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Diagnostic analysis regarding the quality of life in the rural environment in Romania

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DIAGNOSTIC ANALYSIS REGARDING THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *In Romania, at the level of residential environments there are gaps in terms of quality of life, these are reflected through socio-economic indicators. The degree of poverty is high in rural areas, determined by both economic and demographic, social and cultural factors. It is known that incomes are much lower in rural areas than in urban areas, which is evidenced by the increasing trends in the poverty rate in rural areas, both compared to urban areas and compared to the European average. All this leads to the accentuation of the discrepancies between the two residence environments, as well as the accentuation of the phenomenon of social exclusion. The paper aims to carry out a descriptive statistical analysis of the socio-demographic and economic aspects of the quality of life in the Romanian countryside. To carry out the study, the demographic, social and economic statistical indicators from the TEMPO Online database of the National Institute of Statistics (INS) were processed and interpreted.*

Keywords: *Romania, development, rural, urban,, quality of life.*

JEL classification: R11

INTRODUCTION

Quality of life is an evaluative concept aimed at the living conditions of the population (standard of living, access to education and culture, medical care, living conditions, social protection, the environment, etc.), the population's satisfaction with the level livelihood, as well as the public policies that propose its improvement. (Iftimoaei, 2021)

The concept of quality of life is also present in rural development policies, which are based on the following principles: "preserving the identity and cultural values of the rural community" and "orienting rural policy towards improving the quality of life". (Palicica & Palicica, 2005)

Compared to other countries in the European Union, in Romania almost half of the total population lives in rural areas. The rural area is characterized by a large number of small households, aging population, low productivity, lack of diversification of economic activity, the main activity being agriculture, a low level of training of the population, and a low standard of living. In this context, population migration to cities or other countries, with the aim of looking for a job, becoming a real problem for the Romanian countryside. (Popescu, 2013; Dumitru et al., 2021)

In Romania, most rural areas are going through a demographic crisis much more pronounced than at the urban level, this crisis is manifested by an accelerated process of aging of the rural population and a massive depopulation of some extensive areas in this area. The lack or precariousness of basic services such as: medical assistance, education or the lack of opportunities to have a decent job have contributed to maintaining some negative trends at the level of the demographic structure. (Marinescu, 2021)

From an economic and occupational point of view, agricultural production is predominantly practiced in the rural environment: field crops and meadows, vegetable growing, fruit growing, viticulture, forestry, animal husbandry, trade, industry derived from agriculture, as well as crafts have

an important weight in the activities general from the Romanian countryside. (Palicica & Palicica, 2005)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper studies the issue of socio-economic discrepancies at the level of the 2 residence environments. For this purpose, statistical data were processed and analyzed regarding: the resident population, the school population, the number of educational units, the structure of income and expenses per household, as well as the labor force indicators. All these data were collected from the TEMPO Online database of the National Institute of Statistics (INS).

The research methods used in carrying out the research consisted in the systematic and comparative analysis and the complex approach to the theme by studying the previous research carried out by different authors in the field.

RESULTS AND DISSCUSION

For the national economy, demography represents an important component in its structure and dynamics, depending in a high percentage on the rate of economic growth. At the level of 2021, of the total resident population in Romania, a percentage of 53.81% was represented by the urban population, and 46.19% by the rural population. In the period 2015-2021, the resident population in Romania registered a decrease of 3.52%, from 19822 thousand people in 2015 to 19124 thousand people in 2021. The decrease was also recorded at the level of residence environments, the population from the environment urban registering a decrease of 3.57%, and the rural one of 3.47%. At the level of 2021, of the total resident population in Romania of 19124 thousand people, a percentage of 53.81% was represented by the urban population (10291 thousand people), and 46.19% by the rural population (8833 thousand people) . Currently, the Romanian countryside faces demographic problems, as well as the proportional decline of the labor force and education. The aging of the population, as well as the migration of the population to urban areas or to other EU or non-EU countries has led to the reduction of the rural population. (Figure no. 1)

