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SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENT REGIONS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

Regional development is a priority objective of the EU. Reducing gaps and inequalities between European countries or regions requires coordinated efforts through a regional development policy. To make the implementation of regional political measures more efficient, the European territory was divided into regions according to certain territorial division criteria, NUTS. Considering this context, the paper aims to carry out a socio-economic analysis at the regional level, using the Tempo Online statistical database of the National Institute of Statistics (INS). For this purpose, indicators were used regarding the labor force, the level of living and economic statistics of the development regions in Romania.

Key words: Romania, socio-economic indicators development regions, workforce.

JEL⁵: P25, R11, R13

Introduction

The European Parliament defines the development region as: “a territory that forms, from a geographical point of view, a net unit, or a similar set of territories in which there is continuity, in which the population possesses certain common elements and wishes to preserve its specificity thus resulting and to develop it with the aim of stimulating cultural, social and economic progress” (Bliort, 2016).

At the European level, the region is considered “the next level after the state” or “a territory that forms a net geographical unit, or a similar set of territories having continuity, population sharing certain common elements and willing to preserve and

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develop it's specific to stimulate cultural, social and economic progress" (Apostolache, 2014; Pais, 2016). The Assembly of Regions defines regions as those political entities located at the level immediately below the state, which have certain exercised powers by a government that is accountable for its acts to a duly elected assembly democratic (Bliort, 2016).

There are certain economic, social and cultural differences between the development regions of a country or macro-regions, while certain efforts are needed to reduce them throughout the application of regional development policies (Pirvu et al., 2018; Dumitrascu et al., 2018).

Concept of regional development aims to boost and diversify economic activities and stimulate investments, both in public and private sectors. Regional development is intended to eliminate socio-economic differences between territories, contributes to reducing unemployment and increasing living standards, and involves the application of specific measures to a wide spectrum of economic policies (Cirnu, 2010; Bliort, 2016).

Large regional differences in welfare and living conditions could be a real development limitation for certain regions, furthermore, can cause a social pressure, therefore it is crucial to analyze in detail the regional inequalities, as the regions have important role in accomplishing the full EU membership (Mocanu et al., 2018; Mitrica et al., 2020).

Concept "regional development policy" consists of a sequence of actions, which refer to the geographical area regardless of the state or group of states. This European policy is one of the most complex, due to the fact that it acts on areas of interest that need investment for development, such as economic development, urban and rural development, agriculture, environmental protection, transport, etc. European regional policy se is based on the redistribution, to underdeveloped areas, of a percentage of the budget achieved through the contributions of the Member States (Albu, 2019; Antonescu, 2019).

The regional development policy is essential for the EU, it has as its main goal the reduction of socio-economic gaps between the EU regions. The principle underlying the policy is represented by financial solidarity, this term refers to the redistribution of part of the European community's budget to poor or less developed regions and social groups (Diaconu, 2015).

In Romania, the regional development policy was initiated with the PHARE program, representing the set of elaborate measures promoted and implemented by the local and central authorities together with representatives of public and private

sector, and many volunteers, with the main goal to support economic development (Haller, 2017).

Implementation of regional development programs it must be primarily based on the principles established by the EU, such are: providing territorial integrity towards to more harmonized socio-economic development at regional level, in order to increase their competitiveness; ensuring the regional development throughout the advanced rural-urban relationships; renewal of relations between the cities and villages (i.e. communities different in size); enabling the access to necessary information and knowledge; preventing the environmental pollution; strengthening the protection of environmental resources and ecosystems; securing the cultural heritage; providing the optimal access to energy resources, with adequate skipping to renewables; etc. (Akimova et al., 2020; Iancu et al., 2020).

Currently, Romania is facing major problems on a macro and microeconomic scale, problems that have a negative influence on the country's ability to relaunch economic activities. In Romania, regional development emerged as a necessity, to correct the current regional gaps as well as to take over and apply the European Union legislation in this field, after its accession to the community structures (Popescu, 2020; Beciu et al., 2011).

