

AN OVERVIEW OF REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyse the evolution of regional disparities in employment and unemployment in Romania over the period 2000-2024. The analysis is conducted at the level of NUTS 2 development regions and distinguishes between the pre-accession period to the European Union (2000-2006) and the post-accession period (2007-2024), to capture the role of the European context in labour market dynamics. Using official statistics and dispersion measures, the paper describes the main trends and highlights persistent differences between more developed and lagging regions.

Keywords: regional disparities, labour market, unemployment, employment, Romania

Classification JEL: R23, J21

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to analyse the evolution of regional disparities in Romania between 2000 and 2024, from the perspective of employment and unemployment. To provide a clearer analysis of the dynamics and the role of the European context, we have divided this timeframe into two distinct stages: Romania's pre-accession period to the European Union (EU) (2000-2006) and the post-accession period (2007-2024), focusing on changes, developments, and the consolidation of regional differences. Based on official data provided by the National Institute of Statistics of Romania (INSSE), the study describes the dynamics of these two indicators and evaluates the degree of regional dispersion by comparing them to the national average and using the coefficient of variation. The analysis investigates whether a reduction in regional heterogeneity is observed post-accession, and the extent to which the gaps between more developed regions and lagging regions persist or have become consolidated. In this context, the article aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How have regional differences in employment and unemployment rates evolved in Romania, at the NUTS 2 level, during the 2000-2024 period?

RQ2. To what extent has the accession to the European Union (2007-2024) been associated with a reduction or, conversely, a maintenance or consolidation of regional disparities regarding employment and unemployment, compared to the 2000-2006 period?

RQ3. Which are the persistent "outlier" regions (consistently above or below the national average) regarding employment and unemployment, and what patterns do these suggest for regional policies?

To answer these questions, INSSE regional series, comparisons against the national average, and measures of dispersion (coefficient of variation) are used for the two sub-periods.

2. The Evolution of regional disparities in employment and unemployment prior to Romania's EU accession (2000-2006)

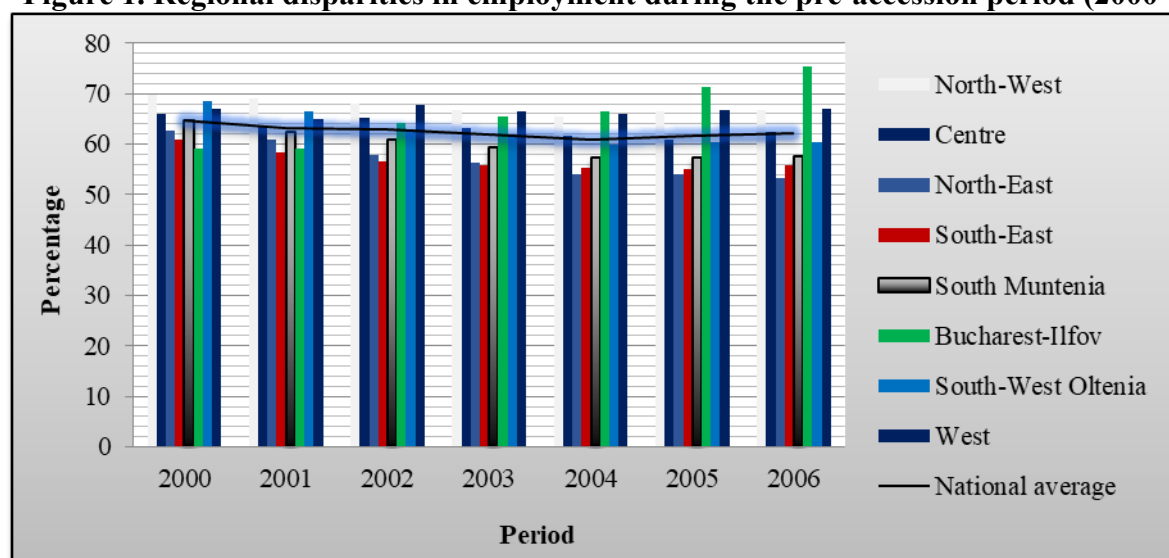
The pre-accession period was characterized by pronounced differences between development regions regarding employment and unemployment. The more developed regions (Bucharest-Ilfov, West, Centre) generally recorded employment rates above the national average and lower unemployment levels, driven by more diversified economies, the attraction of foreign investment, and a higher share of services and value-added industries.

