

CURRENT COORDINATES OF ROMANIAN VULNERABLE GROUPS IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT*

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Abstract

Often, in European Union and Romanian legal documents or in research reports, the term ‘vulnerable group’ is used similarly to disadvantaged, marginalized, excluded or risk group; all these concepts are related to the broader phenomenon of poverty. The common sense for vulnerability is ‘weakness’, ‘lack of defense’, ‘lack of means’. Vulnerable groups are groups without support, which are often in a chronic state of poverty, being unable to take advantage of opportunities or to defend themselves against problems that may arise.

This paper presents a brief analysis of the structure and size of vulnerable groups in the European Union and an analysis of their particularities for Romania.

The paper also proposes a systematic treatment, but not of all the consequences of the global crisis on Romanian vulnerable groups. The main features of the Roma minority and vulnerable women from Romania, their demographic profile and spatial distribution, the employment policies for these vulnerable groups are highlighted.

Keywords: vulnerable groups, Roma population, women as a vulnerable group, labor market insertion.

JEL Classification: A14, J70

1.Introduction

Usually, the identification of vulnerable groups is based on the socio-demographic characteristics of the population: gender, age, ethnicity, geographic location, education, occupation, etc.

Often, official documents, legal documents or research reports, use the term ‘vulnerable group’ similarly to disadvantaged, marginalized, excluded or risk group, all these concepts being related to the broader phenomenon of poverty. This represents a category cumulating risks regarding all the dimensions of life, a category unable to cope with difficulties.

At European level, the Lisbon European Council agreed, in 2000, to fight social exclusion; the adopted policies consider the interdependence between the economic and the social fields.

In the official documents of the European Union, although there is no formal definition of vulnerable groups, the term is often used in relation to the concept of social inclusion, which implies that individuals have access to opportunities and resources necessary to fully participate in the economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living considered normal / desirable in the society in which they live [1].

In the Romanian legislation can be identified a number of terms related to vulnerable groups and their social inclusion / exclusion: poor people, marginalized, socially excluded people or at risk of social exclusion or vulnerable persons.

Regarding social inclusion, the main objective of the Romanian government is to continue the efforts to develop an inclusive society by providing integrated services for social inclusion based on a genuine assessment of the

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individual, through the development of the tertiary sector and ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens with a special emphasis on vulnerable groups [2].

This paper presents a brief analysis of the structure, size and demographic distribution of vulnerable groups: the Roma minority and women as a vulnerable group.

Across Europe, Roma are 10-12 million people, the largest ethnic minority to be found in each of the 28 EU Member States.

In Romania, Roma is the only ethnic group that has increased over the years, representing, at the 2011 census, 3.2% of the total population. Also, data from 1930-2011 censuses shows that, despite the fact that Roma had to change their living habits, their demographic characteristics have not changed.

The 2011 Population and Housing Census data shows that the Roma minority is spread fairly evenly throughout the territory, with a minimum of 1.1% in Botosani County and a maximum of 8.8% in Mures County. Most Roma are found in the Central Region which includes Mures County where there is the highest percentage of minority Roma population compared to the total population of the county. At the opposite end is the North-East Region where Botosani County has the lowest percentage of Roma among all counties.

At EU level, women are implicitly defined as a vulnerable group, their situation being a priority in most areas of regulatory action. In this case, vulnerability is understood as the absence of defenses, as well as being more likely to face certain risks.

In Romanian official documents, the woman appears in a particularly vulnerable position with regard to the issue of violence and to employment opportunities in the labor market. Vulnerable women are usually victims of domestic violence, subject to abuse, exploitation and trafficking and ‘disadvantaged’ women in the labor market.

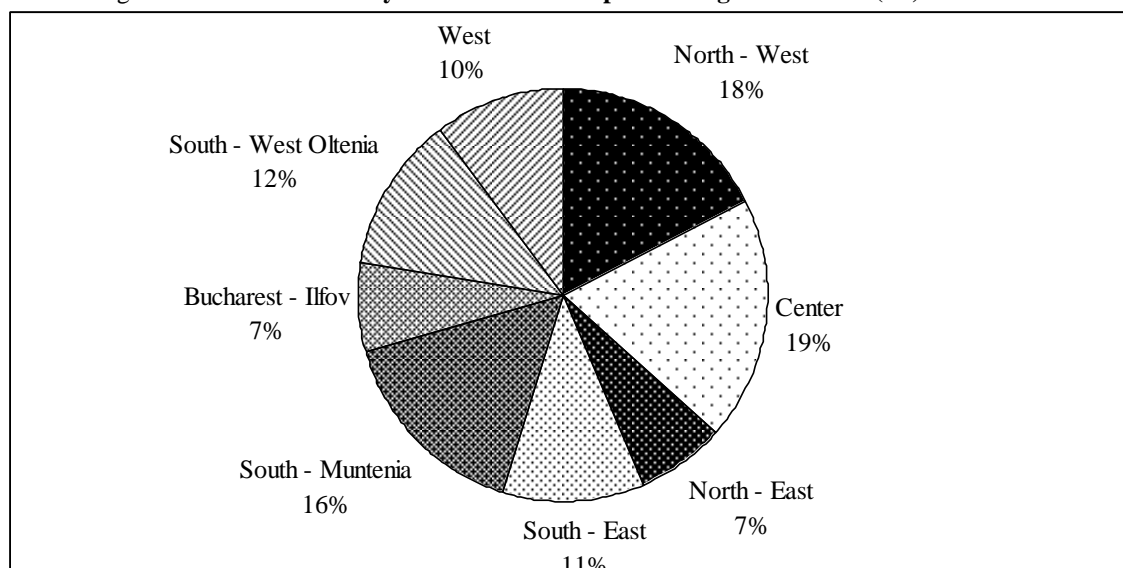
2. General characteristics of the Roma in Romania

