Effective Human Resource Management and Environmental Security: Protection of Human Environmental Rights and Critical Infrastructure Sustainability

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Abstract- **The scientific paper aims to analyze the interaction between three main areas: the protection of environmental human rights, the resilience of critical infrastructure, and human resource management. These elements are interconnected and play an important role in developing and implementing effective management decisions and policies, combining environmental protection with care for human capital.**

The paper analyses key characteristics of environmental security as a dimension of the Human Security Concept, as well as the role of environmental rights. Additionally, the need to protect critical infrastructure in the context of environmental risks and threats is emphasized.

The focus is placed on new aspects of human resource management, such as green human resources management, the role of so-called "green collars", employee motivation, and others. In this context, the role of effective human resource management in organizations that manage critical infrastructure is examined, to achieve sustainable outcomes in areas related to environmental security.

The third fundamental element of the paper involves practical challenges in implementing the trends and new aspects described above. Ideas and practices are proposed to support the development of solutions for creating sustainable outcomes and policies in human resource management within the context of environmental security.

Keyword- Critical Infrastructure, Environmental Security, Human Resources Management.

I. Introduction

Analyzing environmental security as a dimension of the Human Security Concept, it is crucial to consider three key areas of activity: the protection of human environmental rights, the resilience of critical infrastructure, and the effective management of human resources. For the purposes of this report, each of these three areas is perceived as a component of a comprehensive model, presented in a basic form but allowing visualization of the continuous interaction between these components. Moreover, the cyclic nature of the interconnectivity and interdependence of these three key areas enables a deeper examination not only of each domain individually but also of the relationships between them, the processes taking place, and the results achieved.

Following this idea, the objective of the study is not only to present key characteristics of the protection of human environmental rights, the resilience of critical infrastructure, and the effective management of human resources but also to identify the correlation between these three components (see Fig. 1).
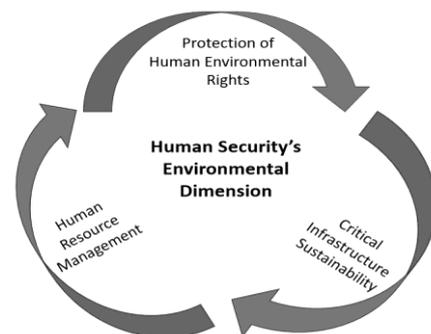

Fig. 1. Author's Model of Interaction between the three main components of Human Security's Environmental Dimension.

Identifying the common characteristics and scientific relations is presented through an analysis of the interaction between three main areas: the protection of environmental human rights, the resilience of critical infrastructure, and human resource management. These elements are interconnected and play an important role in the development and implementation of effective management decisions and policies, combining environmental protection with human capital care.

Proposing ideas and practices to help find solutions for creating sustainable results and policies in human resource management in the context of environmental security is an attempt to draw the attention of researchers and practitioners to this increasingly significant area in national security management.

With the growing importance of environmental security, there is an urgent need to develop sustainable policies and practices that integrate environmental protection and human resource management. In this context, the protection of environmental rights and the resilience of critical infrastructure are not only legal issues but also strategic concerns that affect national and international security.

II. Materials and Methods

A. Protection of Environmental Human Rights as a component of the Human Security's Environmental Dimension

Environmental security, as a dimension of the Human Security Concept, is directly related to its three pillars: "freedom from fear," "freedom from want," and "freedom for a dignified life" [1], [2]. The definition of "environmental security" focuses primarily on achieving a balance between the physical development and survival of the population benefiting from environmental resources without depleting or diminishing their quality. It aims to ensure a sufficiently favorable environment, equipped with resources in both quantitative and qualitative terms. These resources must be equally accessible to all people and guarantee sustainable development for the global population [3]. It is a set of the status of various systems, such as natural, urbanized, socio-economic, and infrastructural systems (especially those with critical importance). Alongside this, it encompasses the processes that occur between these systems, ensuring that no critical situations or threats arise from environmentally hazardous events, nor do harmful ecological phenomena, impacts, or adverse effects occur on human life, health, and well-being.

According to some authors, environmental security is freedom from fear of environmental harm and ecological threats [4]. The fear of natural catastrophes and disasters caused by anthropogenic, technological, or industrial activities haunts people both personally and professionally. Once provoked, threats of an ecological nature cause not only significant material damage but also loss of human lives in homes and workplaces. In other words, people can lose both their freedom from fear (e.g., in life and health threats) and their freedom from want (e.g., in a deteriorated work environment). In such scenarios, negative processes are triggered that endanger freedom for a dignified life (e.g., forming "environmental nihilism" at the political, managerial, organizational [5], and even societal level).