In contrast, the less developed regions (particularly North-East and South-West Oltenia) faced high unemployment and low employment, influenced by the predominance of agriculture, deficient infrastructure, and the absence of strategic investments.

The specialized literature highlights that human capital, infrastructure quality, and the degree of economic diversification are essential factors for regional labour market performance, while internal migration and industrial restructuring processes contributed to the widening of territorial gaps (Pelinescu, 2015; Goschin, 2015; Văcărel and Țătu, 2013; Ionescu, 2016). Although improvement trends were observed in some regions, structural disparities remained persistent (Zaman and Goschin, 2010), setting the stage for how the opportunities opened by accession would be unevenly capitalized upon after 2007.

Figure 1 presents the dynamics of the employment rate for the 8 NUTS 2 regions during the pre-accession period (2000-2006).

Figure 1. Regional disparities in employment during the pre-accession period (2000-2006)



Source:

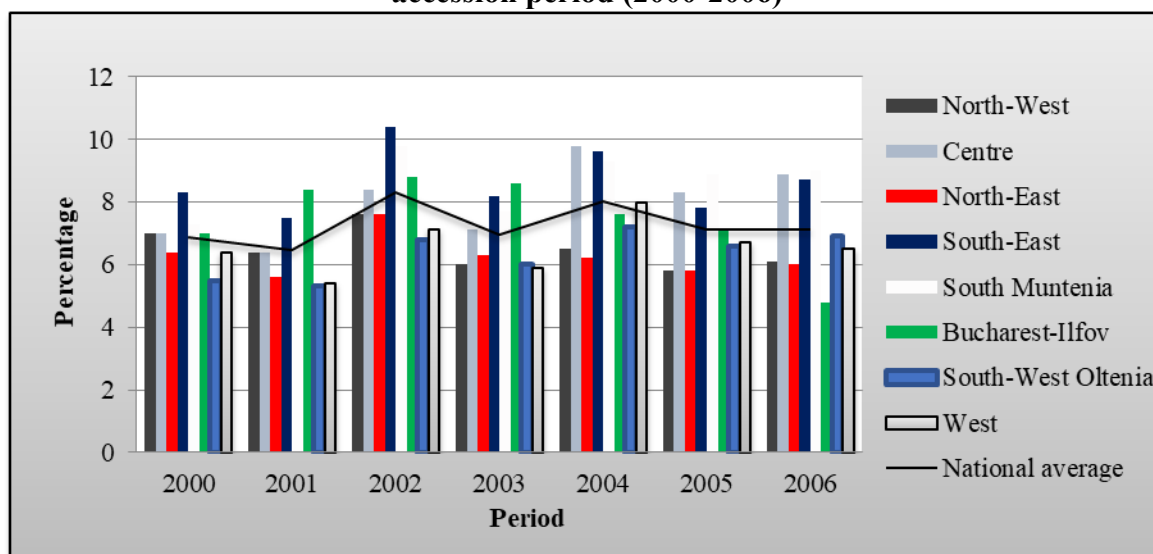
INSSE, TEMPO-Onlinedatabase, <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>

The analysis of statistical data provided by the INSSE Tempo-Online database for the 2000-2006 period confirms the uneven nature of the Romanian labour market. At the national level, the employment rate ranged between 60.8% and 64.7%, with a period average of 62.48%. This average indicates a moderate utilization of labour resources; however, a comparison of the regions against the national level highlights sharp contrasts between economically advanced areas and those affected by structural vulnerabilities.

The Bucharest-Ilfov and West regions remained consistently above the national average, with values ranging between 59% and 75.3% for the capital region and between 66.1% and 67.7% in the West region. These results reflect the consolidation of dynamic regional economies with a superior capacity for job creation.

At the same time, the North-East, South-East, and South-West Oltenia regions recorded lower employment levels, ranging from 53.2% to 62.6% in the North-East and from 55.1% to 60.8% in the South-East. Furthermore, South-West Oltenia continues to be characterized by a fragile economic structure. Therefore, regional differences are manifested not only through distinct employment levels but also through the persistent difficulty of less developed regions to reach or exceed national average thresholds.