With a stable population of 20,121,641 people at the 2011 census, Romania is a country where a significant number of nationalities / ethnic groups (approximately 10.4% of total population) coexist and are officially recognized. Census data from 2011 [3] shows that the Hungarian population represents 6.1% of the total stable population of the country and 621,573 thousand (3.09%) people declared Roma as their ethnicity. The 2011 census preliminarily recorded as stable population, based on their mother tongue, 245,677 thousand Roma people representing 1.43% of the total resident population; they are relatively evenly distributed in the territory, with a share ranging from 0.1% in Covasna County and 9.32% in Mures County. Roma represent more than 6.0% of the resident population in Calarasi (8.1%), Salaj (6.9%) and Bihor (6.1%) counties.

However, the debate over the real number of this population continues, some researchers [4] claiming that approximately 4.3% of the population would self-identify as Roma, while using hetero-identification a number of 1,515,600 people would be Roma.

Comparative analysis of 2011, 2002, 1992, 1977, 1966, 1956 and 1930 census data regarding the Roma population in Romania shows a significant increase after 1992 [5].

Figure 1 Share of Roma by Romanian Development Regions in 2011 (%)



Source: Rezultate definitive_RPL_2011, www.recensamantromania.ro, INS

Regarding the territorial distribution of the Roma, as 2011 Population and Housing Census results show, most Roma are found in development regions Muntenia South, Central and North West (Figure 1).

With respect to the share of the Roma minority population relative to the total population, first ranks the Central Region which includes Mures County where there is the highest percentage of minority Roma population relative to the total county population (8.78%), followed by the North West, including Bihor and Salaj counties where the share of the Roma population in total population of the county exceeds 6% (6.13% in Bihor County and 6.95% in Salaj County). The lowest rankings are for the North-East Region and for Botosani County (1.06%).

3. The demographic structure of the Roma population

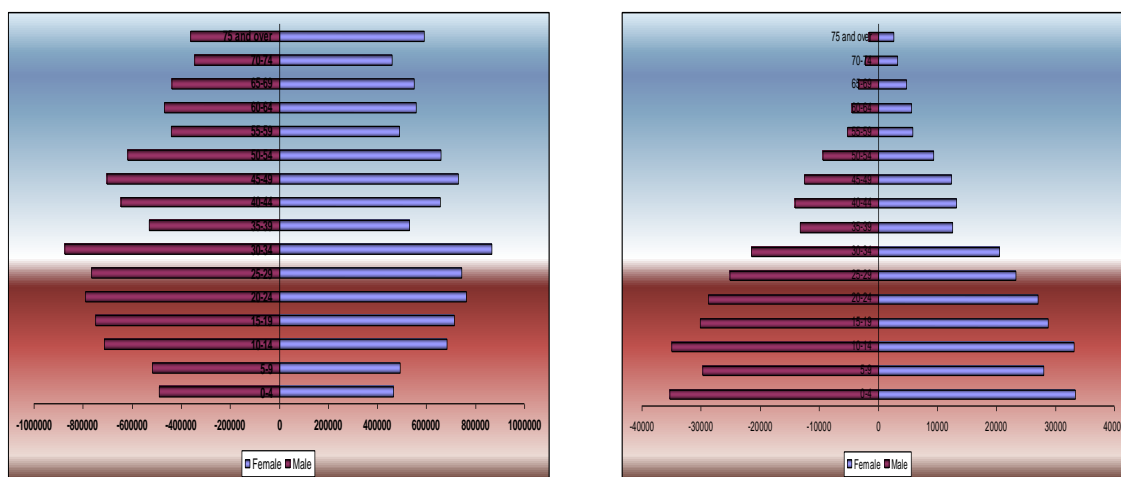
The Roma population has a very young demographic structure determined by higher values of mortality and fertility rates for Roma compared to the general population.

At the 2002 census, 36.33% of the Roma population was represented by children (0-14 years), while the share of elderly / dependent people (65 +) was about 3.33%.

