

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF THE WEST REGION

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**Abstract.** *The West Development Region of Romania is distinguished by a favorable geostrategic position on the border with Hungary and Serbia, a high degree of urbanization, a well-developed industrial sector (especially in the automotive and IT fields in Timiș County), a relatively modern road and railway infrastructure, but also by internal economic disparities. In this paper, the authors carry out a comprehensive socio-economic analysis of the West Development Region of Romania, by investigating the administrative-territorial organization, the natural setting, the demographic, economic and infrastructural characteristics. The purpose of the research is to highlight the specific features and challenges of this region in the context of balanced regional development. The methodology used consisted of comparative analysis and statistical interpretation of data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, of time series (2014–2024) and of relevant programmatic documents, supplemented by own graphical and tabular processing. The research results show that the West Region, although it has a relatively small area (13.4% of the national territory), is distinguished by an important natural diversity and a dynamic regional economy. Timiș County plays a central role, being the most developed from an economic and demographic point of view. The region recorded a doubling of GDP between 2014 and 2022 and has a GDP/capita above the national average. However, population dynamics indicate a sharp demographic decline and low density, especially in mountainous counties. Transport infrastructure is developed in the plains but remains deficient in the mountainous areas.*

**Keywords:** *regional development, regional economy, demography*

### INTRODUCTION

The current economic context requires a reformulation of the concept of "development", because the economic component has become insufficient in justifying economic policy measures. Also, even if development depends mainly on the economy of each country, international effects are also felt in states with a high degree of industrialization [1,12].

From an economic point of view, development is described as the ability of a national economy to produce and maintain an annual growth of at least 5-7% of the main macroeconomic indicator, Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Per capita income or Gross National Product (GNP) per capita, is another important macroeconomic indicator, which shows the extent to which the growth rate of GNP is exceeded by the growth rate of population [7]. This theoretical approach led, in practice, to the promotion of measures to stimulate the growth of the secondary and tertiary sectors, to the detriment of the primary sector, thus necessitating a redefinition of economic development, which would also integrate the social component [3,11].

In this context, Jula et al. (1999) define "development as a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions, aiming at accelerating economic growth, reducing inequality and eradicating poverty" [2, 8,9].

Thus, with the overall evolution of human society, especially in the current context of accelerated globalization, theoretical and practical meanings have diversified, making it necessary to gradually integrate, in addition to the economic aspect, other important dimensions of life: social, cultural, environmental and others. In this sense, development is seen as a process of an economy moving through several stages from the traditional/primary one – based on agriculture, to an advanced development – in which the service sector and technology become the main engines of the economy, replacing the traditional economy, without causing substantial environmental disruption [3,5].

Regional development is a complex process that supports each region in defining its own path of evolution, by capitalizing on local resources and potential, with the aim of reducing inequalities between territories and improving the quality of life of its inhabitants [4,15]. This involves investments in infrastructure, support for businesses, job creation and the promotion of sustainability [6,10].

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology used consisted of comparative analysis and statistical interpretation of data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, of time series (2014–2024) and of relevant programmatic documents, supplemented by own graphical and tabular processing.

### REASERCH RESULTS

**General characteristics** of the West Development Region. The West Development Region is located in the western part of Romania and is one of the eight development regions of the country. It borders the North-West Region (Bihar County) to the north, the Central Region (Alba and Sibiu Counties) to the east, Hungary (Timiș and Arad Counties) to the west, Serbia (Timiș and Caraș-Severin Counties) to the southwest and the South-West Oltenia Region (Mehedinți County) to the south (ADR Vest) [13].