Figure 2 presents the dynamics of the ILO unemployment rate (%) at the regional level during the pre-accession period, 2000-2006.

Figure 2. ILO unemployment rate (% , 15+ years) at the regional level during the pre-accession period (2000-2006)

Source: National Institute of Statistics (INSSE), AMIGO - Labour Force Survey, unemployment rate according to ILO (BIM) methodology, database AMG157E, population aged 15+

Similar patterns of territorial differentiation are reflected in the evolution of ILO unemployment. On average across regions (calculated as a simple average of regional values), the ILO unemployment rate ranged between 6.45% (2001) and 8.31% (2002), indicating significant fluctuations throughout the analysed period. Regionally, the highest levels of ILO unemployment are frequently observed in South-East and South-Muntenia, recording peaks of 10.4% (South-East, 2002) and 9.8% (South-Muntenia, 2002), while the North-East region generally displays more moderate levels (a minimum of 5.6% in 2001).

In contrast, South-West Oltenia consistently presents some of the lowest values (a minimum of 5.3% in 2001), while Bucharest-Ilfov is distinguished by a sharp decline toward the end of the period, reaching 4.8% in 2006.

To highlight regional disparities regarding employment and unemployment prior to Romania's accession to the European Union, official data from INSSE (TEMPO-Online) were used, as presented in Table 1 and Table 2. These include the annual values of the employment rate and unemployment rate for the eight development regions during the 2000-2006 period, as well as the national average calculated for each year.

The national average is calculated as a simple average of the regional values to ensure comparability with dispersion measures. Based on these data, the coefficient of variation (CV) was calculated, an indicator used to measure the degree of regional dispersion and homogeneity.

Table 1. Employment rate of labor resources (%), during the period 2000-2006

Year	North-West	Centre	North-East	South-East	South Muntenia	Bucharest -Ilfov	South-West Oltenia	West	National average	σ	CV
2000	69,7	66	62,6	60,8	64,6	59	68,5	67	64,77	3,50	5,41
2001	69	63,6	61	58,3	62,4	59,1	66,6	64,9	63,11	3,43	5,44
2002	67,9	65,3	57,9	56,6	61	64,2	62,9	67,7	62,93	3,93	6,24
2003	66,8	63,3	56,2	55,9	59,3	65,6	61,9	66,5	61,93	4,12	6,65
2004	65,5	61,7	54,1	55,3	57,4	66,6	59,9	66,1	60,82	4,63	7,62
2005	66,4	61	54,1	55,1	57,4	71,3	60,3	66,8	61,55	5,72	9,30
2006	66,7	62,4	53,2	55,7	57,5	75,3	60,3	67,1	62,27	6,75	10,84

Source: INSSE, TEMPO-Online database, <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-tableand> author calculation

Table 2. Dynamics of the ILO unemployment rate (% , 15 years and over) during the period 2000-2006

Year	North-West	Centre	North-East	South-East	South Muntenia	Bucharest-Ilfov	South-West Oltenia	West	National average	σ	CV
2000	7	7	6,4	8,3	7,3	7	5,5	6,4	6,86	0,76	11,05
2001	6,4	6,4	5,6	7,5	6,6	8,4	5,3	5,4	6,45	1	15,58
2002	7,6	8,4	7,6	10,4	9,8	8,8	6,8	7,1	8,31	1,20	14,48
2003	6	7,1	6,3	8,2	7,7	8,6	6	5,9	6,98	1,01	14,51
2004	6,5	9,8	6,2	9,6	9,3	7,6	7,2	8	8,03	1,31	16,35
2005	5,8	8,3	5,8	7,8	8,9	7,1	6,6	6,7	7,13	1,06	14,85
2006	6,1	8,9	6	8,7	9	4,8	6,9	6,5	7,11	1,47	20,68

Source: National Institute of Statistics (INSSE), AMIGO - Labour Force Survey, unemployment rate according to ILO (BIM) methodology, database AMG157E, population aged 15+ and author calculation

The coefficient of variation (CV) was calculated for each year, based on the regional values, using the formula:

$$CV = \frac{\sigma}{\mu} \cdot 100,$$

where σ represents the standard deviation of regional values, and μ represents their mean.

