living standards across regions.

The analysis of the selected strategies (Figure 1) shows that labour-market themes are strongly connected to education, including workforce development, skills training, and educational pathways (87 co-occurrences). Vulnerable communities are closely associated with health (78), education (70), labour markets (61), accessibility (59), housing (34), and territorial development (25). Labour-market themes are also connected to GDP (45) and the green transition (61). Romanian strategies frame social equity and disparity reduction as major pathways to well-being. Well-being is most strongly associated with vulnerable communities (123 co-occurrences), health (70), labour markets (63), accessibility (59), and education (58). Moderate associations with housing (38), youth (32), the green transition (27), and territorial development (21) indicate partial integration. Weaker links with civic participation (18), GDP (15), security (14), and family life (11) point to dimensions that remain underrepresented.

	A	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
		● civic participation Gr=39	● education Gr=212	● family Gr=17	● GDP Gr=165	● green transition Gr=118	● health Gr=176	● housing Gr=77	● labour market Gr=390	● policy Gr=354	● security Gr=66	● territorial development Gr=110	● vulnerable communities Gr=244	● well-being Gr=264	● youth Gr=58
1															
2	● accessibility Gr=118	3	32	3	3	8	33	23	24	43	6	14	59	59	7
3	● civic participation Gr=39	0	9	1	0	1	14	5	4	14	5	3	18	18	5
4	● education Gr=212	9	0	4	18	18	37	6	87	64	5	8	70	58	22
5	● family Gr=17	1	4	0	2	0	3	3	2	2	1	1	7	11	2
6	● GDP Gr=165	0	18	2	0	8	10	2	45	32	2	24	22	15	0
7	● green transition Gr=118	1	18	0	8	0	9	6	61	40	15	7	19	27	3
8	● health Gr=176	14	37	3	10	9	0	7	17	70	6	6	78	70	8
9	● housing Gr=77	5	6	3	2	6	7	0	10	38	4	13	34	38	2
10	● labour market Gr=390	4	87	2	45	61	17	10	0	93	6	17	61	63	18
11	● policy Gr=354	14	64	2	32	40	70	38	93	0	37	53	94	127	16
12	● security Gr=66	5	5	1	2	15	6	4	6	37	0	1	15	14	0
13	● territorial development Gr=110	3	8	1	24	7	6	13	17	53	1	0	25	21	1
14	● vulnerable communities Gr=244	18	70	7	22	19	78	34	61	94	15	25	0	123	18
15	● well-being Gr=264	18	58	11	15	27	70	38	63	127	14	21	123	0	32
16	● youth Gr=58	5	22	2	0	3	8	2	18	16	0	1	18	32	0

Figure 1. Thematic associations between well-being and key policy concepts in Romanian strategic documents

Source: Authors' representation

Note: Colour coding reflects the number of co-occurrences between concepts: green cells indicate a higher number of associations, red cells indicate a lower number. Gr = Groundedness, a measure of how frequently a code is applied in the analysed documents, as calculated by ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software.