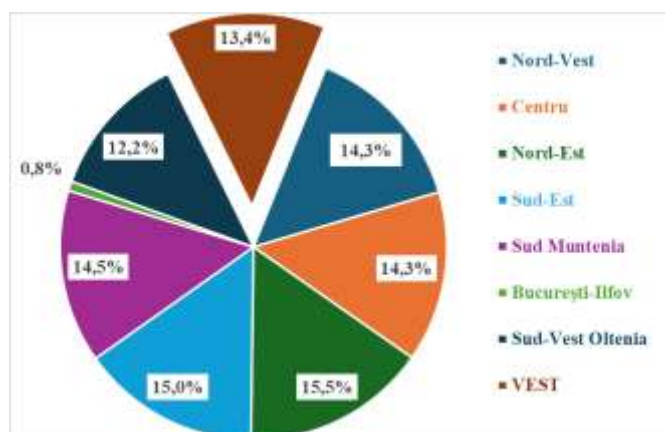
The West Region is composed of four counties: Timiș, Arad, Caraș-Severin and Hunedoara (figure 1).



**Figure 1. The West Region**

*Source: own processing*

The area of the West Region is 32,042 km<sup>2</sup> and holds 13.4% of the country's area, being the third smallest development region in Romania, in terms of area, after the Bucharest-Ilfov Region and the South-West Oltenia Region (figure 2, table 1).



**Figure 2. Share of the West Development Region in the total area of Romania**

Source: own processing

**Table 1.**

**Current administrative-territorial organization of the WEST Region, 2023**

Specification	Total area - km <sup>2</sup>	Population*	Cities and municipalities	of which: municipalities	Communes	Villages
	km <sup>2</sup>	pers.	No.			
<b>West Region</b>	<b>32042</b>	<b>1949859</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>1328</b>
Arad	7746	459088	10	1	68	270
Caraș - Severin	8532	299190	8	2	69	288
Hunedoara	7073	428299	14	7	55	457
Timiș	8691	763282	10	2	89	313

Note: \*population is as of July 1, 2024

Source: Own processing after [14]

In the West Region, the distribution of area by counties is as follows:

- Timiș County is the largest county in the region, with an area of 8,691 km<sup>2</sup>, covering 27.1% of the region's area. It represents an important economic and logistical center, its spatial advantage favoring industrial and agricultural development;
- Caraș-Severin County is the second largest, with an area of 8,532 km<sup>2</sup> and covering 26.6% of the region's area. Although it is large in size, it has a lower population density, being dominated by a mountainous terrain (Banat Mountains);
- Arad County has an area of 7,746 km<sup>2</sup>, which represents 24.2% of the region's area. It also benefits from a strategic positioning on the border with Hungary, with a balance between plains and hills;
- Hunedoara County is the smallest in area in the region, with 7,073 km<sup>2</sup>, i.e. 22.1% of the region's area. It has a pronounced mountainous character, with tourist potential and natural resources, but a smaller usable space compared to other counties.

**Geographical and natural features.** The relief of the West region is varied and includes three main forms: plains, hills and hills, and mountains. The plain extends mainly in Timiș and Arad counties, being part of the Western Plain. It is an area with fertile soils, favorable for intensive agriculture. The hills and hills are found in the central part of the region and represent a transitional area between plains and mountains, with undulating landscapes and mixed land uses. The mountains are located in Caraș-Severin and Hunedoara counties, including the Banat Mountains, Poiana Ruscă and Retezat. They offer a rugged relief, rich in forests, mineral resources and with great potential for mountain tourism. This diversity of relief influences the economy, environment and way of life in the region.

The climate is temperate continental, with sub-Mediterranean influences in the southwest (Caraș-Severin). Summers are warm and winters are moderate, milder in the lowlands and harsher in the mountains. Precipitation is moderate, higher in the mountains. The important rivers in the region are: the Mureș River which crosses Arad and Hunedoara counties, Timiș and Bega in Timiș County, as well as the Cerna and Nera rivers in Caraș-Severin County.

The population of the region on July 1, 2024 was 1,949,859 people, representing 8.9% of the total population, which makes the West Region in last place among the regions of the country (figure 3), and the population density is 60.8 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, being the lowest regional density in Romania.