The coefficient of variation expresses the degree of relative dispersion and allows for the assessment of regional homogeneity. The calculation was performed based on the data from the tables, using the mean and standard deviation for each year of the 2000-2006 period.

Based on the values in Table 1, the coefficient of variation for the employment rate ranges between 5.41% and 10.84%, indicating a relatively high degree of homogeneity among regions throughout the analysed period. Although differences exist between developed regions (Bucharest-Ilfov, West) and those with structural vulnerabilities (North-East, South-West Oltenia), the overall dispersion remains moderate. However, the upward trend of the CV in 2005-2006 suggests a slight widening of regional differences.

The values of the coefficient of variation (CV) for the ILO unemployment rate, calculated based on the data in Table 2, indicate moderate to high regional variability, ranging between 11.05% (2000) and 20.68% (2006). These levels suggest the existence of significant territorial differences, though less pronounced than in the case of unemployment measures that may exhibit much larger dispersions.

The dynamics of the CV show that regional heterogeneity regarding ILO unemployment persisted throughout the analysed period and tended to intensify toward the end of the interval, culminating in 2006. This evolution reflects the sensitivity of unemployment to regional structural characteristics, such as the local economic structure, job availability, and the regions' capacity to absorb economic shocks.

The analysis of the coefficient of variation confirms that, prior to EU accession, Romania presented a labour market with two distinct patterns. On the one hand, employment was distributed relatively more homogeneously across regions, with CV values ranging between 5.41% and 10.84%, indicating generally moderate differences, albeit with a slight increase toward the end of the period.

On the other hand, ILO unemployment was more spatially heterogeneous, with a CV situated between 11.05% and 20.68%, suggesting moderate-to-high regional variability and a tendency for differences to widen toward 2006. Overall, the results show that regional disparities were already taking shape during the pre-accession period, and subsequent developments would be differentially influenced by structural characteristics and the economic adaptability of each region.

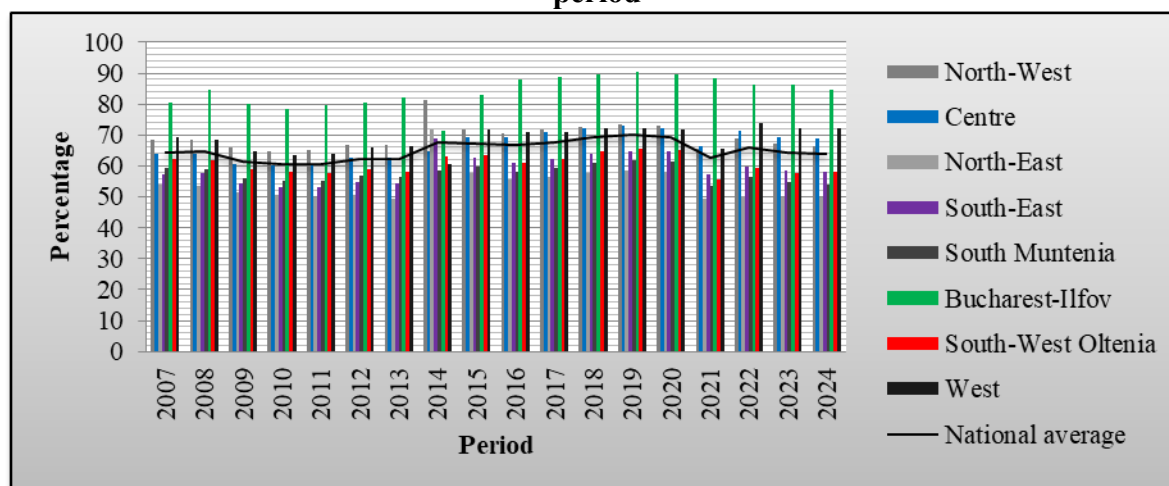
3. The Post-Accession Period (2007-2024): Developments and Regional Disparities

Romania's accession to the European Union opened access to structural and cohesion funds, positively influencing the labour market in most regions. At the same time, the specialized literature regarding regional unemployment disparities in the EU and Romania highlights the persistence of territorial differences (Cismaş et al., 2011). In more developed regions, industrial modernization, the attraction of new foreign investments, and the expansion of the service sector supported employment growth and unemployment reduction. However, in less developed regions, the process of economic modernization was slower, and the absorption capacity for European funds often remained limited. Consequently, although aggregated unemployment rates decreased post-accession, gaps compared to prosperous regions continued to be visible.