Another important term related to ensuring the environmental dimension of human security is "environmental human rights." These rights consist in ensuring fair and equal access to essential natural resources (including land, shelter, food, water, and air), which make survival possible both in personal and professional aspects. Three main environmental human rights are distinguished: the right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment (including the working environment); the right to clean and accessible drinking water; and the right to safe and accessible sanitary conditions (and working conditions) [6]. These rights must be guaranteed in every aspect of human life—personal, professional, social, and public, etc.

The Updated National Security Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria clearly emphasizes the connection between environmental security and the sustainability of critical infrastructure. A significant aspect of protecting environmental security (including environmental human rights) involves preventing, controlling, and overcoming the consequences of pollution of soil, water, and air, and the destruction of natural resources due to accidents in strategically important facilities with critical significance for society and the state [7].

At the heart of the Human Security Concept and the Human Resource Management Concept is the individual with their needs, values, character traits, rights, and freedoms. While the Human Security Concept encompasses all aspects of human life, the Human Resource Management Concept focuses on the person in their social role as an employee with professional goals and aspirations for development. It is important to note that in both concepts, guaranteeing environmental human rights is crucial for their high effectiveness.

B. Resilience of Critical Infrastructure as a component of the Human Security's Environmental Dimension

In today's world, critical infrastructure is fundamental to the functioning of society and the economy. It includes networks and systems such as energy, transportation, water supply, communications, and healthcare services, which are vital for the daily lives and safety of citizens. In accordance with the National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan for Infrastructure Resilience 2023, developed by the Ministry of Environment and Water of the Republic of Bulgaria, the resilience of this infrastructure is directly linked to the effective management of human resources and the preparedness of organizations to adapt to new realities arising from environmental risks and climate change [8]. These aspects are particularly important in the context of Bulgaria but are also applicable within the broader European framework.

The resilience of critical infrastructure in the context of effective human resource management (HRM) and

environmental security can be examined through four key aspects. The first one is related to critical infrastructure and its importance in the context of environmental risks. Critical infrastructure must not only be protected from physical and technical threats but also be resilient to challenges arising from climate disasters, natural catastrophes, and other environmental risks. Climate change and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events—such as floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, and high temperatures—necessitate long-term planning and strategic management of infrastructure networks. The ability to adapt to these risks depends not only on technologies but also on the preparedness and training of personnel responsible for managing and operating these systems. This is highlighted in the European Commission's Notice on "Technical Guidance for Climate Resilience of Infrastructure Projects 2021-2027" [9].

The second aspect is the importance of human resources in ensuring resilience. The resilience of critical infrastructure depends on the preparedness of employees to respond effectively in crisis situations. This requires both specialized technical skills and a strategic approach to human resource development. A European Commission press release from October 18, 2022, on accelerating efforts to build European resilience in critical infrastructure, emphasizes that employee training for handling natural disasters and climate change must be integrated into the core of HRM policies.

Regular training, simulations, and emergency response drills will improve reaction times and reduce risks to infrastructure [10]. Developing a culture of resilience is essential, where employees actively participate in adapting to new environmental realities. In this context, HRM strategies should focus on motivating employees to apply principles of resilience and environmental responsibility in their daily work. This includes both motivating the implementation of green practices and developing mechanisms to encourage innovation in infrastructure management.

The third aspect are challenges and approaches to sustainable management of critical infrastructure. One of the biggest challenges for sustainable critical infrastructure management is integrating new technologies that facilitate adaptation to climate change and minimize environmental risks. For example, implementing smart monitoring systems for climate and environmental conditions allows for rapid response and prevention of potential infrastructure damage.

Additionally, the efficient use of natural resources, reducing carbon emissions, and improving energy efficiency in infrastructure management requires a well-trained and motivated workforce. Integrating sustainability principles into organizational practices must be supported by a high level of employee motivation and responsibility. Achieving resilience requires a continuous process of learning, adaptation, and innovation, with dynamic strategies that can respond to ever-changing environmental conditions.

And the last one is practical implementation of sustainable strategies for critical infrastructure management. To ensure the long-term resilience of critical infrastructure, the following measures and strategies should be implemented:

a) Investing in employee training and development: This includes both technical training on managing environmental risks and emergency response training.

b) Developing "green practices": Implementing sustainable technologies and practices in infrastructure operations, such as reducing energy consumption and using renewable energy sources.

c) Strategic planning for rapid response: Preparing disaster response plans with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for employees, as well as mechanisms for rapid infrastructure recovery after an incident.

