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**SOCIAL INEQUALITIES AND QUALITY OF LIFE. INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ORGANISED BY THE RESEARCH INSTITUTE
FOR QUALITY OF LIFE AND THE ROMANIAN SOCIOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION, 15-19 NOVEMBER 2021**

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Abstract

The Social Inequalities and Quality of Life International Conference organised by The Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy took place online, from 15 to 19 November 2021. The conference distributed 13 panels about current global challenges which impact individuals' daily lives, and two round tables, about the challenges, risks and opportunities that Romanian society is facing. This event gathered 102 presentations from researchers coming from Romania, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, Israel, Italy, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Spain, The Czech Republic and The Netherlands. The conference provided an opportunity for interdisciplinary dialogue to take place about the potential policy strategies aimed to reduce social polarization and social inequalities by overcoming the structural gaps in contemporary society.

Keywords: social inequality, polarisation, conference, quality of life, COVID-19, Research Institute for Quality of Life.

The Social Inequalities and Quality of Life International Conference aims to provide a space that enables an interdisciplinary discussion on social polarization and vulnerabilities that were highlighted during the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The social inequalities that have been produced by the overwhelming economic crisis have created the need for potential policy measures and concrete strategies to overcome the growing development gaps and the current social and economic global challenges. The conference was conceptualised to meet the

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current economic and socio-political climate that results from a succession of crises and major challenges to contemporary societies (ICCV, & ARS, 2021). The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on its propagation of social and economic inequalities are emphasized especially in certain domains such as education, access to digitalisation, living standards in terms of housing, access and position within the labour market on a global scale. This conference brings forward the various dimensions in which polarization has been pushed up due to the pandemic.²

The panels of the conference managed to capture its initial aim to provide a multifaceted debate on the social inequalities contextualised by the current global crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic: Some of the themes captured in the panels were: challenges for young people in a changing labour market, socio-economic inequalities: between ideology and reality; the government response to COVID-19 pandemic; vulnerable groups and health policies and risks and inequalities in education. The complete list of names for the panels can be accessed through the provided link in the footnotes.

The conference also provided two round tables that approached the following topics for in-depth discussion: the challenges for the child protection system and the opportunities and risks of Romanian society.

The international participation provided a rich exchange of knowledge and research results which offered a rounded presentation of the wide spectrum of risk and the processes that cause social change in the contemporary landscape. This international balance was also noted by the valuable participation and academic intervention of the keynote speakers who were from countries such as Italy, Poland, Scotland, Canada and Romania. Their interventions constructed a framework regarding the multilateral characteristics of the quality of life topics. Several ideas can be pinpointed from the keynote speaker sessions, such as the various needs that have been created in the contemporary social landscape which have been especially highlighted due to the pandemic. The keynote speaking sessions began with Acad. Cătălin Zamfirs' (Director of the Research Institute for Quality of Life) presentation called "How can Romanian sociology contribute to the exit from the current crisis of the country?". The presentation was followed by prof. Filomena Maggino (Univ. Sapienza of Rome) with her presentation on "Wellbeing and Sustainability in the post-covid Era", by prof. Renata Siemienska (Univ. of Warsaw) with a presentation on "Political and Economic Expectations and Reality in Eastern Europe. Three decades of changes of political values and attitudes and their context" and by prof. Vasile Dâncu (Univ. of Bucharest) with his presentation "Post-pandemic Society: structural Inequalities and building the Resilient Society". The aforementioned presentations tackled themes concerning the current global needs that individuals face and they also highlighted the fact

² More information regarding the administrative aspects of the conference can be found at <https://ineq2021.arsociologie.ro>.

that there is a requirement for general economic support. Another aspect that was brought forward is the fact that polarization is seen as an aspect that creates social disputes and conflict in times of crisis. This action is considered to be a factor which impairs democracy.

Within the Romanian territory, the majority of academics that held communications came from Bucharest (National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, University of Bucharest, The Financial and Monetary Research Center “Victor Slăvescu” of the Romanian Academy) Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca, Oradea, Timișoara, Craiova, Iași and Făgăraș. International researchers that held communications were from Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Israel, Italy, Norway, Serbia, Spain, The Czech Republic and The Netherlands. The themes presented during the panels indicated that there were some commonalities concerning the current research subjects on social inequalities.

The conference’s academic impact could be measured immediately through the constant exchange of concepts, thoughts, and results on the discussed themes. The discussions regarding the papers were related to the various qualifications, research methodologies and resources as well as overall experiences in studying the current state of social inequalities. The papers presented research designs which were properly adapted to the online setting, created by the present crisis or by the general location of vulnerable groups. These groups mostly studied the labour market and their participation in it. This conference also presented an array of communications from PhD students that received support from senior researchers to acquire diverse ideas and feedback about their work. Conversations between researchers indicated their common interest in future collaborations on the themes that were presented.

The end of the conference put forward the creation of a think tank that was constructed to provide support for the development of social, economic and cultural development of the country program, which in a sense crystallised the Post-crisis Country Policy brief. It is necessary to mention that all of the abstracts and papers presented at this conference will be peer-reviewed and a carefully picked selection of articles written in English are published in a volume at Editura Școala Ardeleană, Cluj-Napoca. Subject to their acceptance, carefully selected papers might be considered for publishing in the following scientific journals: *Quality of Life*, *Journal of Community Positive Practices*, or *Romanian Sociology Review*. This conference represented a professional chance for researchers and academics to discuss and explore an array of concepts and thoughts on the current challenges concerning social inequalities in light of the crisis that the world faced in the last decades.