The fundamental premises for a positive economic evolution at the regional level in Romania are: increasing the share of the private sector, developing the potential of competitive economic sectors, improving the qualification and professional improvement of human resources, adopting a high-performing management, as well as the development of civil society, etc. (Dobrescu et al., 2010).

In Romania, development regions represent areas that correspond to groups of counties, formed by associative form on the basis of a basic convention oriented towards the elaboration of projects, the realization and assessment of regional strategies, as to collecting the statistical data in accordance with the EU rules (rules issued by Eurostat for the second level of territorial classification in EU (NUTS II)), (Hapenciuc, Bejinaru, 2016).

Methodological framework

Paper analyzes the issues of socio-economic discrepancies at the level of eight development regions in Romania. In order to achieve this goal, previous research on regional development strategies was followed, with the data provided by the scientific resource sites, such are Enformation and Google Scholar were accessed. Also, collected statistical data were processed and analyzed at the level of regions regarding the activity rate of labor resources, the distribution of the employed

population, the unemployment rate, the overall GDP or GDP per inhabitant or active enterprises. Data were accessed in Tempo Online database of the National Institute of Statistics (INS) of Romania and EUROSTAT database.

The research methods used were the systematic and comparative analysis as well as the complex and deep consultation of previously realized researches from the field. The statistical research process involved, primarily the data collection and recording, their processing and analysis, as well as interpretation of gained results.

Results with Discussion

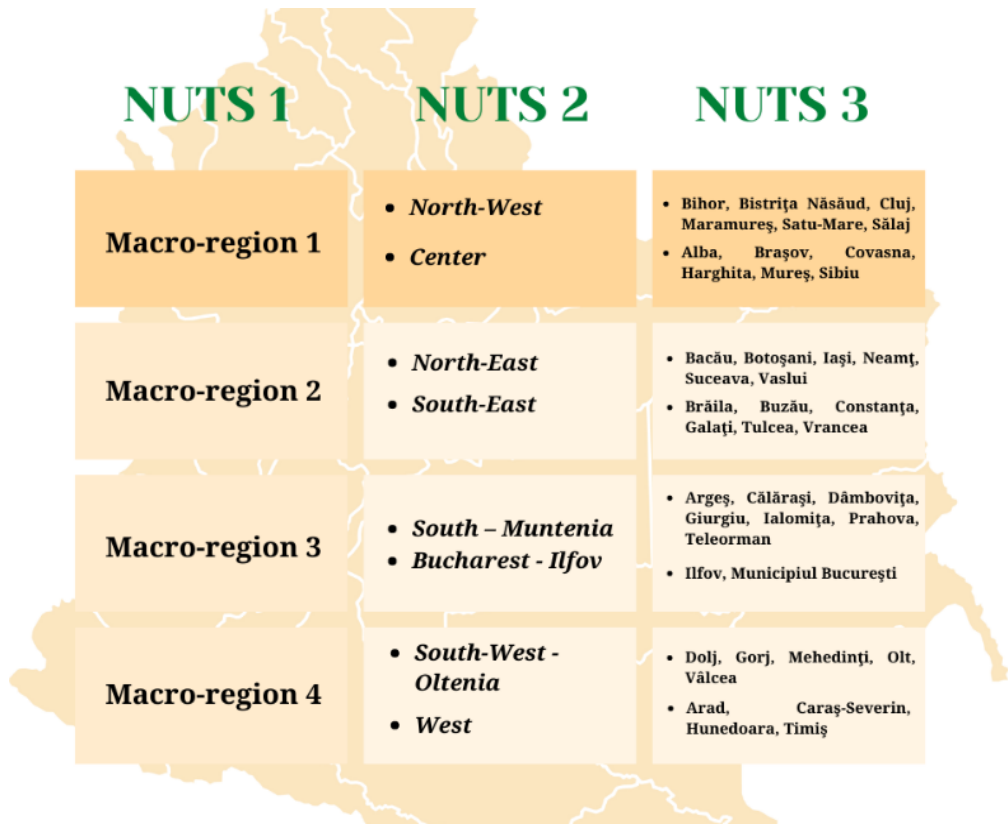
Based on the classification of territorial units at community level (NUTS). Romania's territory is divided in four macro-regions and eight development regions, respectively: North-East, South-East, South-Muntenia, South-West Oltenia, West, North-West, Center and Bucharest-Ilfov (Figure 1.).