By implementing these strategies, it will be possible not only to enhance the resilience of critical infrastructure but also to create a work environment where employees actively contribute to its strengthening and the preservation of environmental resources.

C. Effective Human Resource Management as a component of the Human Security's Environmental Dimension – In Search of Sustainable Solutions and Models

Undoubtedly, part of the challenges related to the overall shift in vision for sustainability in management processes in the areas already described is connected to the effective use of the human factor within these organizations. More than ever, finding key solutions is related to balanced and focused policies aimed at developing human capital [11].

This paper emphasizes some new aspects of human resource management that the authors have been working on in recent years, such as green HRM, the role of "green collars," and new ideas for employee motivation.

In this context, the role of effective human resource management in organizations managing critical infrastructure is examined, aiming to achieve sustainable results in areas related to environmental security.

Sustainable development requires an integrated approach where these three pillars are interconnected and mutually supportive within each organization and its organizational policies:

a) **Economic Sustainability:** This includes creating stable economic systems that support long-term growth and prosperity. Economic sustainability promotes efficient use of resources, development, and organizational stability.

b) **Social Sustainability:** This aspect focuses on improving the quality of life for people by ensuring access to education, healthcare, justice, and equality. Social sustainability also includes encouraging cultural diversity and participation in decision-making processes. This involves decisions in the area of "soft" skills and

competencies, which add value to the management and development of human resources.

c) **Environmental Sustainability:** Environmental sustainability aims to protect and restore natural resources and biodiversity. It involves reducing pollution, managing waste, and combating climate change with a comprehensive "green approach" in management.

The goal is to achieve a balance between them to ensure long-term well-being for both humanity and the planet. In Bulgaria, as in many other countries, the concept of sustainable development is integrated into national strategies and policies. For instance, Bulgaria's National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSDS) defines priorities and measures for achieving sustainable development in sectors such as energy, transport, agriculture, and tourism. It is important to note that sustainability is not just about environmental issues. It also includes social and economic aspects that ensure human communities can live in dignity without compromising their future resources. Sustainable development, on the other hand, is the path or process required to achieve this sustainability. Through this approach, the organization strives to ensure that the resources it uses today will continue to be accessible in the future, not only for the present but also for future generations [12].

Theoretically, since the 1990s, researchers have explored the role that human resource management can play in improving corporate environmental orientation, gradually focusing more on climate protection and introducing environmental management, driven by local air pollution, the first oil crisis, the water crisis [13], food crises, the first report of the Club of Rome, and others.

In the last decade, the need to integrate human resource management (HRM) with environmental management has become increasingly recognized, leading to the emergence of a separate branch in HR theory – Green HRM. The existing literature presents evidence of the impacts of GHRM indicators, the individual effects of human resource practices, or the impacts of overall high-performance work systems (HPWSs) on employee performance through several mediating mechanisms [14].

Two key psychological parameters can be identified as major influencing factors in Green HRM:

a) Environmental Knowledge: Awareness of the need to protect the environment increases the likelihood of eco-friendly behavior.

b) Environmental Psychological Climate: This climate signals that the organization supports eco-friendly behavior and attitudes, favoring eco-friendly behavior among employees, who align their workplace behavior with the adopted organizational culture [15].

To achieve green goals and environmental initiatives, organizations should:

a) Encourage a green image and develop recruitment processes that attract capable and motivated employees who share the organization's green values and principles.

b) Initiate processes and activities that motivate, engage, and encourage employees to participate in green initiatives and improve their green skills in the context of motivational processes.

c) Ensure that corporate values related to green goals are clearly communicated among employees.

d) Ensure that employees' green outcomes are appropriately monitored, recorded, and evaluated.

e) Link employees' contributions to green technologies with internal promotions and visibly support financial and non-financial rewards [5].

In the context of new challenges for HRM, attention must also be given to a particularly sensitive and new trend – the role of so-called green collars. These are employees directly involved in the activities of specific and particularly significant organizations and activities, including in critical infrastructure aspects. Green collar workers are responsible for jobs related to sustainability procedures and environmental protection in general. Green-collar workers, employed in every sector, emerged as businesses employed qualified experts, engineers, consultants, or managers in sustainability after the green transition and sustainable compliance in traditionally performed jobs. The green transition in the economy also brings about significant changes in employment and human capital. The characteristics sought in people to be employed in the green economy will differ. Green-collar workers are a group of employees born from the green economy [16].

The green economy approach has emerged alongside the concept of sustainable development. To achieve sustainable development, countries need to transition to a green economy and follow sustainable policies. Traditional economic approaches cannot provide any opportunity to implement sustainability policies in the long term [17].

