

**RURAL POPULATION IN ROMANIA. TRAITS AND EVOLUTION:
2010-2020.**

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Abstract

In the context of a process of expanding urbanization, societies tend to reflect more on the role that rural space, including the rural population, will play in the future. To what extent will the rural area maintain its fundamental functions? To what extent will the rural population adapt to change and find its place in a world with a growing urban character?

Things are even more complex in the case of Romania, for a long time our country being an agricultural one. Even at the present time, Romania disposes of a generous rural area and of a considerable rural population. Our study aims to capture the evolution of the rural population in the last decade, respectively to identify whether, compared to previous periods, the same trends have been maintained, and if there have been changes, to capture what those were.

Keywords: *rural population, active population, employment rate, unemployment.*

JEL classification: *Q15*

1. Introduction

The present society is facing unprecedented challenges, the world of the future shaping itself as one of advanced technologies and of profound transformations, making vital the need for rapid adaptation. Robotization, digitalization, artificial intelligence are the results of remarkable advances in

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science, especially the fourth industrial revolution marking on today's society and economy.

The more advanced the steps related to the construction of a city of the future, the more relevant the questions regarding the role of the rural space in this new context. Defined as having “an inner or coast area that includes villages and small towns, where most of the land is used for: agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and fishing; the economic and cultural activities of the inhabitants of such areas (handicraft, industry, services etc.); the organization of non-urban areas for leisure and entertainment (or natural reservations); other use purposes” (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe), the rural area is the holder of vast resources, both in terms of its population and the territory at its disposal.

As the urbanization process progresses, with population growth involving, among other things, the expansion of urban areas, both globally and in the European Union, rural areas are experiencing a relative decline in their share. Even if it is a sensitive one, based on its constancy it becomes problematic, the downward trend risking to perpetuate itself.

In terms of population, about 43.8% of the total registered population worldwide is a rural population. The European Union is under-represented, with only a quarter of the EU's rural population. A closer look at the statistics confirms the downward trend mentioned above, only in 2020 being recorded a decrease of about 1% compared to the previous year (1.12% worldwide, 1.18% in the European Union). In fact, according to estimates, by 2030, the rural population will account for only 30% of the total global population.

Table 1: Rural population: Romania, European Union, World.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Romania	46.1	46.1	46.0	45.9	45.8
European Union	25.9	25.7	25.5	25.3	25.0
World	45.6	45.2	44.7	44.3	43.8

Source: World Development Indicators. The World Bank

Even more alarming data on rural decline are provided by Eurostat, with projections indicating a general contraction of the rural population in the

European Union. Thus, 20 of the Member States will be affected in the period 2019-2030 by decreases between - 43.5% (Lithuania) and - 0.6% (Austria), the most pronounced declines being expected to occur in the case of Latvia (-37.6%), Bulgaria (-26.8%), Romania (-25%) and Croatia (-23.3%). However, the rural population will also register some increases, a situation valid in countries such as: Ireland (+ 24.5%), Sweden (+ 10.9%), Denmark (+ 1.2%) and Belgium (1%) (Eurostat, Population projections : urban growth, rural decline).

The considerable potential of the rural area is nourished not only by its population, but also by the surface it encompasses. Thus, in the European Union alone, rural areas accounted for over 83% of the total area in 2018, comprising 341 million hectares, with urban areas accounting for 17% of the total, namely 70 million hectares (EU rural areas in numbers, European Commission).

2. Sections

As we already mention, the declining trend of the rural population is also a characteristic of Romania, this tendency complementing other structural problems of the local countryside, generated mainly by the aging of the village, but also by extreme poverty and lack of perspective.

The analysis of the rural evolution in the period 2010-2019 indicates an obvious decline in it, the decrease in the number of rural inhabitants overlapping, to a large extent, over the general contraction of the demographic element registered in Romania in all these years.

From a numerical point of view, the year 2019 illustrates a decrease of 4.3% in the number of rural inhabitants, compared to 2010 (8,916,090 rural inhabitants in 2019, compared to 9,324,629 rural inhabitants in 2010), respectively of 12.5% compared to the year 2000 (when the rural population counted 10,190,607 people).

As a representation on average, the rural population constituted in 2019 46% of the total, the decrease compared to 2010 being insignificant (of 0.1%), a bigger difference (of 0.6%) resulting from the reporting to the year 2000. Even if the data do not illustrate a sharp decline, the fact that the trend continues year after year and for decades has the effect of perpetuating the problem of rural depopulation and exacerbating it.

Table 2: Evolution of the population, the average.

Year	Number of people (total)	Number of people		Representation of the percentage by area	
		Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
2010	20246798	10922169	9324629	53,9	46,1
2011	20147657	10878099	9269558	54,0	46,0
2012	20060182	10823218	9236964	54,0	46,0
2013	19988694	10772678	9216016	53,9	46,1
2014	19916451	10728929	9187522	53,9	46,1
2015	19822250	10671868	9150382	53,8	46,2
2016	19706529	10585664	9120865	53,7	46,3
2017	19588146	10516768	9071378	53,7	46,3
2018	19476713	10481512	8995201	53,8	46,2
2019	19370448	10454358	8916090	54,0	46,0

Source: The Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 2020

One of the factors that plays a decisive role in rural depopulation is the negative demographic increase, the Romanian village, far from being a generator of life, being not only much more deserted, but also much older. If in 2010 the natural increase in rural areas was - 47,743, with a rate of - 4.9, the decrease continued to accentuate, reaching in 2019 -52,153 and - 5.8 as rate (in 2000 the increase being of - 21,117, - 2.1 as a rate). We can observe the existing differences in this aspect between the urban and rural environment, the last years, however, recording a certain blurring of them.