Studies highlight the decisive role of economic diversification, infrastructure, and administrative capacity in transforming European resources into effective regional development. Overall, the dynamic analysis indicates a slow and uneven process of regional convergence: some regions are gradually approaching the national average, while others constantly lag behind, in terms of both employment and unemployment.

Figure 3 presents the dynamics of the employment rate (%) for the post-accession period 2007-2024.

Figure 3. The evolution of the employment rate of labor resources (%) during the 2007-2024 period



Source: INSSE, TEMPO-Online database, <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>

The data presented in Figure 3 show that, between 2007 and 2024, the inter-regional average of the employment rate (calculated as a simple average of regional values) ranged from 60.52% (2010) to 70.03% (2019), with an average value for the entire period of approximately 65.05%. The evolution suggests a general improvement in labour force utilization following Romania's accession to the European Union; however, the dynamics are not uniform at the regional level and include episodes of divergence, particularly after 2021.

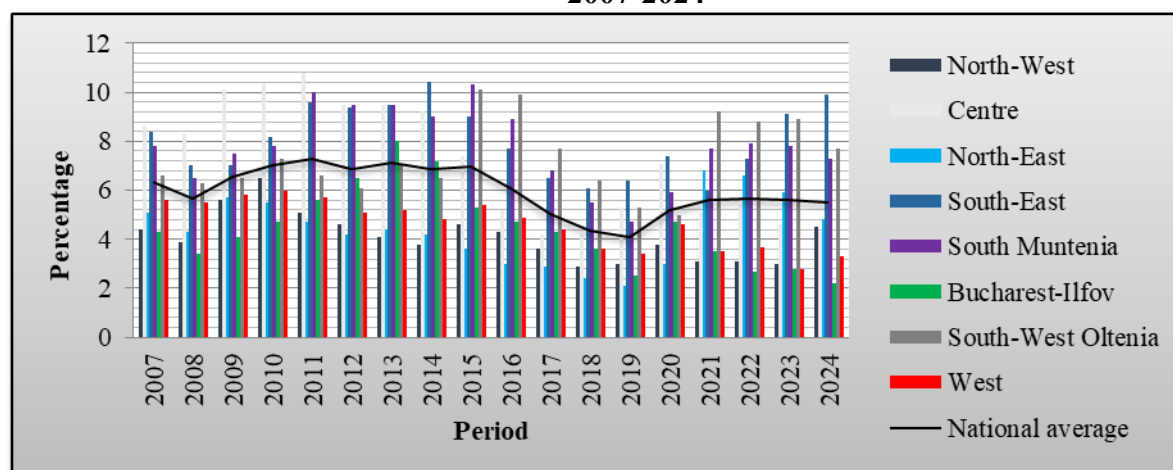
Territorially, the Bucharest-Ilfov region remains, in most years, the region with the highest employment values, frequently falling within the 78-90% range, confirming the advantages of a diversified economy and the concentration of investments and jobs in competitive sectors. The West region also consistently ranks above the national average, indicating a relatively robust labour market and a better capacity to absorb investments and economic opportunities.

In contrast, the North-East and South-Muntenia regions frequently sit below the national average, especially after 2021, indicating the persistence of structural vulnerabilities. The South-East and South-West Oltenia regions also tend to remain below the national average in numerous years, suggesting an uneven absorption of the benefits of economic growth and EU accession at the

territorial level. Also noteworthy is the year 2014, when employment values were atypical in several regions, and the coefficient of variation reached the period's minimum (10.22%). This pattern may reflect a specific change in the statistical series/definitions (series break) or a specific conjunctural context. Overall, developments indicate that, although the employment rate has increased over the medium term, regional disparities have persisted, and in recent years a widening of differences is observed, consistent with the dynamics of the coefficient of variation in Table 3.