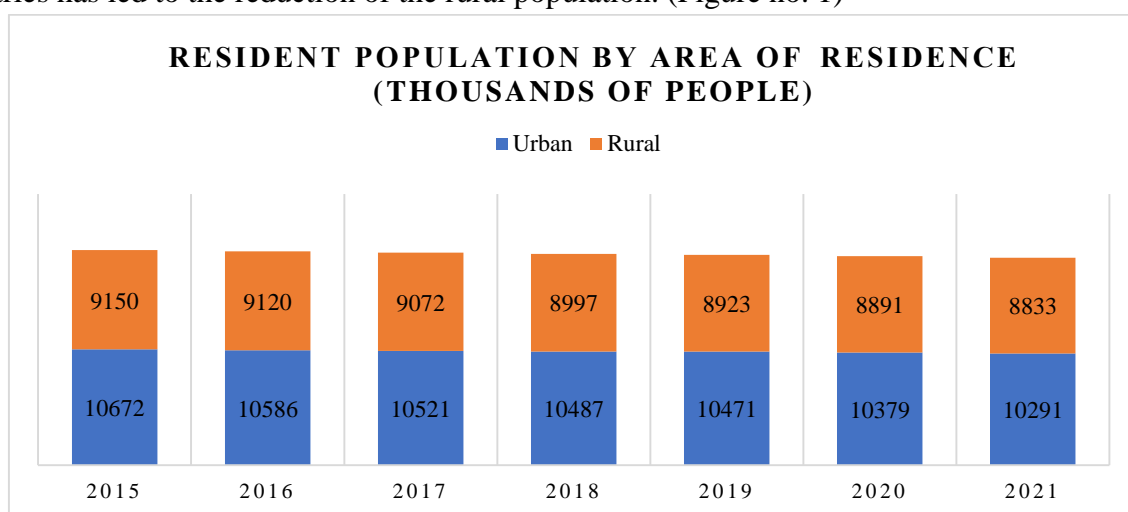


Figure no. 1 – Evolution of the resident population by area of residence in the period 2015-2021 (thousands of people)

Source: National Institute of Statistics, tempo online, accessed on 22.09.2022

The school population in Romania registered a decrease of 4.03% in the analyzed period. In terms of residence, it was noted that the school population in rural areas registered a significant decrease of 12.08%, while that in urban areas showed a decrease of only 0.63%. (Table no. 1)

Table no. 1 – The evolution of the school population by residence in the period 2015-2021

Specification	Residential environments	Years							Average	2021/2015%	2021/2020 %
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
School population (thousands of people)	Urban	2561	2546	2556	2553	2559	2550	2545	2553	-0,63%	-0,18%
	Rural	1081	1051	1023	994	967	945	951	1002	-12,08%	0,60%
	Total	3643	3597	3579	3547	3526	3495	3496	3555	-4,03%	0,03%

Source: National Institute of Statistics, tempo online, accessed on 22.09.2022

In the year 2021, of the total school population in Romania (3496 thousand people), the one in the urban environment was represented in proportion of approx. 73% (2545 thousand people), while the school population from rural areas recorded a percentage of 27.20% (951 thousand people). (Table no. 1)

Table no. 2 – Evolution of the number of educational units by residence environment in the period 2015-2021

Specification	Residential environments	Years							Average	2021/2015 %	2021/2020 %
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Educational units (number)	Urban	3903	3870	3907	3894	3884	3850	3893	3886	-0,26%	1,12%
	Rural	3205	3140	3140	3126	3117	3120	3122	3139	-2,59%	0,06%
	Total	7108	7010	7047	7020	7001	6970	7015	7024	-1,31%	0,65%

Source: National Institute of Statistics, tempo online, accessed on 22.09.2022

Regarding the number of educational units, a decrease of 1.31% was observed at the national level. The sharpest decrease was in rural areas of 2.59% from 3205 in 2015 to 3122 educational units in 2021. (Table no. 2)