Compared with the Romanian population, the age distribution, at different moments, shows that Roma population is much younger than the majority of the population; population pyramid for the Roma, unlike a normal one, has an extremely wide base and it becomes "sharp" after age 55 (Figure 2).

Therefore, the population that could be considered as active and of working age (15-64 years) represents 60.3%, which demonstrates the high potential of this population's participation in the labor market, including the development of local social economy projects.

Figure 2 Population Pyramid for Romanians and Roma in 2002



Source: Rezultate definitive_RPL_2011, www.recensamantromania.ro, INS

Gender distribution for this segment of the population (15-64 years) was almost identical: men 60.55%, women 60.11%.

The analysis of age distribution data by gender shows that, in 2002, for age groups 45-49 years and 50-54 years the number of men was very close to that of women in these groups (a difference of 28, respectively 11 people). Before this age there is a dominance of males: accentuated for age groups 0-29 years (on average, the number of Roma men was higher than the number of Roma women with 1,700 people), the difference being reduced for age groups 30-44 years, on average, to 780 people. Starting with age group 55-59 years, women's share is dominant.

4. Women as a vulnerable group

Equality between women and men is considered a fundamental right, a common value and a necessary condition for achieving EU growth, employment, labor and social cohesion. Women are considered vulnerable on the grounds of: lower female employment rate compared to men (58.6% vs. 70.7%), although women have a higher educational level; a large number of women work part-time; women are paid less than men, on average 18% less per hour of work; the risk of poverty is higher for women than for men since 17.1% of women are poor compared to 15.3% of men, and for seniors 65 and over, the difference is even higher (20.1% for women and 14.9% for men); women are underrepresented in positions of economic and political decision-making, although their share in these areas is high; the sharing out of family responsibilities is still strongly unequal; more often women are victims of violence and human trafficking.

The Romanian National Development Plan 2007-2013 states that "the risk of social exclusion is more strongly manifested for women than for men in all stages of life, as a reflection of their low participation in the labor market. The risk of poverty is particularly higher among older women and single parents with dependent children, women representing the predominant group" [6].

In Romania, women's employment situation can not be regarded as overall problematic. As a result of a tradition strengthened during the socialist regime, women have relatively high education and labor market participation levels. However, for certain categories of women, the sector and the type of occupations involved, the type of contract and other similar issues can lead to a situation of vulnerability. For them, the social economy can be a form of support, an opportunity to solve their professional integration and development needs.

Female employment follows the general pattern of employment in Romania (valid also for men) with low levels and a declining trend. In 2012, the employment rate of women (20-64 years) in Romania had one of the lowest values in Europe: 53.3% (the EU average is 62.3%). Female employment in Romania is comparable to that in southern countries such as Spain, Greece, Italy (with a traditional pattern of low participation of women in the labor market), but much lower than in the Nordic countries (with shares over 70%) and even compared to most of the former socialist countries [7].

Women were affected by the decline in the rate of employment in a higher proportion than men. The difference in employment rates for women and for men is considerable and constant in time. In recent years, it has increased, probably due to the economic crisis that has affected more the female population.

Compared to men, a lower employment rate is recorded mainly for the female population with a low or average education level, the difference being constant over time. Women with higher education are as likely as men to fill a job opening; this is indicated by the small difference in employment recorded for the two population groups. In 2012, for women unemployment rate was 4.9%, lower than for men (6.1%).

In Romania, compared to other European countries, the wage gap between men and women is not high and it has a downward trend. If in 2004 it was 14%, today it is less than 9%, considerably lower than the average of 17.2% for the Member States (according to Eurostat). Romania falls into the category of countries with a low difference, less than 10%, along with Italy, Malta, Poland, Slovenia, Portugal and Belgium.

Over two thirds of women in Romania have a paid job. Part-time employment is predominantly a characteristic of the female population (for EU-27, about a third of women are employed part-time, compared to less than 8% of men).

5. Conclusions

Both at European level and in Romania, the Roma minority population is one of the most vulnerable groups at risk of social and labor market exclusion, with recorded employment rates substantially lower than the figures available for the majority population. Among the factors contributing to the social and economic exclusion of Roma could be mentioned: the low level of education and lack of professional qualifications, and prejudice and discrimination.

The analysis of the demographic evolution and spatial distribution of Roma communities, based on data from population censuses starting with 1930, allow for some conclusions, among which may be mentioned:

- regarding the population size of the Roma minority: there is an increase of approximately 15% during 2002-2011, of 33.5% during 1992-2002 and an overall increase of 53.6% for the period 1992-2011;
- when ranking Romanian regions by the share of the Roma minority population relative to total population, the Central Region ranks first followed by the North West Region;
- the Roma population pyramid, unlike the normal one, has an extremely broad base and its "sharpening" is accentuated after age 55, indicating that it is a much younger population than the majority;

Among the arguments in favor of women's vulnerability could be considered:

- a lower female employment rate than for men (58.5% vs. 74.5%), although women have a higher level of education;
- a large number of women work part-time;
- women are paid less than men, on average 18% less for each hour of work.

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