Figure 4 presents the evolution of the ILO unemployment rate (% , 15 and over, total) during the 2007-2024 period.

Figure 4. Dynamics of the ILO unemployment rate (% , 15 and over, total), during the period 2007-2024



Source:

National Institute of Statistics (INSSE), AMIGO - Labour Force Survey, unemployment rate according to ILO (BIM) methodology, database AMG157E, population aged 15+

Figure 4 illustrates the evolution of the ILO unemployment rate (15 years and over, total) in the post-accession period and highlights a dynamic where the national average (calculated as a simple average of regional values) decreases from 6.35% in 2007 to a minimum of 4.09% in 2019, followed by an increase in 2020 (5.19%) and a maintenance at higher levels in recent years (approx. 5.50-5.69% in 2021-2024). This evolution reflects both the effects of the economic crisis (with higher levels around 2009-2014) and the recent changes that contributed to the increase in territorial heterogeneity after 2020.

At the regional level, differences remain significant. The Centre region frequently records high ILO unemployment values (e.g., over 9-10% in several years), while the South-East and South-Muntenia regions also remain among those with high levels, with peaks such as 10.4% in South-East (2014) and 10.3% in South-Muntenia (2015). South-West Oltenia presents persistent episodes of high unemployment, particularly in the 2015-2017 interval and again in recent years (2021-2024).

At the same time, significant changes in regional profiles are observed. For example, the North-East region transitions from relatively low values in the 2015-2019 interval to high levels in 2021-2022 (6.8% and 6.6%), contributing to the increase in regional dispersion after 2020. In contrast, Bucharest-Ilfov generally remains at low unemployment levels, particularly after 2018, although the dynamics also include episodes of temporary increase (e.g., 2013-2014). Viewed overall, the post-accession evolution of ILO unemployment confirms that the improvement at the aggregate level was not territorially uniform, and differences between regions remain largely structural (Schonauer, 2015).

Similar to the pre-accession period, for the 2007-2024 interval, the coefficient of variation values were calculated based on the data presented in Table 3 and Table 4, with the aim of evaluating the degree of regional dispersion regarding employment and unemployment in the post-accession period.

Table 3. Employment rate of labour resources, during the period 2007-2024

Year	North-West	Centre	North-East	South-East	South Muntenia	Bucharest -Ilfov	South-West Oltenia	West	National average	σ	CV
2007	68,5	64	54	57,2	59,3	80,4	62,2	69,3	64,36	7,80	12,13
2008	68,6	63,9	53,6	57,5	58,8	84,8	61,9	68,4	64,68	9,02	13,94
2009	66,1	60,7	51,3	54,5	56,2	80,1	59,1	64,7	61,58	8,40	13,64
2010	64,9	60	50,6	53,3	55,3	78,5	58	63,6	60,52	8,18	13,52
2011	65	60,4	49,7	53	55,4	79,5	57,5	64	60,56	8,67	14,31
2012	66,7	62,6	50,8	54,6	56,9	80,3	59	65,9	62,1	8,57	13,80
2013	66,9	62,8	49,6	54,5	56,5	82,1	58,1	66,2	62,08	9,36	15,08
2014	81,3	64,6	71,8	68,8	58,7	71,2	63	60,4	67,47	6,89	10,22
2015	71,6	69,4	57,6	62,8	59,6	83,1	63,3	71,9	67,41	7,77	11,52
2016	70,4	69,5	55,5	61,1	58,2	88	60,9	70,9	66,81	9,71	14,54
2017	71,6	70,8	56,4	62,4	59,5	88,6	62,3	71,1	67,83	9,52	14,03
2018	72,7	72,3	57,7	63,8	61,1	89,4	64,6	72,1	69,21	9,26	13,38
2019	73,6	73	58,5	64,9	62	90,4	65,6	72,3	70,03	9,25	13,21
2020	73	72,4	58,1	64,6	61,3	89,4	65,3	71,9	69,5	9,09	13,08
2021	65,4	66,3	49,3	57,3	53,4	88,5	55,5	65,7	62,67	11,41	18,20
2022	68,9	71,5	50,1	59,8	56,5	86,3	59,3	73,8	65,77	10,82	16,45
2023	67,3	69,3	49,8	58,5	54,7	86,3	57,7	72,3	64,48	10,96	16,99
2024	66,3	68,8	49,7	58,1	53,9	84,6	57,9	72	63,91	10,57	16,55