Figure 1. The administrative-territorial organization of Romania



Source: INS, 2022a.

This classification was made to make possible the effective application of the regional development policy. Usefulness of the NUTS classification lies in delimitation of administrative units for the purpose of allocating development funds (Figure 2.).

Figure 2. The development regions of Romania in line to the NUTS classification

Source: INS, 2022a.

The activity rate of labor resources represents the ratio, expressed as a percentage, between the active civilian population and labor resources. Analyzing the activity rate of labor resources by development region, in the period 2015-2020, its growth trend was noted for all eight analyzed regions.

The highest labor resource activity rate was recorded in Bucharest-Ilfov, which was 90.4% in 2020. Analyzing the evolution trends of the activity rate by development regions, an increase of 6.86% was recorded in Bucharest - Ilfov Region, while at the opposite pole, with a decrease of 0.98% was the North-East Region (Table 1.).

Table 1. Activity rate of labor resources by macro-regions, development regions and counties (in %)

Development regions	Year						2020/2015	2020/2019
	2015.	2016.	2017.	2018.	2019.	2020.		
North-West	74.1	72.7	73.7	74.4	75.1	75	1.21%	-0.13%
Center	72.8	72.7	73.4	74.5	74.9	74.8	2.75%	-0.13%
North - East	61.5	59.4	59.7	60.7	61.1	60.9	-0.98%	-0.33%
South- East	67.3	65.5	66.2	66.8	67.7	67.8	0.74%	0.15%
South - Muntenia	63.8	62.1	62.7	63.6	64.2	63.8	0.00%	-0.62%
Bucharest - Ilfov	84.6	89.4	89.8	90.5	91.5	90.4	6.86%	-1.20%
South-West - Oltenia	69	66.4	67.2	68.7	69.2	69.2	0.29%	0.00%
West	74.1	72.8	72.7	73.4	73.5	73.5	-0.81%	0.00%
Total	70.3	69.5	70.1	71.1	71.7	71.5	1.71%	-0.28%

Source: INS, 2022a.

In 2020, as in 2019, the Northeast Region had the largest share of the employed population (18.5%), unlike the West Region, with only 8.4% of total employment. In 2020, the share of the employed population in urban areas was higher than that recorded in rural areas for five of the eight development regions. The Bucharest-Ilfov Region, due to its specificity, registered the most significant share: 88.9% of employed persons were domiciled in the urban environment. Among the three regions where the employed population was predominantly in rural areas, the North-East Region is in first place, with 60.7% (Table 2.).

Table 2. Distribution of the employed population, by development regions and residence environments, in 2020 (in %)

Development regions	Urban	Rural
North-West	55.3	44.7
Center	61.1	38.9
North - East	39.3	60.7
South- East	54.4	45.6
South – Muntenia	40	60
Bucharest - Ilfov	88.9	11.1
South-West – Oltenia	47.4	52.6
West	65	35
Total	55.2	44.8

Source: INS, 2022b.

The unemployment rate measures the level of unemployment relative to the working population. During the analyzed period, the unemployment rate registered decreases at the level of development regions in Romania. The most significant decrease was recorded in the Sud-Muntenia Region by 40.91%, from 6.6% in 2015 to 3.9% in

2020. Thus, a reduction in the number of registered unemployed is highlighted, the reduction being generated by economic development, this development being possible thanks to the support given to the diversification of economic activities, both in the urban and rural environments, and at the same time creating new jobs. This development was due to the support granted through the European Structural and Investment Funds (Table 3.).