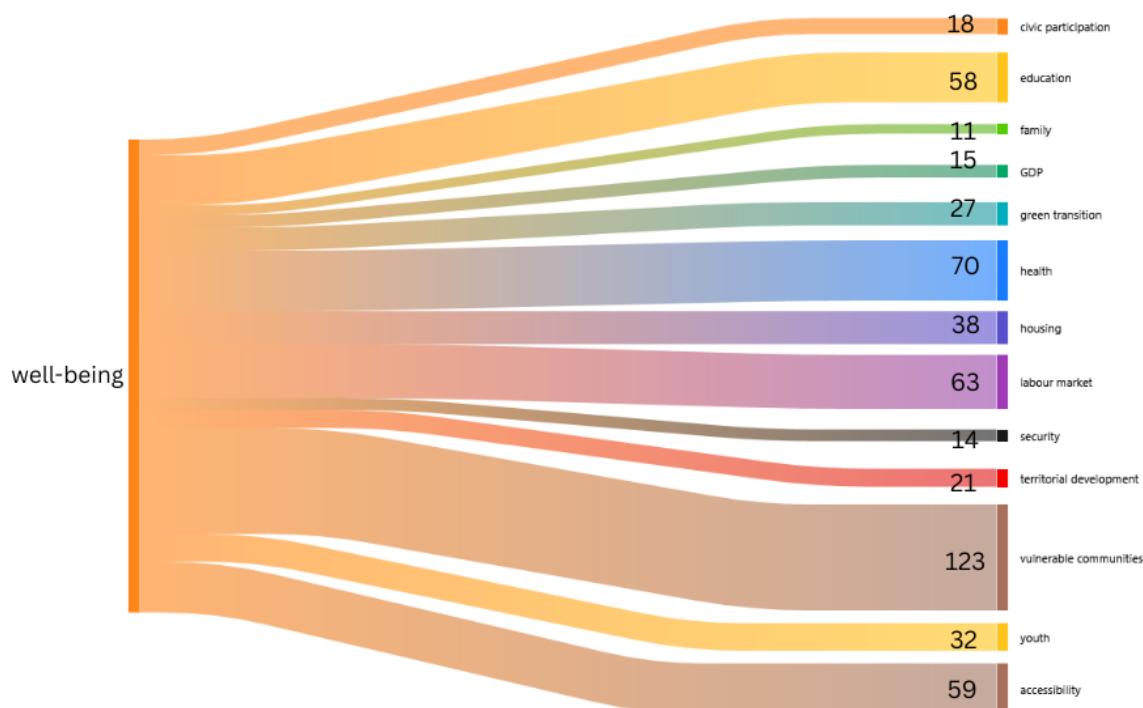


Figure 2. Well-Being associations across policy themes in Romanian strategic documents

Source: Authors' representation

Notably, the strategies with the highest concentration of explicit well-being (Figure 3) references are Romania's development strategy for the next 20 years – strategy 1 (50), followed by strategy 4 - National Employment Strategy 2021-2027 (32) and strategy 5 - National housing strategy (32) which suggests that the long-term national planning on development, employment and housing highly relate to well-being in Romania's strategic vision.

In contrast, sectoral strategies such as National Strategy for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction (18), strategy 7 - National Competitiveness Strategy (15), strategy 6 - National Strategy for Research, Innovation and Smart Specialization (9) and strategy 2 - National Green Jobs Strategy (4) tend to approach well-being more indirectly, emphasizing economic growth, innovation, and labour adaptability as proxies for quality of life.

