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TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT RURAL EDUCATION

MARIOARA RUSU[1]

Abstract: *In a globalized, knowledge-based economy, education and training is of great importance for increasing economic and social progress: an adequately trained workforce can face competition in terms of productivity, quality and innovation. According to Eurostat, Romania allocates less money to education than most European Union countries. These allocations reflect the low level of attention paid to the education and training system. This paper analyses the situation and trends that have been registered in the Romanian education system in the EU's post-accession period. The set of indicators has been selected to cover both education levels and the types of predominantly rural, intermediate and predominantly urban regions. The following dimensions were considered: participation in education, the human and material resources involved and, where possible, the results.*

Key words: *education, rural regions, Romania*

JEL Classification: *I21, I29, R10*

INTRODUCTION

In a globalized, knowledge-based economy, education and training are of great importance for economic and social progress. Studies conducted in recent years, focusing on education and vocational training, show that there is a strong correlation between the low level of education and the economic and social problems faced by Romania (Apostu et al., 2015; WB, 2010; Fartuşnic, 2014 OECD, 2017). Education and training are two of the most powerful weapons in the fight against poverty (FAO, 2003).

Romania, as a Member State of the European Union (EU), has rallied to the Europe 2020[2] Strategy and has developed five national strategies, which are also found in the Law on Education and which aim at: i) reducing the phenomenon of early school leaving; ii) increasing the quality of tertiary education; iii) development of lifelong learning; and iv) investing in the infrastructure of educational institutions with the highest exposure to poverty. Although, over the years, were developed several strategies, and many governments have declared education a national priority, the main feature of the Romanian education system is a chronic under-financing (for example, in 2015, Romania has spent 2% of GDP value much lower than the EU28 average, 4.9% respectively). The 2011 Education Law set a target of 6% of GDP for public spending on education. This provision has not materialized so far, affecting mainly schools in rural areas.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The hypothesis on which this paper is that education and training are important factors in the development of a competitive knowledge-based economy, and the investments made in this field contribute to the stimulation of economic growth and, implicitly, to the growth of rural well-being. The analysis presented in this paper is based on data from different statistical and documentary sources (National Institute of Statistics -NIS, Eurostat, Ministry of National Education -MNE, etc.). The analysis was based on the defined rural-urban typology at NUTS3 level in the EU. It comprises three types of regions: *predominantly urban regions* (Bucharest and Ilfov County), *intermediate regions* (counties: Arges, Bacău, Bihor, Braşov, Brăila, Cluj, Constanţa, Dolj, Galati, Hunedoara, Iasi, Neamt, Prahova, Timiş), *predominantly rural regions* (counties: Alba, Arad, Bistrita-Nasaud, Botosani, Buzau, Calarasi, Caras-Severin, Covasna, Dambovita, Giurgiu, Gorj, Harghita, Ialomita, Maramures, Mehedinti, Mures, Olt, Satu Mare, Sălaj , Suceava, Teleorman, Tulcea, Vâlcea, Vaslui, Vrancea). Data availability, lack of relevant variables, incomplete data

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[2] Employment Strategy for 2010-2020

series, limitations on classification of data by type of region, etc. have narrowed the aim of analysis we have proposed.

RESULTS AND DISCUTIONS

In Romanian society, it is well known that the school has regressed constantly in recent years, a decline that has been much more pronounced in the case of rural communities: children no longer attend school, many schools in the rural area have been closed, teachers are poorly trained, etc. The analysis carried out in this paper reveals the main difficulties and problems related to participation in education, human and material resources and, where possible, results.

In Romania, total school population comprises about 3.6 million pupils and students, of which 13.31% are located in predominantly urban regions, 47.44% in intermediate regions and 39.25% in predominantly rural. As regards their distribution on types of education, it can be noticed that predominantly urban and intermediate regions have relatively close proportions (40-45%). Only in the case of university education the situation is different: the students are placed into the intermediate regions and especially in the predominantly urban ones, the share of the students from the predominantly rural regions being very low (10.85%). Compared to 2006, the school population registered a decrease of 16.18%.