Table 3. Unemployment rate by development region (in %)

Development regions	Years						2020/2015	2020/2019
	2015.	2016.	2017.	2018.	2019.	2020.		
North-West	3.4	3.2	2.8	2.3	2	2.6	-23.53%	30%
Center	4.7	4.4	3.5	2.9	2.6	3.3	-29.79%	26.92%
North - East	6.3	6.5	5.6	4.8	4.3	4.7	-25.40%	9.30%
South- East	6.6	6.7	5.6	4.6	4.2	4.8	-27.27%	14.29%
South - Muntenia	6.6	6.3	5	4	3.4	3.9	-40.91%	14.71%
Bucharest - Ilfov	1.8	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.1	1.2	-33.33%	9.09%
South-West – Oltenia	8.2	8.3	7.3	5.9	5.2	5.5	-32.93%	5.77%
West	3	2.6	2.2	1.8	1.7	2.2	-26.67%	29.41%
Total	5	4.8	4	3.3	2.9	3.4	-32%	17.24%

Source: INS, 2022a.

Table 4. Active enterprises at CAEN Rev.2 section level, size classes by development regions (in number)

Development regions	Years						2020/2015	2020/2019
	2015.	2016.	2017.	2018.	2019.	2020.		
North-West	73,860	76,982	81,811	85,847	88,065	93,137	26.10%	5.76%
Center	59,586	61,444	64,343	67,087	70,080	73,958	24.12%	5.53%
North - East	54,132	55,991	59,443	62,160	63,704	68,736	26.98%	7.90%
South- East	58,027	59,009	61,289	63,232	64,518	67,787	16.82%	5.07%
South - Muntenia	55,620	57,083	60,276	63,262	66,199	70,099	26.03%	5.89%
Bucharest - Ilfov	128,818	131,927	137,333	142,118	142,514	148,930	15.61%	4.50%
South-West – Oltenia	36,694	37,405	39,192	40,623	42,475	45,029	22.71%	6.01%
West	47,113	47,951	50,109	52,216	53,704	56,530	19.99%	5.26%
TOTAL	51,3850	527,792	553,796	576,545	591,259	624,206	21.48%	5.57%

Source: INS, 2022a.

In total, the number of active enterprises in Romania increased during the period 2015-2020 for over 21%. Within the development region, a relative homogeneity

was noted between the evolution of the number of active companies in observed period. While in the North-East Region their number increased for 26.98%, in the Bucharest-Ilfov Region the increase was only 15.61%. In other regions have been also registered increases in number of active companies for 16.82% - South-East Region, 19.99% - West Region, 22.17% - South-West-Oltenia Region, 24.12% - Center Region, 26.03% - South-Mountain Region, and 26.10% - North-East Region (Table 4.).

COVID-19 pandemic was initiated a labor market crisis in 2020, resulting in layoffs, decreased job opportunities, and a significant reduction in wage growth. On an annual basis (in 2020), there was 452 thousand unemployed persons according to the ILO definition, or there come to increase for 99 thousand persons compared to 2019. Comparing with previous year, it comes to increase in number of unemployed males for 22.3%, while the number of unemployed females has increased for 37.3% (INS, 2022b).

The National Institute of Statistics (INS) announced that in 2020 the largest number of enterprises was in the Bucharest-Ilfov Region (148,930 enterprises), while the South-West-Oltenia Region stood out by recording the lowest number of enterprises (45,029 enterprises). It should be noted that until 1990, mining activities were mainly practiced in the South-West Oltenia Region, where the cessation of mining activity almost completely reduced the economic activity in this region (Haller, 2017).

