

EVOLUTION OF RURAL POPULATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

MATEOC-SÎRB NICOLETA^{1,2}, MATEOC-SÎRB TEODOR¹, NAN ANCA-IOANA¹,
DAVID ROXANA-SAIDA¹, MĂNESCU CAMELIA^{1*}

¹*Banat University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael I of Romania" from Timisoara, Faculty of Agricultural Management, Timisoara, Romania*

²*Romanian Academy-Timisoara Branch, Timisoara*

*Corresponding author's e-mail: cameliaoborocea2004@yahoo.com

Abstract: Romania, with a total population of 19,644,350 inhabitants (2017), shares about 4% of the population of the European Union. Population is both a factor of economic, administrative and socio-cultural activity, and a consumption factor. Currently, Romania has two major demographic issues: steady decrease of the population and increase of demographic unbalances caused by the ageing of the population. In this context, the authors of this article present, based on their own analysis, the main trends in the evolution of total population of Romania and particularly of the rural population that will directly influence the development of rural areas.

Key words: rural communities, development, demographics, depopulation, migration

INTRODUCTION

Rural areas face serious issues regarding population employment and infrastructure.

This is why we need to restructure rural economies based on specific resources and to adapt them to the demands of market economy in the context of globalisation to allow the growth of life quality of rural population and to stop migration. [1]

There are, in the Romanian rural area, valuable elements of **human potential** (labour force), **land potential** (agricultural land with high productive features allowing crop diversification and high yields; reserves and nature monuments, areas with extraordinary landscape values) and **heritage** (historical, cultural, architectural, and ethnographic) that are not properly valorised. [2]

Most economic resources (raw materials for industry, agricultural, forestry, tourism, and spa resources) are in the rural area and almost all primary production from agriculture can be raw materials for processing industries (agro-alimentary, light, pharmaceutical, cosmetic, chemical, energetic, etc.). [5]

Though we have all these valuable potential elements, major changes in the rural area in the last decade have changed all economic and social components: economic relationships, value system, individual behaviour, and basics of rural community life. Under these conditions, the rural area regressed in most rural regions and mainly in intermediary and disadvantaged areas. [4] Thus, except for peri-urban areas, Romanian rural areas are characterised by underdevelopment, which deepens the gap between the urban environment and the European rural area. [3]

Analysis of rural area allows the caption of the main issues in Romania's rural areas. Thus, demographically, there is still a decreasing trend of the population (negative natural growth and migration of the youth) and ongoing demographic unbalance (increasing aging population), which generates very high mortality rate in rural communities. [11]

Job offer lacks attractiveness for the youth so that incomes come mainly from agricultural activities, and precarious conditions of agriculture in small agricultural households ensure very low incomes.[6]

Non-agricultural activities are, as a rule, industrial activities linked to the exploitation of natural resources or activities of large foreign corporation that attract

mainly untrained labour force that they pay very low salaries: this is why very many young people migrate to other countries for ever or temporarily, in search of better paid jobs. [8]

In this context, we need to analyse labour resources available in rural areas to emphasise the measure in which rural economy could develop through the re-launching of the main economic activities specific to the area or through diversifying local economy taking into account financing funds through European Union policy programmes (where human resources play an important role for the community).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Analysis of Romanian rural area allowed the caption of the main issues confronting our rural areas.

One of the methods used to prepare the raw analysis material was to document the official databases provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INS – time series Tempo Online), Romania's Statistics Yearbook – collection, databases published by EUROSTAT, as well as different publications or complementary information retrieved from the Internet.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Actions that led to population decrease in rural areas

In order to make proper decisions, knowing the main demographics and actions determining population movement are important supports for decision-making factors in the development of viable sustainable development strategies for rural areas aiming at preventing history from repeating.