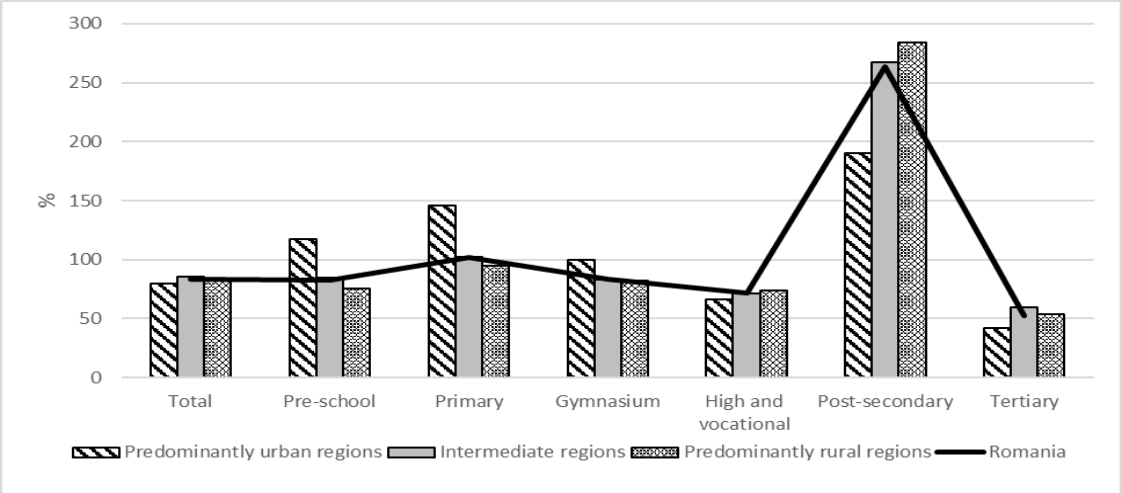

Figure 1. Evolution of school population by educational levels and types of regions (2015 vs. 2006)
Source: author's data processing after NIS, TempoOnline Database, 2017

By type of regions, a more pronounced decrease is observed for predominantly urban regions (20.15%) and close to the national average for predominantly rural regions (16.77%). In predominantly rural regions, with the exception of post-secondary education and foremen, there is an obvious decrease in the total school population in all forms of education - with the highest decreases in pre-primary, primary and secondary education. This state of affairs is primarily a direct effect of demographic trends (natality, migration, etc.).

The enrolment rate in all levels of education highlights the general level of participation in education of the population and has registered a low fluctuation trend between 71.23% and 75.20% at national level (2006 -2015 period). Predominantly rural regions have the lowest value for this indicator over the entire period, reflecting the reduced capacity of the education system in these regions to allow access to all levels of education, and in particular to higher education. Predominantly urban regions have a high gross enrolment rate, which generally indicates a high level of participation at all levels of education, particularly high school and university. In addition, in predominantly rural regions, if we take as a reference the pre-accession period, the trend is downward.

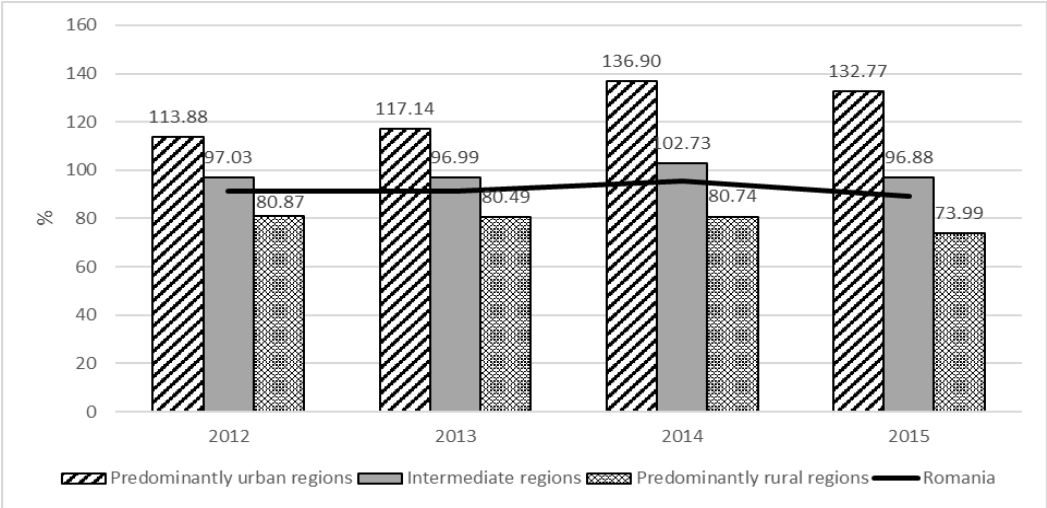

Figure 2. Evolution of the gross enrolment rate in all levels of education, by type of region
Source: author's data processing after NIS, TempoOnline Database, 2017

The situation of graduates of pre-university education records a similar course to that of the school population. Thus, in Romania, in 2014, there were 554,418 graduates, of which 14.63% were in predominantly urban regions, 46.82% in intermediate regions and 38.55% in predominantly rural regions. At national level and at the level of each type of region, compared to 2006, there was a decrease in the number of graduates, the most significant being in the predominantly rural regions (21.34%). Regardless of the type of the region it is noted the increase of the dropout rate as the level of training increases. However, the graduation rate is consistently higher in predominantly urban areas in primary and secondary education relative to predominantly rural and intermediate regions.