Table 5. GDP at the level of development regions in Romania, period 2015-2020 (EUR/capita)

Development regions	Years						2020/2015	2020/2019
	2015.	2016.	2017.	2018.	2019.	2020.		
North-West	7,100	7,800	8,900	9,600	10,700	10,600	49.30%	-0.93%
Center	7,500	8,200	9,100	10,000	10,800	10,600	41.33%	-1.85%
North - East	4,900	5,300	6,000	6,600	7,200	7,200	46.94%	0.00%
South- East	6,900	7,200	7,900	8,700	9,200	9,100	31.88%	-1.09%
South – Muntenia	6,400	6,900	7,400	8,200	8,800	8,600	34,8%	-2.27%
Bucharest - Ilfov	19,400	20,200	22,200	23,900	26,600	26,000	34.02%	-2.26%
South-West – Oltenia	5,900	6,200	7,100	8,100	9,000	8,900	50.85%	-1.11%
West	8,400	9,200	9,900	10,800	11,900	11,700	39.29%	-1.68%
Total	8,100	8,600	9,600	10,500	11,500	11,400	40.74%	-0.87%

Source: EUROSTAT, 2022.

After joining the EU, Romania benefited from the allocation of funds for cohesion and territorial cooperation, so that, according to EUROSTAT statistics during the period 2015-2020 the GDP increased by 40.74%. During the observation of regional GDP, its growth trend was observed at the level of the eight development regions of Romania. The highest increase of 50.85% was recorded in the South-West-Oltenia Region, while the lowest of 31.88% was recorded in the Southeast Region (Table 5.).

Romania's economy was strongly affected in 2020 by the COVID-19 crisis, causing the establishment of a state of alert and emergency, its effects being marked by the reduction of GDP. At the annual level, the regional GDP oscillated between EUR 7,200/inhabitant in the North-East Region and EUR 26,000/inhabitant in the Bucharest-Ilfov Region, while at the national level it was EUR 11,400/inhabitant. There is thus a very large GDP gap between the capital region and the other regions of Romania. European NUTS2 development regions are recognized as economically developed regions if GDP/capita exceeds 90% of the EU average, if GDP/capita is between 90% and 75% of the EU average regions are in progress development/in transition, while if the GDP/inhabitant is below 75% of the EU average, the regions are considered as less developed or even poorly developed (EUROSTAT, 2016).

GDP/inhabitant as an indicator of value growth, in the case of Romanian regions, is far below those recorded by developed European administrative regions, the following table shows the gaps in GDP/inhabitant at the regional level. In 2020, the Bucharest-Ilfov Region had the highest GDP/capita value compared to the EU average, 87 EUR/capita as a percentage of the EU average, or 262.5% higher than the North-East Region, which recorded the lowest GDP/inhabitant compared to the EU average, respectively 24 EUR/inhabitant as a percentage of the EU average.

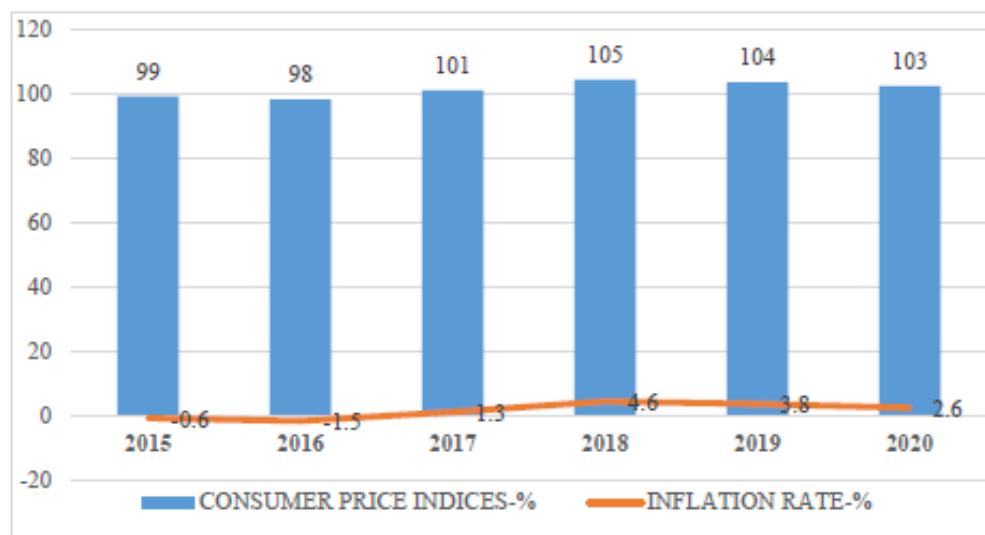
Table 6. Regional GDP compared to the EU average (EUR/inhabitant as a percentage of the EU27 average (in 2020))