In Romania, there was concern for the development of different areas under centralised economy system. Starting with 1976, they developed a national plan (the Unique National State Plan) based on the enforcement of a central development plan. The goal was to reduce the development gaps between the different counties based on a single criterion, industrial development. This resulted in forced industrialisation of all counties without taking into account the resources available or the criteria of economic efficiency. In some areas, they diversified too much the types of industries while in other areas they developed localities depending on a single larger or smaller industrial unit belonging to heavy, chemical, or machine-building industry, while completely neglecting the environment.

Under these conditions, active population in agriculture decreased significantly, being attracted by industrial activities in urban areas.

Population migration from the rural to the urban areas caused severe changes in the village life and huge pressure on the towns and cities being industrialised.

The emphasis on the diminution of gaps at all costs plus the investment policy based mainly on quantity-oriented labour force and not on economic-efficiency and competitiveness-oriented one, was the main cause of the decrease of economic growth during the last decade of the 20th century.

During this period of forced industrialisation and economic growth, traditionally poor counties (Botoşani, Vaslui, Maramureş, Bistriţa-Năsăud, Mehedinţi, Dolj, Olt, Giurgiu, and Teleorman) continued to be affected by high population migration in the 1970s and 1980s.

Romania got to have a unique situation in the economic landscape of Central- and South-European countries. The negative effects of this economic policy were obvious in the 1970s, aggravated in the 1980s, and got worse in the 1990s. The negative consequences are still present nowadays when almost all counties face economic issues, particularly in the rural areas.

Changes in the country's economy and economic decline after 1989 made the solution to these problems even more difficult to apply.

Table 1

Evolution of total and rural population of Romania

Year	Total population	Rural population
	thousands of people	thousands of people
1948	15,843	12,159
1956	17,489	12,015
1966	19,103	11,797
1977	21,560	12,164
1990	23,207	10,598
1995	22,681	10,224
1999	22,458	10,155
2000	22,435	10,190
2001	22,408	10,164
2002	21,795	10,186
2003	21,733	10,133
2004	21,673	9,778
2005	21,624	9,744
2010	21,431	9,632
2016	19,638	9,129

Source: our own processing of Anuarul statistic al României, colecție 1990-2017, INS, Recensemintele populației 1948-1977 [12]

According to the data in Figure 1, Romania's population decreased significantly following the political movements after 1989: from over 23,000,000 in 1990 to 19,630,000 on January 1, 2017.

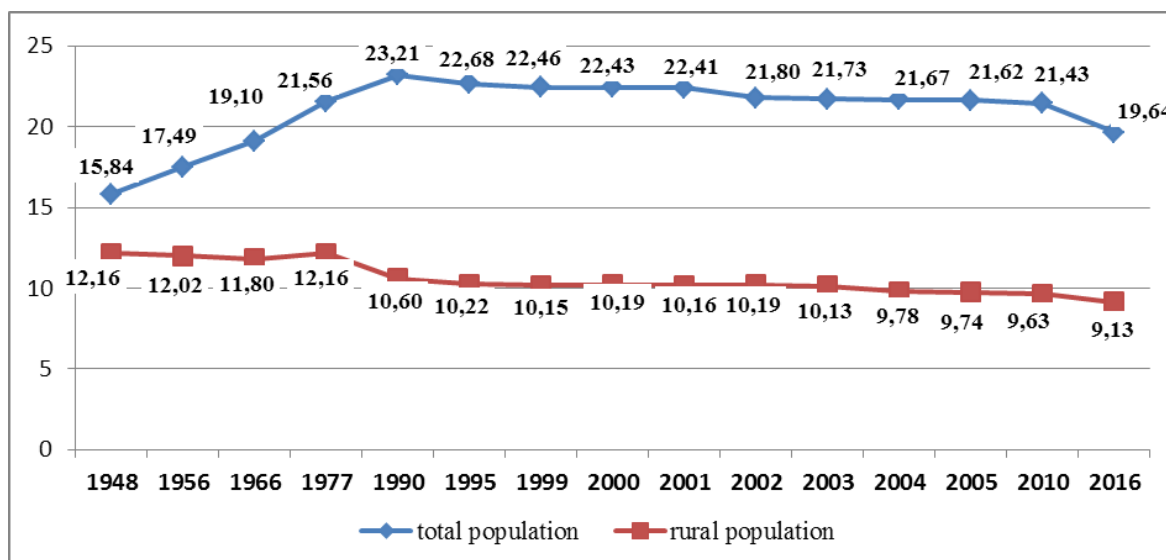


Figure 1. Evolution of total and rural population of Romania (thousands of people)

The worrying problem is that labour resource decrease significantly – both civil active population and civil population employed (Figure 2).