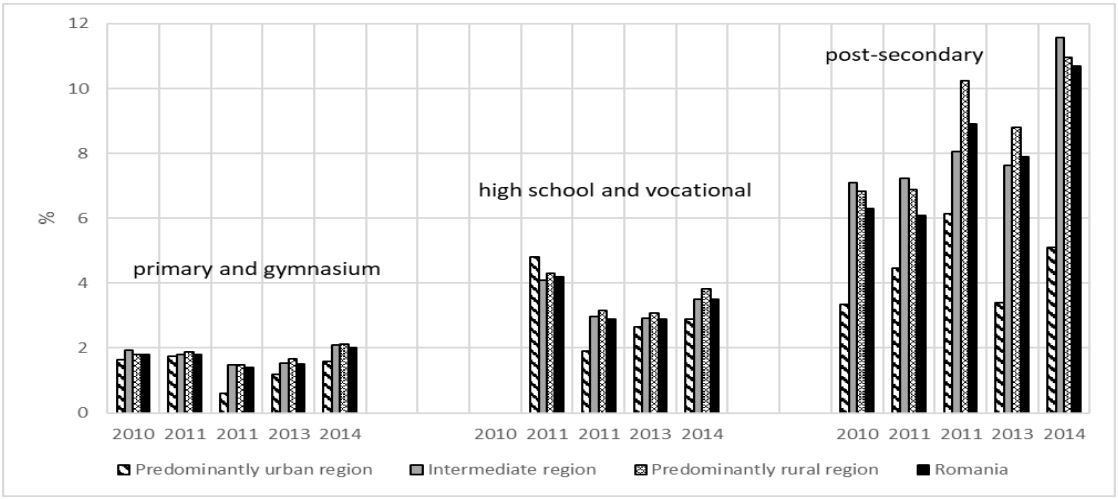

Figure 3. Evolution of school drop-out rate by educational levels and types of regions
Source: author's data processing after NIS, TempoOnline Database, 2017

The number of agricultural high school graduates (including agricultural, forestry, veterinary and agro-mountain high schools) was 4,891 in 2014, which represented 2.58% of the total number of high school graduates. Compared to the reference year 2006, the number of graduates of agricultural high schools represents only 68.13%. By type of region, the most significant decrease was recorded in predominantly rural regions (59.76%) followed by predominantly urban regions (56.04%). Reporting the number of graduates of high schools with agricultural profile to the total number of high school graduates by type of region, it is observed that over the whole analysed period in the predominantly rural regions their share was above the national average. For many students in predominantly rural regions, agricultural high schools were chosen because of regional specificity or in other cases was the only one option.

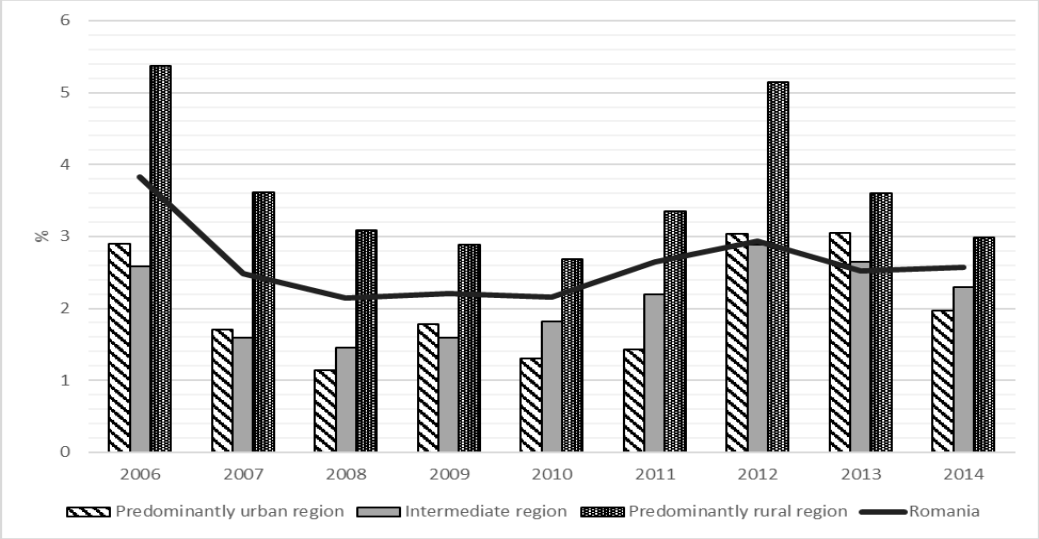

Figure 4. Evolution of the share of agricultural high school graduates
in total high school graduates, by type of region
Source: author's data processing after NIS, TempoOnline Database, 2017