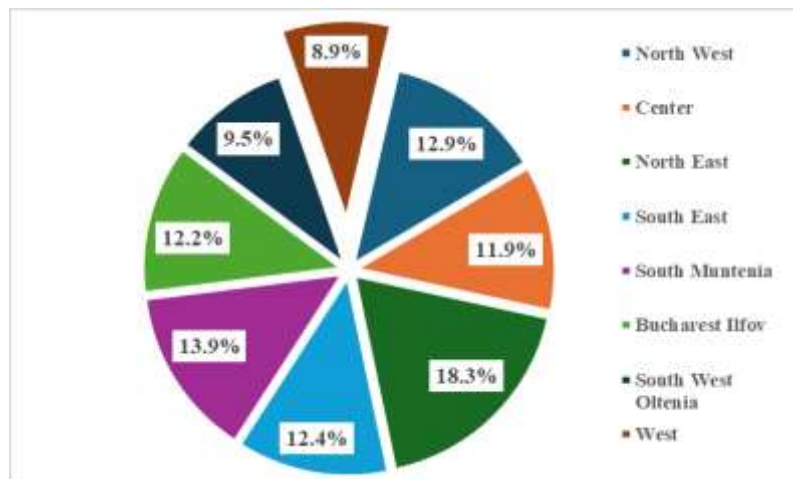


Figure 3. Population distribution by regions in Romania

The population distribution in the West Region is uneven, with a major concentration pole in Timiș County (9,763,282 people), followed by two counties with medium populations, Arad (459,088 people) and Hunedoara (428,299 people), and a significantly smaller county in terms of population, the county with only 9,029 people. This structure reflects both the existing intra-regional differences and internal migration to more developed counties, especially Timiș County (figure 4).

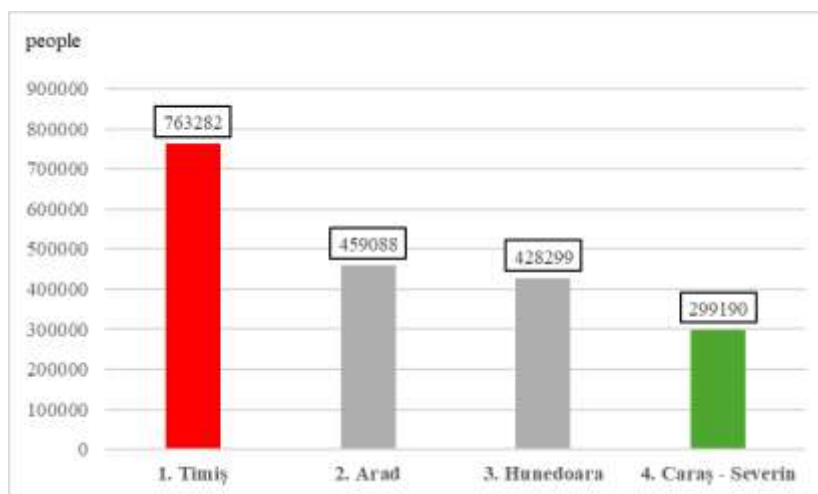
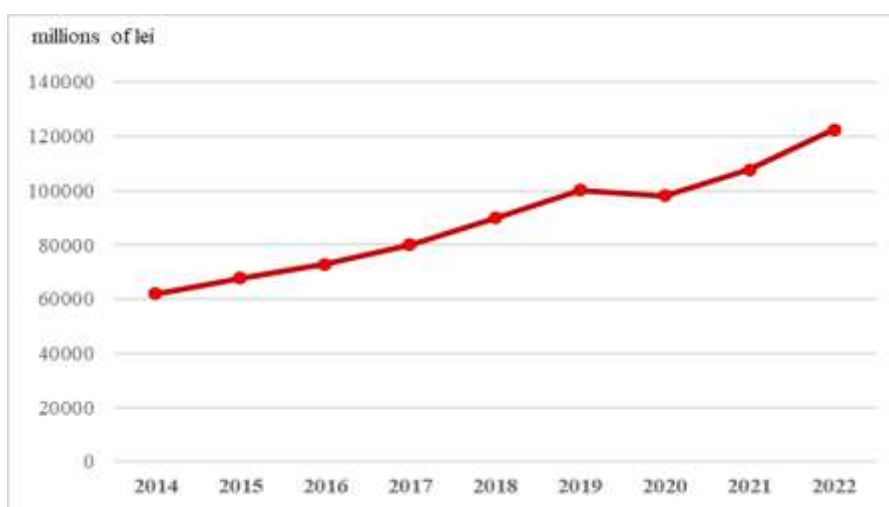