Total average monthly income per household increased significantly between 2015 and 2021. In the urban environment, there was a 118% increase in incomes, from 2997 lei in 2015 to 6521 lei in 2021. In the rural environment, incomes increased by 102%, from 2279 lei in 2015 to 4607 lei in the year 2021. However, there is a rather large gap between the incomes recorded at the level of residence environments, the incomes recorded in rural areas being significantly lower compared to those in the urban environment, where the quality of life is higher. At the level of 2021, the difference between rural and urban incomes was 1914 lei. (Figure no. 2)

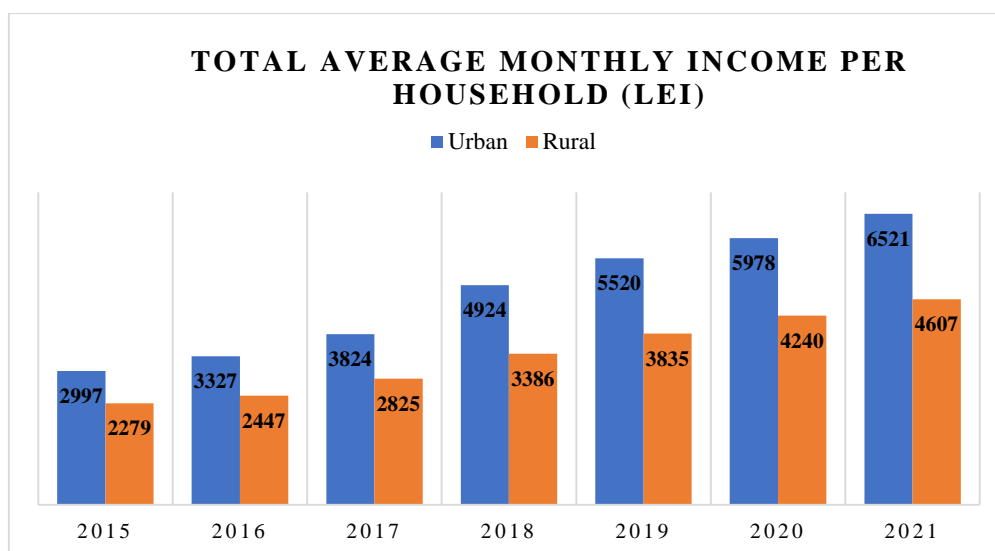


Figure no. 2 – Evolution of total average monthly income per household by average residence in the period 2015-2021 (lei)

Source: National Institute of Statistics, tempo online, accessed on 22.09.2022

Together with the incomes, the total average monthly expenses of a household were also increased. Thus, at the level of 2021, the expenses recorded by an urban household reached the value of 5579 lei, 116% higher than those recorded in 2015, respectively 2581 lei. In rural areas, the average expenses per household increased by approx. 94% in the analyzed period, from 2049 lei in 2015 to 3973 lei in 2021. (Figure no. 3)