The graduation degree in the baccalaureate exam of pupils who have completed high school education registered very low values during the investigated period. Thus, at national level, this weight ranged between 54.62% in 2010 and 62.32% in 2014. This increase should be correlated with the fact that many 12th grade students do not register anymore in the baccalaureate exam. This phenomenon has intensified in recent years as a result of the strict control measures implemented in the education system and the perception that the baccalaureate exam has a very high degree of difficulty. The baccalaureate success rate is higher than the average in predominantly urban and intermediate regions and is below the national average for predominantly rural regions with the lowest baccalaureate graduation rates throughout the analysed period.

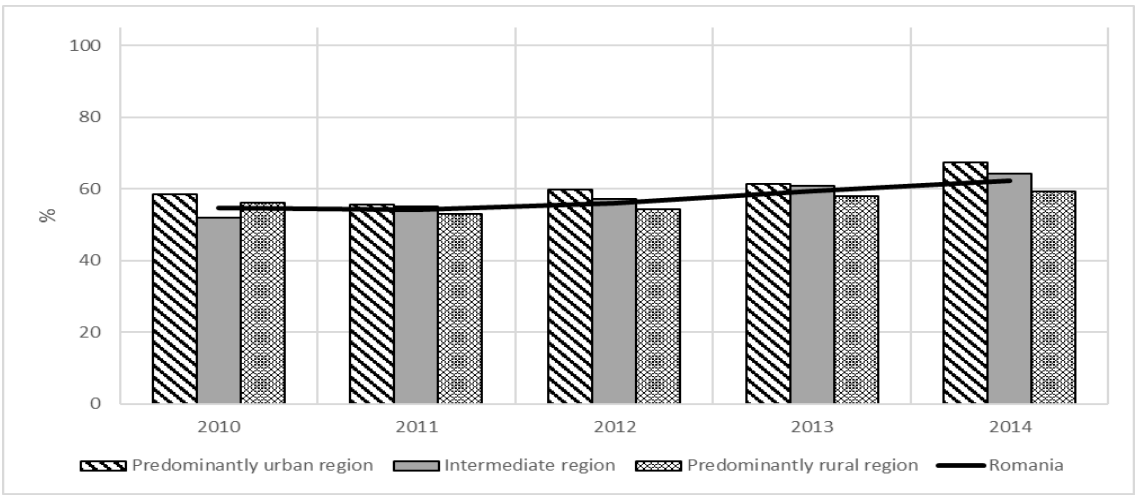

Figure 5. The share of graduates from baccalaureate, by type of region
Source: author's data processing after NIS, TempoOnline Database, 2017

Of the total number of pre-university education staff (210,498 teachers), 14.63% operate in predominantly urban regions, 46.82% in intermediate regions and 38.55% in predominantly rural. Between 2006 and 2015, their number decreased by 36,421 people. In predominantly rural regions, there is the largest drop in teaching staff. A significant contribution to this decline is brought to pre-primary, primary and secondary education. Predominantly urban regions have, in turn, lost the highest number of high school, vocational and foremen teachers.

The number of pupils on number of teacher's ratio in a school year is used to measure the level of human resources allocated in relation to the number of pupils. The value of the student /

teacher ratio to positively influence the quality of the learning process and must not be higher than the established official norms. The quality of teaching and learning is not only reflected by this indicator but must be considered in the context of differences in teacher education / training, pedagogical training, experience and status, teaching methods, available teaching materials, etc.