Table 3: Natural movement of the population, the average.

Year	Natural growth			
	Urban	Rural	Rate	Rate
2010	219	-47743	-	-4,9
2011	-7981	-47216	-0,6	-4,9
2012	-20168	-52834	-1,9	-5,8
2013	-12126	-46750	-1,1	-5,0
2014	-8947	-47278	-0,8	-5,1
2015	-10673	-49774	-1,0	-5,4
2016	-11155	-46051	-1,0	-5,0

2017	-18389	-52736	-1,8	-5,8
2018	-12372	-48795	-1,2	-5,4
2019	-21477	-52153	-2,0	-5,8

Source: The Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 2020

If so far, the analysed data have shown decreases of all the indicators studied, in terms of life expectancy, the figures indicate increases. If in 2010 life expectancy was 73.90 years, in 2019 it reaches 75.99 years. Even if the urban-rural gap manifests itself again, we cannot fail to notice that life expectancy has also increased among the rural population, from 72.20 years in 2010 to 74.30 years in 2019 (in 2000 it was 69.53).

Table 4: Life expectancy, the average.

Year	Total	Urban	Rural
2010	73,90	75,26	72,20
2011	74,20	75,50	72,55
2012	74,69	75,94	73,13
2013	75,15	76,36	73,65
2014	75,41	76,60	73,91
2015	75,35	76,58	73,81
2016	75,56	76,79	74,03
2017	75,73	76,98	74,18
2018	75,85	77,12	74,24
2019	75,99	77,32	74,30

Source: The Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 2020

A number of changes have taken place in relation to the degree of representation of the rural on the labour market. The study of the data provided by INS shows the countryside as an essential provider of labour for the Romanian economy, for a long time even the main one.

If in 2010 the rural population registered an active population of 4,427 thou persons, (44.4% of the total active population), the following years coincided with gradual decreases in numerical terms, this trend being valid for the whole active population. Despite the decrease in the number of active

people in rural areas, in 2019 the 4,082 active people registered here represented 45% of the total active population.

Compared to the employed population, in 2019 the employed population in rural areas was 3,897 thou persons, constituting 44.8% of the total employed population (compared to 4,208 thou persons in 2010, 45.5%).

As for unemployment, the rural population is also affected by this phenomenon, in 2010 the unemployed from rural areas represented 219 thou persons, more precisely 30.2% of the total unemployed. In the following years, however, we can see that the urban-rural gap gradually decreasing in terms of the number of unemployed, in 2017 being practically witnesses of a numerical equalization, then even of the reversal of the trend. As a result of this evolution, the year 2019 recorded a number of 185 thou persons unemployed (52.4%).

Table 5: Population, by participation in economic activity, the average.

Year	Active population			Employment			Unemployment		
	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
2010	9965	5538	4427	9240	5032	4208	725	506	219
2017	9120	4994	4126	8671	4769	3902	449	225	224
2018	9096	4955	4114	8689	4769	3920	380	186	194
2019	9033	4951	4082	8680	4783	3897	353	168	185

Source: The Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 2020

In relation to the activity rate and the employment rate, the changes occurred are sensitive. The year 2010 indicates a total activity rate of 63.6%, ahead of the rural activity rate, calculated at 64.4%. In 2019, we observe the increase of the total activity rate, the rural activity rate, although following in its turn a positive trend, still being below the total one. The same is valid for the employment rate (65.8% of the total rate, 64.2% in rural areas in 2019, compared to 2010: 58.8% of the total employment rate, 60.1% in rural areas).

Regarding the unemployment rate, after 2010, when the total rate was 7.3%, the rural having an index below average, respectively 5%, the phenomenon of unemployment decreased. At the same time, however, we are witnessing an increase in the share of the phenomenon among the rural

population, the unemployment rate in rural areas reaching 4.5% in 2019, while the total unemployment rate was only 3.9%.

Table 6: Activity rate, employment rate, unemployment rate, the average.

Year	Activity rate			Employment rate			Unemployment rate		
	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
2010	63,6	63,1	64,4	58,8	57,3	60,1	7,3	9,1	5,0
2018	67,8	68,4	66,9	64,8	65,8	63,5	4,2	3,8	4,7
2019	68,6	69,5	67,5	65,8	67,1	64,2	3,9	3,4	4,5

The information on the professional status of the population employed in agriculture is also very interesting. Compared to 2010, in 2019 we are witnessing a doubling of the persons with the status of employee (from 5.2% to 10.09%), significant increases being recorded also regarding the share of persons with the status of employer (from 0,1% to 0.5%) and self-employed workers (from 52.9% to 53.9%). This while the share of unpaid family workers decreased from 41.6% to 34.7%.

Table 7: The structure of employment in agriculture, by professional status.

Year	Total employment in agriculture	Professional status (%)			
		Employee	Employer	Self-employed	Unpaid family member
2000	3570	5,3	-	48,8	45,9
2010	2780	5,2	0,1	52,9	41,6
2019	1844	10,09	0,5	53,9	34,7

Source: The Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 2020

3. Conclusions

Once with the technological development and the changes occurred at all levels, the extension of the urbanization process is irreversible, the urban gaining more and more ground in front of the rural.

The new trends will not threaten the rural space with extinction, especially since it, through its functions, is vital to society, but we will certainly witness the reconfiguration of the countryside.

In this respect, the rural space needs strategies in order to be prepared to change and to develop new capacities for facing the future challenges.

The Romanian rural population will be also subject to change, Romanian rural space already suffering from severe issues such as: decline, depopulation, aging, poverty and lack of perspectives.

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