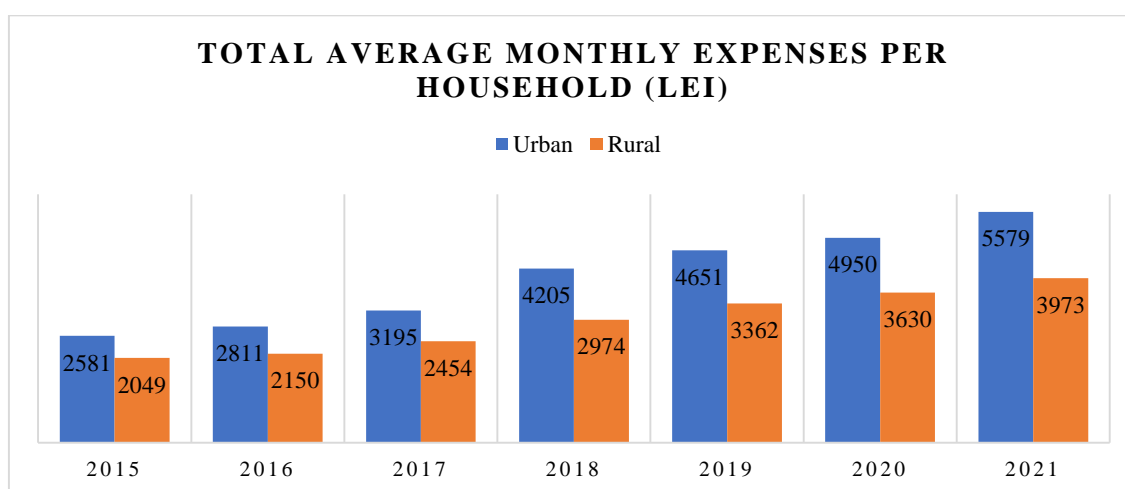


Figure no. 3 – The evolution of total average monthly expenses per household by average residence in the period 2015-2021 (lei)

Source: National Institute of Statistics, tempo online, accessed on 22.09.2022

The increase in expenses is the direct effect of inflation. In 2021, the inflation rate was 96.15 percentage points lower than the previous year. Regarding the annual consumer price index, which measures the overall evolution of the prices of goods purchased as well as the rates of services used by the population in the current year compared to the year chosen as the reference period, a slight downward trend was observed. In 2021, there was a decrease of 2.36 percentage points compared to the previous year. (Figure no. 4)

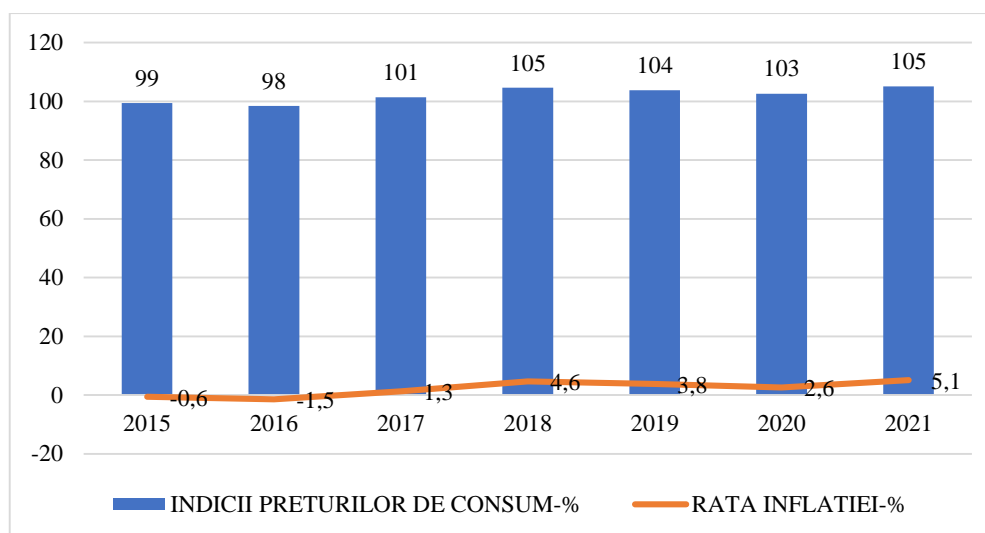


Figure no. 4 – The evolution of the annual index of consumer prices in Romania in the period 2015-2021

Source: National Institute of Statistics, tempo online, accessed on 22.09.2022

The systemic changes produced in rural areas after 1989 regarding ownership, sectors of activity and labor force, led to a significant mobility of the labor force, both to cities and to other countries, especially the Community ones. It is known that the decline of rural communities is intensified by the migration of the young population, the active population being attracted to economically developed cities.