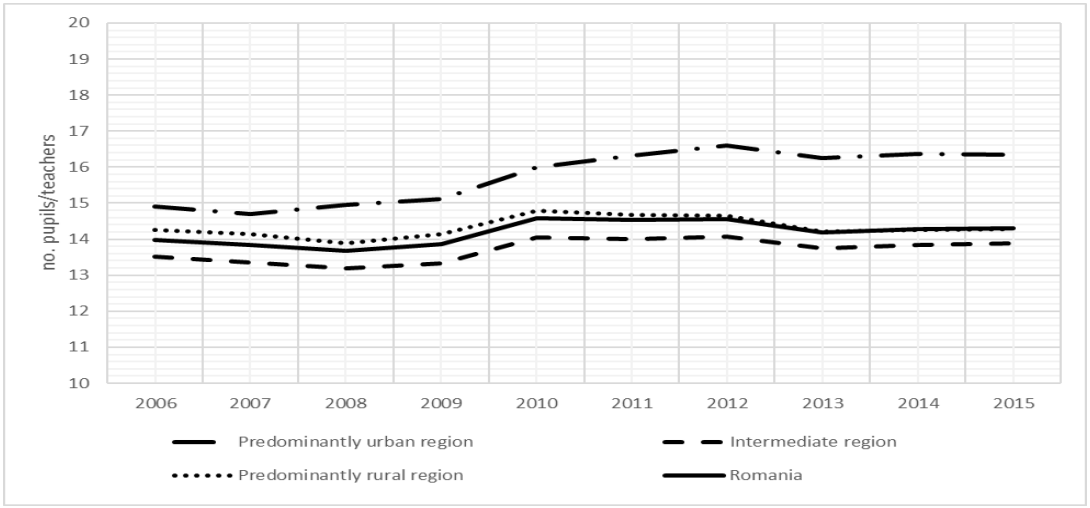

Figure 6. Evolution of the number of pupils on the teachers, by type of region
Source: author's data processing after NIS, TempoOnline Database, 2017

The educational infrastructure analysed from the perspective of two indicators - the number of laboratories per school unit and the number of pupils and students on a computer allows to appreciate the quality of the didactic process, from the perspective of providing the necessary material basis. Both indicators indicate that predominantly rural regions have a less developed educational infrastructure than the other types of regions. This situation leads to a lower level of training for young people in rural areas, a situation that affects the social and economic development of human capital but also social inclusion. Among the most important causes of this situation are the poor financing of the Romanian education system. Moreover, for predominantly rural regions, there is also a limited capacity of public administrations to access and manage European funds and investments.

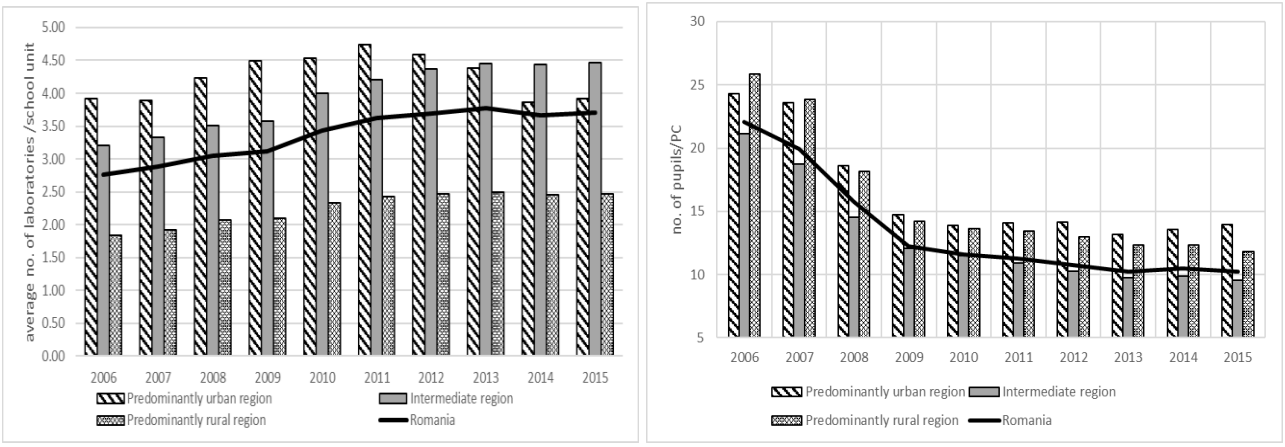

Figure 7. Evolution of the number of laboratories per school unit (left) and the evolution of the number of students on a PC (right), by type of region
Source: author's data processing after NIS, TempoOnline Database, 2017

CONCLUSIONS

Following the analysis, we can conclude that the predominantly rural regions are below the national average. Preparing a highly skilled rural labour force geared towards productivity, quality and innovation is more a desideratum than a reality. The lack of financial and human resources is

one of the main reasons for the situation in the poor education of the rural school population. The current education system faces not only numerical decreases but also high problems of efficiency, equity, quality and relevance to the knowledge economy (Stanef, 2013). Equal access to quality education of rural young people is the basis for inclusive development but, in Romania, many young people lack basic skills: according to the PISA (International Student Assessment Program) - almost half of Romanian pupils (40%) do not have the basic cognitive skills that they would need for productive employment (OECD, 2016).

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