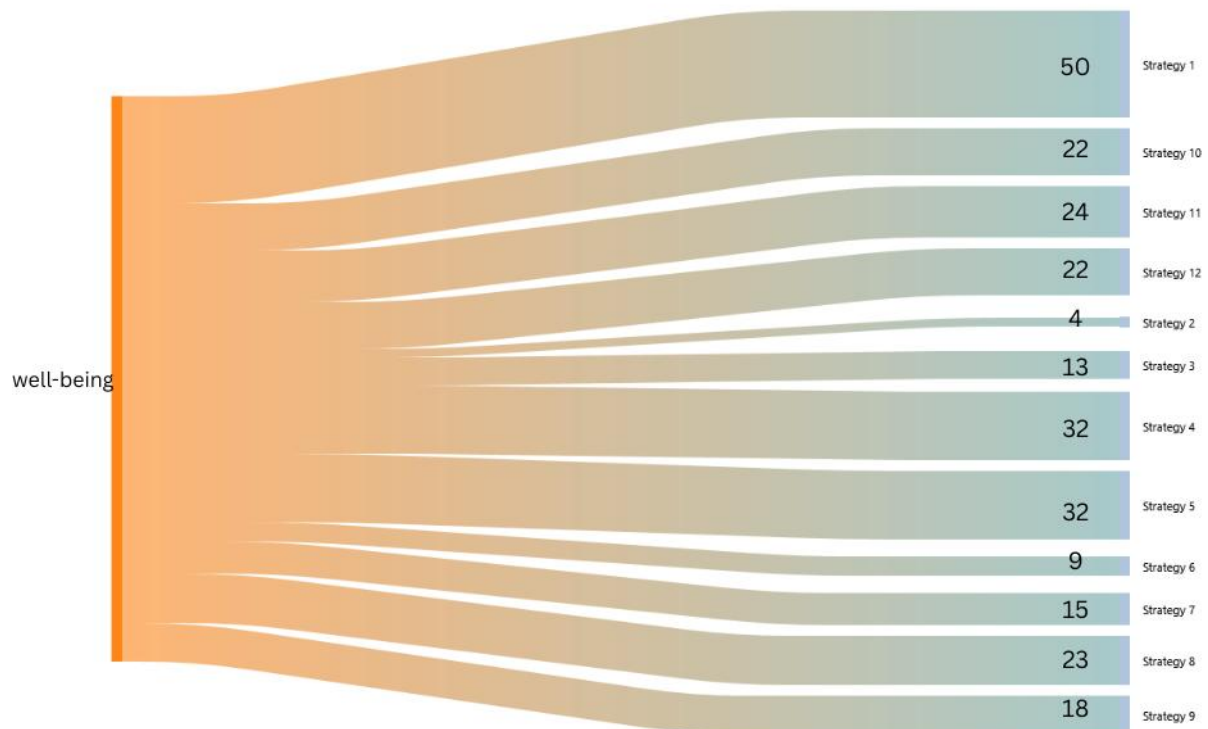


Figure 3. Well-Being Associations across each of the twelve Romanian national strategies
Source: Authors' representation

These findings point to a clear pattern of uneven integration. Well-being is most firmly embedded in socially oriented strategies, those addressing vulnerable communities, labour market inclusion, health and education, while strategies focused on economic competitiveness, research and innovation, and green jobs engage with well-being only indirectly or peripherally. Territorial development, accessibility and the green transition show moderate levels of association, reflecting a growing but still incomplete recognition of the multidimensional

nature of well-being. Dimensions that are consistently foregrounded in international frameworks such as civic participation, personal security, family life and economic metrics beyond employment, remain underrepresented across the portfolio of strategies analysed. Inter-institutional coordination, administrative capacity and monitoring systems also remain areas of concern, as effective implementation of well-being-related commitments depends on mechanisms that are not yet sufficiently visible in the Romanian policy environment.

Romania has made tangible progress in incorporating well-being concerns into its national strategic documents: the twelve strategies analysed demonstrate that well-being is no longer absent from the policy agenda and that its visibility has grown across social, environmental and territorial domains. However, the concept is not yet sufficiently consolidated, operationalised, or coordinated across policy fields. It continues to function as a background value or aspirational reference rather than as a central, measurable objective with dedicated targets and monitoring indicators. Moving from recognition to implementation requires treating well-being as a cross-cutting priority, one that connects social, economic, environmental and governance dimensions within a coherent national framework.

4. Well-Being and social capital in Romanian strategic documents

The contemporary conceptualisation of well-being, consolidated by the Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi (Stiglitz et al., 2009) and operationalised through the OECD Better Life Initiative and the How's Life? Framework (OECD, 2020) decisively moves beyond reducing quality of life to income, health infrastructure, or service delivery.

These dimensions are captured analytically by the concept of social capital, theorised by Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000) as a productive resource generated through social relations. For the Romanian case, this

Well-being is now understood as a multidimensional phenomenon based on trust, civic participation, associational engagement, institutional confidence, and the capacity of citizens and public authorities to cooperate.

framework carries particular weight, since many structural development challenges derive not from resource scarcity but from the fragility of cooperative structures and the lack of trust. Comparative European data consistently place Romania among the EU member states with the lowest levels of interpersonal and institutional trust. The European Social Survey and the

European Values Study document persistently low scores on generalised trust and openness towards strangers, with fewer than one-third of Romanian respondents reporting trust in people they meet for the first time, and some of the lowest levels of trust towards people of another religion or nationality in Europe (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2026). An Eurostat research (Eurostat, 2017) placed Romania (3.6%) among the least active citizens in the European Union (EU-28), and more recent data indicates that volunteering participation, though slightly increased between 2015 and 2022, still lags far behind the EU average (Eurostat, 2024). To these deficits are added accelerated demographic decline, the external migration of several million citizens, the widening gap between Bucharest–Ilfov and the other development regions, and persistent urban–rural disparities (World Bank Group, 2023). All these phenomena weaken the relational foundations of well-being, shaping how citizens relate to institutions, communities, public services, and future opportunities.