Source: INSSE, TEMPO-Online database, <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-tableand> author calculation

Table 4. Dynamics of the ILO unemployment rate (%) by region (15 years and over, total), 2007-2024

Year	North-West	Centre	North-East	South-East	South Muntenia	Bucharest -Ilfov	South-West Oltenia	West	National average	σ	CV
2007	4,40	8,60	5,10	8,40	7,80	4,30	6,60	5,60	6,35	1,64	25,85
2008	3,90	8,30	4,30	7,00	6,50	3,40	6,30	5,50	5,65	1,58	27,96
2009	5,60	10,10	5,70	7,00	7,50	4,10	6,50	5,80	6,54	1,65	25,31
2010	6,50	10,30	5,50	8,20	7,80	4,70	7,30	6,00	7,04	1,65	23,48
2011	5,10	10,80	4,70	9,60	10,00	5,60	6,60	5,70	7,26	2,30	31,68
2012	4,60	9,50	4,20	9,40	9,50	6,50	6,10	5,10	6,86	2,13	31,07
2013	4,10	9,50	4,40	9,50	9,50	8,00	7,00	5,20	7,15	2,18	30,47
2014	3,80	9,20	4,20	10,40	9,00	7,20	6,50	4,80	6,89	2,33	33,86
2015	4,60	7,40	3,60	9,00	10,30	5,30	10,10	5,40	6,96	2,43	34,97
2016	4,30	5,20	3,00	7,70	8,90	4,70	9,90	4,90	6,08	2,29	37,67
2017	3,60	4,20	2,90	6,50	6,80	4,30	7,70	4,40	5,05	1,61	31,79
2018	2,90	4,20	2,40	6,10	5,50	3,60	6,40	3,60	4,34	1,40	32,23
2019	3,00	5,30	2,10	6,40	4,70	2,50	5,30	3,40	4,09	1,45	35,44
2020	3,80	7,10	3,00	7,40	5,90	4,70	5,00	4,60	5,19	1,43	27,59
2021	3,10	5,10	6,80	6,00	7,70	3,50	9,20	3,50	5,61	2,07	36,89
2022	3,10	5,40	6,60	7,30	7,90	2,70	8,80	3,70	5,69	2,17	38,15
2023	3,00	4,60	5,90	9,10	7,80	2,80	8,90	2,80	5,61	2,54	45,21
2024	4,50	4,30	4,80	9,90	7,30	2,20	7,70	3,30	5,50	2,40	43,65

Source: National Institute of Statistics (INSSE), AMIGO - Labour Force Survey, unemployment rate according to ILO (BIM) methodology, database AMG157E, population aged 15+ and author calculation

Based on the values in Table 3, the coefficient of variation for the employment rate during the 2007-2024 period indicates a moderate regional dispersion, with values ranging between 10.22% (2014) and 18.20% (2021). In the 2007-2020 interval, the CV generally hovers around 12-15%, suggesting relatively stable regional variability. However, starting in 2021, the coefficient of variation rises to values of 16-18% (2021-2024), indicating a widening of regional differences in recent years.

Territorially, Bucharest-Ilfov and West remain, in most years, above the national employment average, while North-East and South-Muntenia frequently sit below it, contributing to the

maintenance of visible regional variability. The dynamics of the coefficient of variation show that employment remains, overall, more homogeneously distributed than unemployment, but it can no longer be characterized as stable below the 15% threshold for the entire period, exhibiting clear episodes of increased dispersion after 2021.

In the case of unemployment, the coefficient of variation values presented in Table 4 highlight a much more accentuated dispersion among regions. The CV is permanently situated at high levels, between 23.48% (2010) and 45.21% (2023), and in numerous years exceeds 30% (e.g., 2011-2019, 2021-2024). This evolution confirms that ILO unemployment remains a strongly territorially heterogeneous indicator, reflecting persistent structural differences between regions.