Table no. 3 – The evolution of the workforce by place of residence in the period 2015-2021

Specification	Residential environments	Years							Average	2021/2015 %	2021/2020 %
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
The working population (thousands of people)	Urban	5013	4962	4994	4955	4952	4920	4746	4935	-5,32%	-3,52%
	Rural	4146	4016	4126	4113	4082	4053	3468	4001	-16,35%	-14,43%
	Total	9159	8979	9120	9068	9034	8973	8215	8935	-10,31%	-8,45%
Occupied population (thousands of people)	Urban	4662	4684	4769	4769	4784	4703	4584	4708	-1,68%	-2,52%
	Rural	3873	3765	3902	3920	3897	3819	3171	3764	-18,11%	-16,95%
	Total	8535	8449	8671	8689	8680	8521	7755	8471	9,14%	-8,98%
Inactive people (thousands of people)	Urban	5680	5658	5562	5550	5494	5484	5493	5560	-3,28%	0,18%
	Rural	5020	5141	4977	4914	4878	4858	5367	5022	6,91%	10,48%
	Total	10700	10799	10539	10464	10372	10342	10861	10582	1,50%	5,02%
Unemployed BIM (thousands of people)	Urban	350	278	225	186	168	217	162	227	-53,68%	-25,25%
	Rural	273	252	224	194	185	235	297	237	8,56%	26,54%
	Total	624	530	449	380	353	452	459	464	-26,40%	1,64%

Source: National Institute of Statistics, tempo online, accessed on 22.09.2022

In the period 2015-2021, the active population, which constitutes the available labor force, at the national level was on average 8935 thousand people, during this period a decrease was observed in the population providing the available labor force for the production of goods and services, in the rural area registering the largest decrease of 16.35%, from 4146 thousand people in 2015 to 3468 thousand people in 2021, having a share of 42.22% in the total population.

A downward trend was also noted in terms of the employed population, at the national level it recorded a decrease of 9.14% in the period 2015-2021. Analyzing by residence environment, a greater decrease was noted in the rural environment, where the population employed in administrative-social services and activities is smaller, this being 18.11% in the analyzed period, compared to the urban one, which recorded a decrease of approx. 1.68%. In urban areas, most employed people are found in manufacturing and trade, while in rural areas the largest share of the employed population is in agriculture, followed by industry.

The inactive population, represented by students, pensioners and other categories of people who cannot provide labor, showed a decreasing trend in the urban environment, while in the rural environment the trend was an increasing one, at the level of the analyzed period registering there is a 6.91% increase in inactive people. As for the unemployed population, which refers to people looking for a job, at the national level there was a reduction of 26.40% in the period 2015-2021. Depending on the area of residence, the statistical data from this period show a significant reduction of the unemployed population of approx. 53.58% in the urban environment, while in the rural environment there is an increase of 8.56% of the unemployed population. (Table no. 3)