An analysis of the twelve Romanian strategic documents adopted between 2018 and 2024, covering thematic areas as sustainable development, social inclusion, youth, health, employment, housing, territorial development, competitiveness, and innovation, reveals a fragmented and largely implicit treatment of social capital. The qualitative analysis confirms this pattern, as while well-being and vulnerable communities emerge as dominant, the categories that would capture social capital, such as civic participation, family relations, and associational life, remain under-represented. Related themes appear dispersed rather than integrated into a coherent framework. Social cohesion is invoked predominantly in connection with poverty reduction and the inclusion of vulnerable groups, in line with the Sustainable Development Strategy 2030's commitment to leave no one behind. Civic participation surfaces only residually, within good governance and youth engagement objectives. At the same time, community development is operationalised primarily through the Territorial Development Strategy and implemented through Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) and its rural component, the LEADER programme, which rely on Local Action Groups (LAGs) as their implementing structures. Trust in institutions is addressed tangentially through transparency and integrity objectives, and volunteering and associational life are largely recognised as instruments for delivering social services rather than as expressions of a consolidated civic culture. Local identity, sense of belonging, access to support networks, loneliness, and isolation, all dimensions fundamental to subjective well-being, remain almost absent from the national strategic vocabulary. The distribution of well-being associations across strategies reinforces this diagnosis: the highest concentrations occur in documents anchored in material

and structural dimensions, such as long-term development, employment, and housing, whereas strategies more directly connected to civic and relational dimensions register fewer references, indicating that Romanian strategic thinking frames well-being predominantly as an outcome of employment, housing, and economic development, rather than as the product of relational, participatory, and community-based resources.

A common feature of these documents is the treatment of social capital as an instrumental resource rather than a strategic objective. When mentioned, social capital appears either as an implicit precondition for the success of sectoral interventions or as a collateral effect expected from other policies, whether economic, educational, or infrastructural. It is rarely conceptualised as an asset to be measured, cultivated, and evaluated in its own meaning. This produces a significant analytical gap, since the resilience of local communities, the administrative capacity of public authorities, the quality of multi-level governance, and the effectiveness of policy implementation depend substantially on the available stock of social capital, yet this relationship is not made explicit.

The experience of European funds implementation in 2014–2020, together with the absorption difficulties observed in the PNRR, suggests that technically well-designed projects have often failed or produced limited impact in territories marked by deficits of inter-institutional cooperation and mutual trust. As the Fiscal Council of Romania has warned, by the end of 2024 the actual absorption rate of the Structural and Cohesion Funds stood at only 2%, and around 29% for the PNRR, due primarily to administrative incapacity and insufficient institutional mobilisation (Fiscal Council of Romania, 2025). A recent analysis has confirmed the same a similar diagnosis at the territorial level, showing that more than 90% of county councils had not signed any PNRR contract by 2025 (Ernst, 2026). The central argument that Romanian strategic documents ought to embrace is that well-being frameworks cannot be effective if built exclusively on material indicators. The gap between Romania's decade-long GDP per capita growth and the stagnant perception of quality of life in peripheral territories shows that economic performance does not automatically translate into well-being. **In the Romanian case, social capital should become a core component of any future well-being framework, since many development challenges, from rural depopulation and the underutilisation of local administrative capacity, to limited access to basic public services and the vulnerability of marginalised groups, are linked not only to the availability of resources but to the quality of cooperation, and the nature of the relationship between citizens and authorities.**

Consequently, any Romanian approach to well-being beyond GDP must integrate social capital as an explicit strategic dimension, not merely as an implicit or secondary element of other public policies. Its formal recognition as a developmental resource, measurable and shapeable through public policy instruments, constitutes the precondition for shifting from a paradigm of material well-being to one of relational well-being, the only paradigm capable of addressing the structural challenges of contemporary Romanian society.