Figure 4. Population distribution by county in the West Region

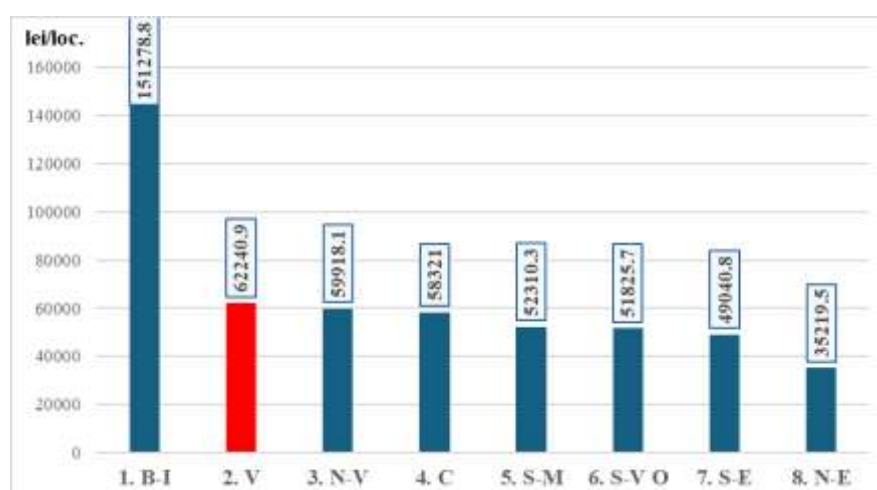
**Economic** characteristics. In 2014, the GDP of the West Region was 62,028 million lei. By 2022, it had increased to 122,477.3 million lei, almost double the amount at the beginning of the period (figure 5).



**Figure 5. GDP evolution, West Region**

The growth was constant every year, with a sharp pace between 2017 and 2019. In 2020, a slight decrease compared to 2019 is observed, probably caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. After 2020, the GDP returned to an upward trend, reaching a peak in 2022. The West Region has contributed significantly to the GDP of Macroregion 4 and to national economic growth.

The West Region is one of the most developed regions in Romania, after Bucharest-Ilfov, with a GDP per capita of 62,240.9 lei (figure 6).



**Figure 6. GDP per capita by development regions, 2022**

Source: own processing

The West Development Region of Romania is distinguished by an advantageous geostrategic position and a dynamic regional economy, characterized by a significant increase in Gross Domestic Product and a competitive industrial sector, especially in Timiș County. The diversified economic structure, comprising high-performance agriculture in the plains, modern industries and expanding services, ensures the region an important role in the national economic landscape.

## CONCLUSIONS

The West Development Region stands out for its dynamic and diversified regional economy, with a doubling of GDP between 2014 and 2022 and a GDP/capita above the national average, due to the central role of Timiș County in industry, IT and high-performance agriculture.

Intra-regional disparities, however, remain significant, reflected in the low population density, the sharp demographic decline in mountainous areas (Hunedoara and Caraș-Severin) and the deficient infrastructure in these areas, compared to the well-developed plain areas.

The geostrategic position on the border with Hungary and Serbia, as well as the natural and economic diversity, give the region a high development potential, but achieving balanced development requires additional investments in infrastructure, reducing territorial imbalances and sustainable valorization of local resources.

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