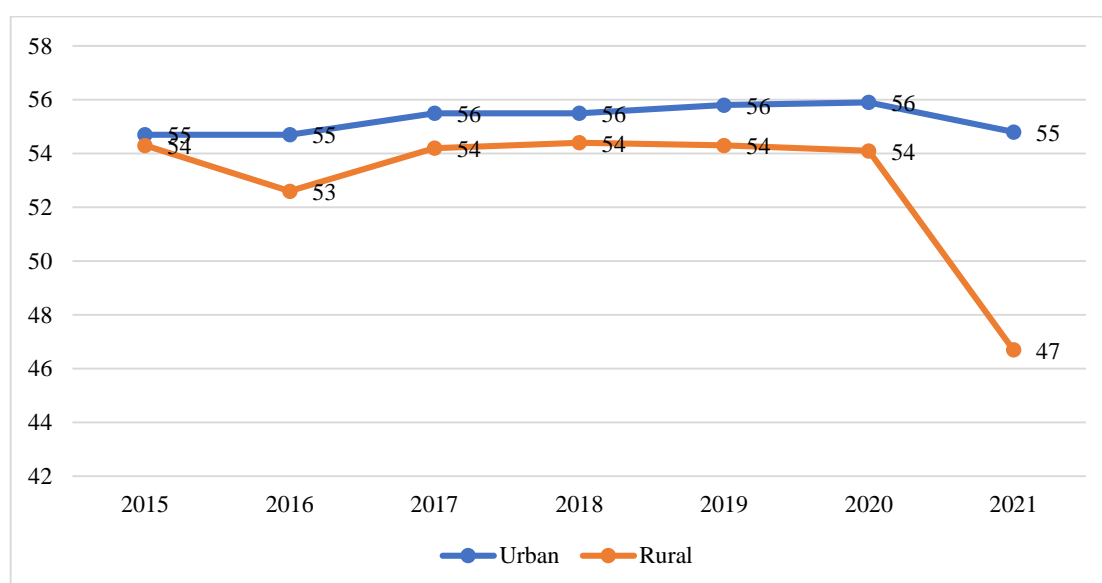


Figure no. 5 – The evolution of the activity rate by residence and activity during the period 2015-2021

Source: National Institute of Statistics, tempo online, accessed on 22.09.2022

The analysis of the activity rate underlines significant aspects of the population's participation in economic activity, being an indicator for its quantification. Following the analysis of the rate of activity registered in the rural area in the period 2015-2021, a decrease of approx. 14 percentage points, from 54% in 2015 to 47% in 2021. Regarding the percentage of the activity rate registered in the urban environment, an oscillation between 55% and 56% was observed in the analyzed period. Also, the activity rate in urban areas is higher than in rural areas. (Figure no. 5)

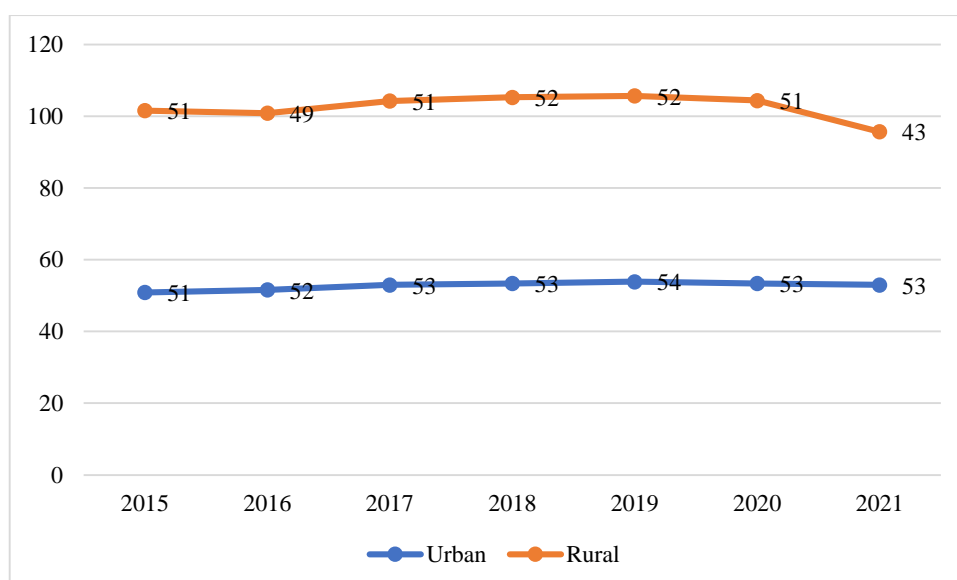


Figure no. 6 – The evolution of the employment rate by medium of residence and activity in the period 2015-2021

Source: National Institute of Statistics, tempo online, accessed on 22.09.2022

The employment rate registered a slight upward trend in urban areas, of 4.13 percentage points, while in rural areas, it decreased from 51% in 2015 to 53% in 2021, when a decrease was evident by 15.78 percentage points. (Figure no. 6)