5. Policy recommendations

Romania has reached a point where well-being can no longer remain a sporadic or secondary reference in strategic documents. The concept should be transformed into a coherent policy objective, supported by institutions, expertise, indicators, and long-term political commitment. The following recommendations propose a gradual but structured approach.

Recommendation 1. Make well-being a strategic objective assumed across governments

Romania should move from merely acknowledging well-being in several policy documents towards assuming it as a strategic national objective. At present, well-being-related themes appear in connection with health, education, social inclusion, sustainable development, territorial cohesion, demographic resilience, and quality of life. However, these references remain dispersed and insufficiently coordinated.

A first step would be to integrate well-being into a broader national health and social development strategy, adopted as a long-term strategic plan and assumed by successive governments. This would reduce the risk that well-being depends only on temporary political priorities or isolated sectoral initiatives. Well-being should be framed as a stable public policy objective, connected to citizens' quality of life, mental health, access to services, social trust, environmental quality, education, work-life balance, and territorial equity.

This national approach should be strongly correlated with European Union frameworks. Romania should align its well-being priorities with the European Pillar of Social Rights, cohesion policy, the European Green Deal, the European Semester, EU health initiatives, and the broader beyond GDP debate. Such alignment would allow Romania to integrate well-being

into wider development plans already assumed at European level and to create synergies with existing strategies, funding instruments, and reporting mechanisms.

The objective should not be to import an external model mechanically. A Romanian well-being strategy should reflect the country's specific challenges: rural–urban inequalities, demographic decline, migration, uneven access to healthcare and education, regional disparities, low institutional trust, vulnerable communities, and differences in local administrative capacity. In this way, well-being would become not only a policy concept, but also a practical framework for addressing Romania's structural vulnerabilities.

Recommendation 2. Develop education, training, and accreditation pathways in well-being

Romania cannot develop a credible national strategy on well-being without experts capable of designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating well-being-oriented policies. For this reason, a second recommendation is to develop accredited bachelor, master, postgraduate, and professional training programmes focused on well-being.

These programmes should be recognised by Romanian authorities and designed from a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspective. Well-being is not the exclusive field of psychology, public health, sociology, economics, geography, public administration, education, or environmental studies. It requires the integration of all these perspectives. A Romanian educational pathway in well-being should therefore combine public policy, health, mental health, social capital, territorial development, environmental sustainability, digital transformation, data analysis, and impact assessment.

The SAGES project may provide a strong conceptual and methodological reference point, especially because it focuses on sustainable well-being, place-based inequalities, beyond GDP approaches, environmental and societal constraints, and spatially sensitive policy recommendations. This type of interdisciplinary research orientation could be translated into academic curricula, summer schools, professional training modules, and public administration courses.

Romania could also learn from existing international models. For example, Maastricht University and United Nations University offer a Master in Public Policy and Human

Development focused on policy analysis, governance, and development challenges¹. Romanian universities could create dedicated programmes or specialisations such as “Well-Being and public policy”, “Sustainable well-being and territorial development”, “Mental health and social policy”. These programmes should be connected to European research networks, public institutions, NGOs, and local authorities. They should also include applied components, such as policy labs, internships, impact assessment exercises, and cooperation with ministries, county councils, municipalities, and development agencies.

The aim is to create a professional community capable of supporting a future Romanian well-being strategy with evidence, expertise, and implementation capacity.

Recommendation 3. Create a national system of well-being indicators adapted to Romanian territorial realities.