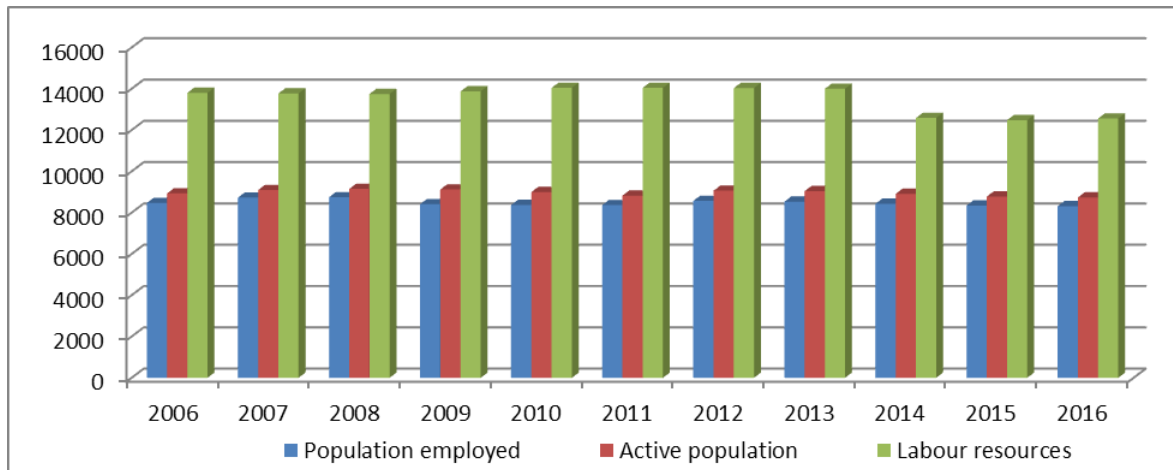


Figure 2. Evolution of labour resources, active population and employed population in Romania

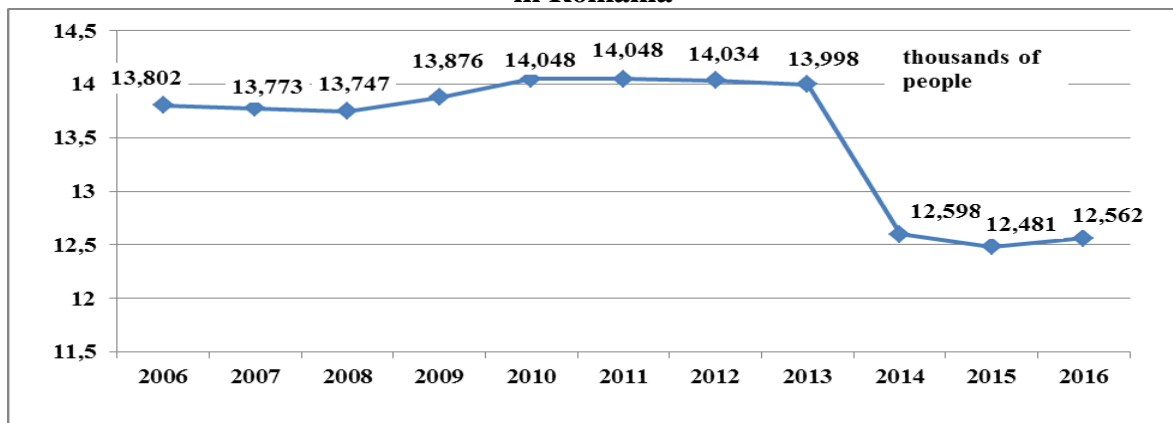


Figure 3. Evolution of labour resources in Romania

Comparing the main indicators characterising civil labour force depending on share of economic activity in 2017 to those in 2011, 2006, figures show:

-thousands of people-

Total population 19,638/ 21,414/21,584	
Labour resources 12,562/ 14,048/13,802 (Population aged 15+)	
Active population 8,736/ 9.810/10041	
Population employed 8,317/ 9.069/9313	
Registered unemployed people (BIM) 418/741	
People paid salaries 5,224 /6,157/9,321	Other categories

Figure 4. Distribution of population depending on share of economic activity (2017/2011/2006)

Source: our own processing of tempo-online[16]

Civil population was, on January 1, 2017, 8,735,800 people, i.e. 44.5% of resident population. Women shared less than men of civil active population: 45.4% women and 54.6% men. Of active people, employed women shared 95.6% and 4.4% were unemployed. Of the total civil active population, employed people shared 95.2%.

Employment rate per age category (15-64 years) was 63.9%, more than in 2011 (61.6%). Employment rate was also higher in men (71.8%) than in women (55.8%). In 2011, employment rates were lower (69.7% in men and 53.3% in women).

Analysis of residence environments shows that employment rate was higher in the urban environment (64.8%) than in the **rural environment (62.7%)**. Employment rate in the youth (15-24 years) was 24.5% (22.3% in 2016), while that of older people (55-64 years) was 44.5% (42.8% in 2016).

To note that the highest employment rate in people able to work was in higher education graduates (87.9%), while there were 67.5% of the people with medium level of education and only 42.5% of the people with lower education.

Data show that unemployment affected more graduates from elementary and medium education (6.8% and 5.1%, respectively). Unemployment in higher education people was only 2.4%.

Long-term unemployment rate (unemployed people for over one year) was 2.0%, and long-term unemployment incidence (share of people unemployed for over one year of total unemployed people) was 41.4%.

In young people (15-24 years), long-term unemployment (unemployed for over six months) was 11.1%, about five times more than the mean, while long-term unemployment incidence among the youth was 60.4%. This is one reason why the young people leave Romania and go work abroad.

Trends in population evolution

Data published by the National Institute of Statistics show that in 2017 Romania's population decreased dramatically: in January 2017, it lost 13,704 inhabitants, i.e. the equivalent of four medium communes because of the increase of the death rate. For instance, in January 2016, the negative natural growth was only 7,757 people. As for birth rate, in January 2017 15,096 children were born, i.e. 615 (4%) less than in January 2016, and 28,800 people died, i.e. 5,332 more (22.7%).

Infant death rate is also worrying: it grew significantly (with 31.0%) in January 2017, when there were 160 infant deaths compared to 122 infant deaths in January 2016. According to international statistics, Romania has the highest infant death rate in the European Union.

In 2016, Romania's population decreased with 66,718 inhabitants because of demographic decrease. Overall, in Romania, 189,783 children were born in 2016, i.e. 11,240 less than in 2015, while the number of deaths decreased with 5,196 (2%) to 256,501. As for the natural growth of the population, it was a negative one in 2016 (10% more than in 2015). In numbers, 201,023 children were born in 2015 in Romania, and the number of deaths was 261,697 according to the National Institute of Statistics. Under these conditions, specialists in the field estimate a deeper demographic decline in the decades to come. According to a report of the United Nations Organisation published in 2015, Romania's population will reach 14,500,000 inhabitants in 2050.

CONCLUSIONS

The diagnosis analysis of the rural area shows that demographics is the main development potential factor. Since Romania's population is more rural than other E.U. member states, we believe we need to do more for rural areas by taking into account specific economic activities, resources available, and human resources available.

In this context, keeping in the rural area as many young people as possible could be decisive for the revival of the rural area, for its economic diversification, for the tempering of demographic unbalance particularly in areas with dysfunctionalities. Thus, the

efficiency of the policy of rural development could reflect in the establishment of this segment of the population in accordance with natural, economic and social possibilities of each area.

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