Development regions	Years						2020/2015	2020/2019
	2015.	2016.	2017.	2018.	2019.	2020.		
North-West	26	28	31	32	34	35	34.62%	2.94%
Center	27	29	31	33	35	36	33.33%	2.86%
North - East	18	19	21	22	23	24	33.33%	4.35%
Southeast	25	26	27	29	29	30	20%	3.45%
South – Muntenia	23	24	25	27	28	29	26.09%	3.57%
Bucharest - Ilfov r	70	72	76	79	85	87	24.29%	2.35%
South-West – Oltenia	21	22	24	27	29	30	42.86%	3.45%
West	31	33	34	36	38	39	25.81%	2.63%
Total	29	31	33	35	37	38	31.03%	2.70%

Source: EUROSTAT, 2022.

From EUROSTAT data, it was observed that in 2020, the regional GDP compared to the EU average were oscillated between 24 EUR/inhabitant as a percentage of the EU27 average in the North-East Region and 87 EUR/inhabitant as a percentage of the EU27 average in the Region Bucharest-Ilfov (Table 6.).

Figure 3. Trend of the annual index of consumer prices in Romania during the period 2015-2020 (in %)



Source: According to INS, 2022a.

In 2020, the inflation rate reached 2.6%, showing an upward trend. Regarding the annual index of consumer prices (it measures the overall evolution of the prices of goods as well as the rate of population services in the current year compared to the year chosen as the reference period) a slight upward trend was observed in 2020, reaching the 103% threshold, or it is for 3.24% higher than in 2015 (Figure 3.).

Conclusion

In Romania, the most developed region is the Bucharest-Ilfov Region, and at the opposite side, there are the South-East and South-West-Oltenia Regions, these being poorly developed regions from a socio-economic point of view.

The North-East Region and the South-Mountain Region are predominantly agricultural regions, characterized by a higher unemployment rate compared to the other development regions. The West Region, the North-West Region and the Center present a higher degree of attractiveness for foreign investors, considering the geographical positioning towards the western borders, towards the community space,

while the Bucharest-Ilfov Region, which includes the capital, represents the decision-making center and cosmopolitan of Romania, being also the most developed region in Romania.

The evolution of the main socio-economic indicators at the level of regions in Romania, for the period 2015-2020, was characterized by:

- the increase in the activity rate of labor resources recorded in 2020 for 1.71% compared to 2015, where the Bucharest-Ilfov Region was recording the highest increase during the analyzed period, respectively 6.86%;
- the decrease in the unemployment rate by 32% in 2020 compared to 2015, where in the Sud-Muntenia Region was registered the most significant decrease of 40.91%;
- the increase in the number of enterprises at CAEN Rev. 2 section level by 21.48%, where the largest increase was in the North-East Region, for 26.98%;
- increase in GDP product for 40.74%, where the Bucharest-Ilfov Region was recorded the highest GDP in 2020, or 26,000 EUR/inhabitant, followed by the West Region with 11,700 EUR/inhabitant and the North-West and Center Regions with 10,600 EUR/inhabitant,

For the development of the regions in Romania, there is a need to consolidate a sustainable and attractive economic environment, improve public infrastructure, services and reduce taxation. The rate of economic growth at the regional level depends to the greatest extent on the way in which the endogenous development potential of the country and of each component development region is mobilized, as well as on the intensity of the financial support given to the development priorities established by the National Plan of Development.

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