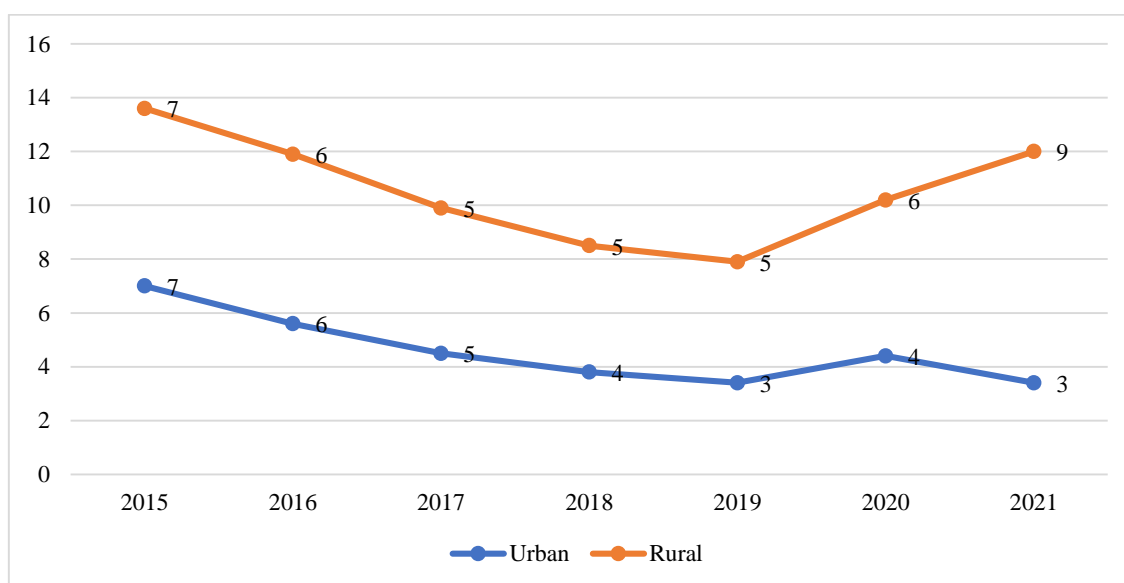


Figure no. 7 – The evolution of the BIM unemployment rate by medium of residence and activity in the period 2015-2021

Source: National Institute of Statistics, tempo online, accessed on 22.09.2022

Overall, the unemployment rate decreased, a fact also recorded in the urban environment, while an increase was recorded in the rural environment. In rural areas, the unemployment rate increased significantly by 30.30 percentage points between 2015 and 2021, from 7% in 2015 to 9% in 2021, while in urban areas the unemployment rate decreased from 7% in 2015 to 3% in 2021, with approx. 51.43 percentage points. (Figure 7)

CONCLUSIONS

The research conclusions reflect the need for the socio-economic development of the Romanian rural space, so as to reduce the discrepancies regarding the quality of life between the urban and the rural environment. The increasing trends of the rural poverty rate, both compared to the urban and compared to the European average, highlight the low level of income of the rural population, at the level of 2021, the difference between the income of the rural population and that of the urban population being 1914 lei.

In the absence of an adequate labor market policy, in Romania unemployment continues to be a major socio-economic risk, especially in rural areas. The vulnerability of the labor force in relation to unemployment is unequal and dependent on a series of characteristics: demographic, educational, professional, regional, behavioral. At the level of the 2015-2021 period, the unemployment rate increased significantly by approx. 30 percentage points, while in the urban environment it decreased by 51.43 percentage points. The labor market benefits and disadvantages some categories of the active population. In this context, the development of the labor market, the increase of investments, of the specialized and trained workforce, is necessary for the development of the Romanian rural space, this can change the image of the village and its community. Also, in the development of rural development strategies, it is very important to pay special attention to the human factor in all aspects of its manifestation.

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