The content analysis of twelve Romanian national strategies confirms that well-being is invoked across multiple policy fields, but without a shared measurement framework to track whether it is actually improving. Romania currently lacks a dedicated national system of well-being indicators that goes beyond GDP and aggregate economic metrics. The strategies analysed address health, education, housing, employment, social inclusion, territorial development, green transition and digitalisation as separate sectoral concerns, but no integrated set of indicators connects these dimensions into a coherent picture of how people live across the country. Developing such a system is a necessary condition for translating strategic commitments into accountable policy.

The indicator system should cover, at minimum: health and mental health; income security and decent work; education and skills; housing adequacy; access to services; environmental quality; digital inclusion; social trust and civic participation; personal safety; mobility; and work-life balance. The framework should combine objective indicators (such as access to health services or broadband coverage) and subjective ones (such as life satisfaction and perceived safety), ensuring it captures what people actually experience, not only what institutions provide.

¹<https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/education/master/programmes/public-policy-and-human-development?utm>

Indicators must be available at multiple territorial levels: national, regional, county, urban, rural, and where possible local. The strategies analysed identify rural - urban disparities and regional imbalances as central concerns and a well-being indicator system that operates only at national level cannot support the territorially differentiated policy responses these strategies call for.

In practical terms, the system should build on the existing monitoring framework, it should be updated regularly, made publicly accessible, and linked to the monitoring mechanisms of major sectoral strategies. Civil society organisations and research institutions should be formally involved in defining indicators and interpreting results. Such a system would not replace sectoral monitoring, but would provide the integrating framework currently missing and enable policymakers, local authorities and citizens to assess whether Romania's strategic commitments are translating into measurable improvements in people's lives across the whole territory.

Recommendation 4. Strengthen social capital and community resilience as pillars of well-being policy.

Romania's future well-being framework should recognise social capital and community resilience as core policy pillars, rather than as secondary level variables or implicit preconditions for sectoral interventions. The dominant conception of well-being, anchored in income, employment, access to health and education services, and material living conditions, captures only one dimension of the relational and civic infrastructure that determines quality of life. These material dimensions are essential, but insufficient, because Romania's sustained GDP per capita growth over the past decade has not produced a proportional improvement in perceived quality of life, particularly in ageing or depopulated (rural) communities, small towns, and territories affected by migration. A coherent Romanian well-being strategy should therefore complement material indicators with explicit objectives concerning trust, civic and political participation, associational density, volunteering, local sense of belonging, intergenerational and interethnic cooperation, and the mitigation of loneliness and social isolation (especially for elderly people). These dimensions are not soft concerns peripheral to development policy, but constitutive elements of it, since they shape whether investments actually translate into lived improvements in citizens' lives.

This recommendation relies on a better-established empirical finding, as communities with higher stocks of social capital, denser networks of trust, associational life, and stronger cooperation between citizens and authorities are better able to absorb shocks, implement public policies, deliver proximity services, protect vulnerable members, and sustain quality of life over time. The COVID-19 pandemic, the refugee inflows from Ukraine, and the uneven implementation of European funds have all shown that territories with weak cooperative infrastructures underperform even when technical resources are available. The Fiscal Council of Romania's 2025 diagnosis of very low absorption rates, together with the finding that more than 90% of county councils had not signed any PNRR contract by 2025, suggests it is not resources that are missing, but the cooperative capacity to use them. Social capital is thus not a secondary or cultural residual, but a genuine development resource.

Operationally, this recommendation should be pursued along four complementary directions. First, Romania should develop a national social capital measurement framework, integrated into the statistical system of the National Institute of Statistics and aligned with OECD and European Social Survey methodology, providing regular, territorially disaggregated indicators on trust, participation, associational life, loneliness, and civic engagement. Without measurement, social capital cannot be governed. Second, dedicated policy instruments should target the vulnerable territories such as rural areas, towns in economic decline, marginalised urban neighbourhoods, ex-industrial communities, and localities affected by depopulation and out-migration. Instruments such as LEADER should be expanded, better funded, and reoriented from purely economic objectives towards the deliberate cultivation of associational infrastructures, participatory governance, and local civic capacity. Third, targeted programmes should address the specific vulnerabilities of demographic groups whose well-being depends particularly on relational resources, namely elderly people at risk of isolation in depopulated rural areas, young people in peripheral territories who lack meaningful civic opportunities, Roma communities and other marginalised groups facing structural exclusion, and transnational families affected by labour migration, whose relational fabric has been reshaped by prolonged separation. Fourth, systematic investment should be made in the associational sector, in local civic infrastructure such as community centres, libraries, and cultural hubs, and in structured mechanisms of citizen–authority cooperation, including participatory budgeting, deliberative fora, and co-production of local services.