Regionally, high levels of ILO unemployment frequently appear in the Centre, South-East, South-Muntenia, and South-West Oltenia regions, while Bucharest-Ilfov generally remains at lower levels (although there are years with higher values, such as 2013-2014). At the same time, significant profile changes are observed in certain regions: for example, the North-East transitions from low values in previous years to high levels in 2021-2022, contributing to the strong increase in dispersion after 2020. This heterogeneous distribution is directly reflected in the CV values, which indicate an increasingly pronounced contrast between regions.

Overall, the analysis of the coefficient of variation for the 2007-2024 period shows that, while employment presents moderate regional variability (with intensifications after 2021), ILO unemployment remains profoundly unequally distributed and tends to become even more heterogeneous in recent years. These results support the conclusion that, even after accession to the European Union, regional disparities in Romania have persisted, and the convergence process between regions has continued to be slow and uneven.

Comparing the coefficient of variation values for the two analysed periods also indicates an increase in dispersion in the post-accession period: for employment, the CV rises from typical pre-accession values of under 11% to values reaching up to 18.20% after 2021, while for ILO unemployment, the CV is situated consistently above 20% post-accession and reaches over 40% in 2023-2024. Therefore, although aggregated levels of employment and unemployment may improve, territorial variability shows that the benefits of favourable developments are not uniformly distributed, and regional differences tend to persist or widen in certain intervals.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this article was to analyse the evolution of regional disparities regarding employment and unemployment in Romania during the 2000-2024 period. The results of the study show that the Romanian labour market remains strongly territorially differentiated, and accession to the European Union did not automatically lead to rapid regional convergence, but rather to a slow and uneven evolution of indicators.

In the pre-accession period (2000-2006), employment presented a relatively moderate regional dispersion, with the coefficient of variation ranging between 5.41% and 10.84%, suggesting higher homogeneity among regions from the perspective of labour force integration. In contrast, ILO unemployment was more heterogeneous, with a coefficient of variation ranging between 11.05% and 20.68%, indicating visible territorial differences and a tendency to widen toward the end of the period. At this stage, the structural pattern of the labour market was already taking shape: more developed regions (Bucharest-Ilfov and West) tended to record better results, while regions with structural vulnerabilities (especially North-East and, at certain moments, South-West Oltenia) faced persistent difficulties.

In the post-accession period (2007-2024), employment levels improved at the aggregate level, yet regional differences remained evident. The coefficient of variation for employment increased compared to the pre-accession period, ranging between 10.22% and 18.20%. In the 2007-2020 interval, dispersion was relatively stable (approx. 12-15%), but after 2021 a widening of regional differences is observed (CV around 16-18%), indicating episodes of recent divergence. Bucharest-

Ilfov maintains its leading position in employment, and the West region generally remains above the national average, while North-East and South-Muntenia frequently remain below it.

In the case of ILO unemployment, the results confirm a strong and persistent territorial heterogeneity throughout the entire post-accession period. The coefficient of variation consistently sits at high levels (23.48%-45.21%), exceeding 30% in numerous years and reaching peaks in 2023-2024, signalling an accentuated regional polarization. Regionally, high unemployment frequently appears in the Centre, South-East, South-Muntenia, and South-West Oltenia regions, while Bucharest-Ilfov remains, in most years, the region with the lowest values. Furthermore, after 2020, profile changes are observed in certain regions (e.g., North-East), which contribute to the increase in dispersion.

The comparison of the two sub-periods highlights that, although employment and unemployment had a more favourable evolution at the national level in certain intervals (especially until 2019), regional disparities did not systematically diminish; for unemployment, an intensification of differences is even observed in recent years.

Consequently, the benefits of economic growth and European integration were unevenly distributed among regions, consolidating the territorial advantages of economic poles and maintaining the structural difficulties of lagging regions.

Overall, the analysis suggests that reducing regional disparities in the labour market requires better-targeted public policies, tailored to territorial specifics: investments in infrastructure and connectivity, stimulating economic diversification in vulnerable regions, improving administrative capacity, and increasing the efficiency of European funds utilization. Without such interventions, regional convergence tends to remain slow, and the polarization between developed and vulnerable regions risks becoming perpetuated.

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