An important aspect of the relationship examined by the authors between effective human resource management and environmental security, protection of human ecological rights, and the sustainability of critical infrastructure is the use of innovative approaches to motivating participants in these processes and relationships [18]. The complexity and challenges of the changing security environment provide the basis for finding innovative and sustainable models for motivation, including solutions related to new employee expectations that align with the evolving role of human capital in underdeveloped areas [19]. In this regard, some good practices can be pointed out in the field of "soft skills," which are becoming increasingly important for employees, including in the security sector. Finding a balance between work and personal time, between an individual's needs and organizational goals, and balancing psychological and physical aspects of work are relationships that require new solutions, especially during times of acute and often

chronic crises and instability in entire sectors. Of course, this approach is linked to a clear regulatory framework and well-founded legal bases [20].

When changes are experienced as positive or well-aligned with core values, individuals may assimilate these changes into their identity, reinforcing a cohesive sense of self [21]. For example, the motivational model "Motivation 4.0" is one of the latest developments, widely applied in public sector organizations in recent years [22]. It combines four key motivation areas – Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Emotional Intelligence (EI), Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), and benchmarking/best practices and storytelling. The application of balancing policies and tools, according to the authors, leads in the short term to increased motivation by balancing employee needs, accepting the role and significance of their organizations in building a harmonious society. Although still new, the model has won awards in good practice competitions for public sector organizations, and interest in it is linked to its balance and easy adaptation to specific organizational conditions.

Certainly, it is worth adding another area that organizations should focus on in the coming years in search of balanced and distinguishing policies to position themselves as outstanding employers – specifically, policies related to employee well-being, which are linked to aspects beyond economic ones. There are three areas where, in recent years, there have been numerous good practices and policies – well-being, resilience, and mindfulness practices [23]. Holistically developed and systematically applied employee care policies ensure a sustainable increase in employee motivation on one hand, while on the other hand, enhancing their image as employers.

These challenges and solutions are of particular importance and potential opportunities for organizations in the sectors of environmental security, critical infrastructure, and the overall framework of national security. This focus in human resource management is likely to be critically important for balanced personal and career development and will attract more potential candidates to work in these institutions [24]. Of course, the fact that in the short term, the positive organizational climate and culture will significantly improve, which is a key characteristic in seeking sustainable solutions in such a significant sector as national security in recent years, cannot be overlooked.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The topic of this research is highly relevant in the context of contemporary global challenges and the need for integrated solutions for environmental security and human resource management. The ability to protect human environmental rights and ensure the resilience of critical infrastructure is crucial in addressing growing climate threats and eco-economic crises. Technological innovations and new human resource management strategies, such as the concept of "green-collar" workers,

play a vital role in ensuring the sustainability and adaptability of critical infrastructure under environmental risk conditions.

At the same time, the protection of human environmental rights is not only a moral and legal issue but also a key element of national and international policies that guarantee the safety and stability of society. This interconnection between environmental, social, and organizational aspects makes the topic particularly relevant and significant for modern scientific and managerial discussions.

New challenges in visionary management of critical sectors essential for sustainable development are increasingly becoming subjects of scientific and practical interest. In this context, the triad of "environmental security – critical infrastructure – human resources" is of great importance in the framework of national security.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The balance between goals, plans, and results in a dynamic environment is part of an organization's sustainable development policies. On the other hand, it is maintained by that aspect of management functions, such as goal-setting, which is carried out in the interest of society in accordance with public and international values, rules, and norms.

A balanced approach to finding solutions within the triad of "environmental security – critical infrastructure – human resources" is a process necessary at the national level to transition from the current state to the desired state (i.e., to successfully move toward the future). It involves strategic decisions (which have a long-term nature) and strategic actions applied in formulating and implementing strategies that ensure coherence within the system and between the system and its surrounding environment, allowing for the achievement of set goals.

We will conclude with a beloved passage from *Alice in Wonderland*:

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here? - Alice asked.

- That depends a good deal on where you want to get to - said the Cat.

- I don't much care where - said Alice.

- Then it doesn't matter which way you go - said the Cat.

- ...so long as I get somewhere... - Alice added as an explanation.

- Oh, you're sure to do that - said the Cat - if you only walk long enough..."

The challenges and possible solutions for efficiency within the triad of "environmental security – critical infrastructure – human resources" define both the path and direction of development. Part of this journey involves formulating a new vision for managing these relationships—one that seeks but also offers strong engagement, an emphasis on employee development, and long-term, sustainable solutions.

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