Recognising social capital as a strategic dimension of Romanian well-being policy would mark a substantive shift, from a model in which the state delivers services to passive beneficiaries, to one in which public policy actively cultivates the cooperative, civic, and relational conditions under which well-being becomes sustainable, equitably distributed, and resilient to future shocks. Such a shift would also align Romania with the emerging European consensus that development beyond GDP requires not only better measurement of outcomes, but deliberate investment in the social foundations.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of well-being in Romanian strategic documents shows that Romania has made visible progress, but still lacks a coherent and fully assumed well-being framework. The concept has gradually entered national policy language through European integration, sustainable development, health, social inclusion, education, recovery, resilience, and, more recently, through alignment with OECD approaches. However, its presence remains uneven, fragmented, and often indirect.

Romania now has the opportunity to move from scattered references to a strategic approach capable of connecting well-being with long-term development. This requires more than adding the word “well-being” to policy documents. It requires a clear conceptual framework, measurable indicators, institutional coordination, specialised expertise, and territorial adaptation.

The main policy direction should therefore be the transformation of well-being into a stable strategic objective, assumed across governments and supported by education, research, indicators, and participatory governance. If properly integrated, well-being can become a useful framework for improving public policy coherence and for placing citizens’ quality of life at the centre of Romania’s development model.

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Annex 1. Selected strategies in Romania

No.	Document	Authority
1.	Romania's Development Strategy for the Next 20 Years	Romanian Academy
2.	National Green Jobs Strategy 2018–2025	Ministry of Labour, Family, Youth and Social Solidarity
3.	Romania's National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030	Government of Romania, Department for Sustainable Development
4.	National Employment Strategy 2021–2027	Ministry of Labour, Family, Youth and Social Solidarity
5.	National Housing Strategy 2022–2050	Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration
6.	National Strategy for Research, Innovation and Smart Specialisation 2022–2027	Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization
7.	National Competitiveness Strategy 2021–2027	Ministry of Economy, Digitalization, Entrepreneurship and Tourism
8.	National Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities “A Fair Romania”, 2022–2027	Ministry of Labour, Family, Youth and Social Solidarity
9.	National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction 2022–2027	Ministry of Labour, Family, Youth and Social Solidarity
10.	National Health Strategy 2023–2030	Ministry of Health
11.	National Youth Strategy 2024–2027	Ministry of Labour, Family, Youth and Social Solidarity
12.	Territorial Development Strategy of Romania	Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration

Annex 2. Codes applied on the text analysis and associated works

Code	Associated words
well-being	quality of life, subjective well-being, life satisfaction, objective well-being
GDP	budget, funds, financial, capital, competitiveness
labour market	employment, unemployment, work, income, outcome, job, value, labour, social capital, green labour
housing	household, house, locuibility, livability
family	people, child, parental
youth	young, adolescent, future generation
health	Covid19, health services, prevention, mental health
education	research, skill, school, human capital, performance, attainment
civic participation	support, community, social connections
green transition	green housing, energy, green labour, smart specialization, schimbări climatice
vulnerable communities	poverty reduction, rural–urban disparities, aging population, access to basic services, ethnic minorities, NEETs, at-risk groups, digital divide, social inclusion
accessibility	transportation, digital accessibility, infrastructure

security	safety, military security, cyber security, digital security, individual safety, data security
territorial development	rural, urban, city, local
policy	government, public policies, policy maker, evidence based policies

SAGES: Spatial Analysis of Growth, Environment and Sustainable Well-being

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