INEQUALITY TRENDS IN ROMANIA

IULIANA PRECUPEȚU

*R*omania illustrates a case of remarkable growth of income inequality during the transformation period. The country is one of the most unequal in the EU, in regard to income inequality, while a range of various inequalities characterize its social setup. This paper is a descriptive attempt of highlighting three dimensions of inequality in Romania: income, labour market and education inequality. First, the article concentrates on income inequality with the aim of understanding the pattern of growing inequalities, in time. Secondly, the paper focuses on poverty and poverty profiles, by employing two measures of poverty, relative and absolute, with the aims of understanding the trends in the evolution of poverty and of highlighting the most exposed groups to poverty. Labour market inequality is treated in the next section, and the final section is dedicated to educational inequality. The paper uses NIS national data, as well as Eurostat data. The data show that even though Romania has the lowest median equivalised income in the EU, it also displays a high level of income inequality. Inequalities are structured by socio-demographic groups, as well as at territorial level, by region, residence and type of community. Moreover, there is no evidence that the existing divides tend to lower, on the contrary, they already seem deeply-rooted, and tend to maintain.

Keywords: *income inequality, labour market inequality, education inequality.*

INTRODUCTION

In Romania, income inequality grew tremendously after 1990 and today, Romania is among the most unequal countries in the EU. While in 1990 the value of the Gini coefficient placed Romania among the most equal countries in Europe, at the level of Sweden, by 2007 Romania had become the most unequal country in Europe. In 2011, Romania ranked fifth highest in EU in regard to income inequality with a Gini coefficient[1] of 33.2, after Greece (33.5), Spain (34), Latvia (35.4) and Portugal (34.2).

This article is a descriptive endeavour of highlighting three dimensions of inequality in Romania: income, labour market and education inequality. First, it

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Adresa de contact a autorului: **Iuliana Precupețu**, Institutul de Cercetare a Calității Vieții al Academiei Române, Calea 13 Septembrie, nr. 13, sector 5, 050711, București, România, e-mail: iuliana@iccv.ro.
[1] Eurostat data.

looks at income inequality in an attempt to understand the pattern of growing inequalities in time. Second, the paper concentrates on poverty and poverty profiles by employing two measures of poverty, relative and absolute, with the aims of understanding the trends in the evolution of poverty and of highlighting the most exposed groups to poverty. Labour market inequality is treated in the next section which focuses on three main dimensions: employment, unemployment and wages, while also highlighting inequalities. The final section is dedicated to educational inequality.

The paper relies on NIS national data, as well as on Eurostat data. National data come from the Romanian households' budget surveys which, in time, have been through several changes: 1990–1994 Family Budget Surveys, 1995–2000 Integrated Household Survey, 2000–2010 Household Budget Survey[2]. Eurostat data comes from either EU-SILC which was implemented in Romania starting with 2007, or LFS, starting with 1997. Even though these data describe a rather short period of time, it allows us to understand variations by socio-demographic variables and to make comparisons to other countries in the EU.

AN OVERVIEW OF INEQUALITIES IN INCOME, LABOUR MARKET AND EDUCATION

In Romania, inequalities seem to be deeply entrenched and tend to perpetuate.

Currently, Romania has the lowest median equivalised income in the EU, less than half of the EU12 average and around ten times smaller than that of some developed western countries like Netherlands or Austria. Even though very poor, Romania displays a high level of income inequality. Romania was largely an egalitarian country under communism. However, it was characterised by equality at a very low level of income and the population was generally poor and impoverished. Today, this country displays high levels of inequality while incomes continue to remain very low.

In Romania, especially during the first decade of transition, own consumption played an important role in reducing poverty and lessening inequality, particularly throughout the time of economic recession. Subsistence agriculture represented an important means that contributed to the households' budgets and helped to maintain some households barely above the poverty line throughout the transition and, furthermore, was a factor in decreasing income inequality.

Poverty continues to remain one of the crucial problems of the country[3]. In 2010, Romania ranked the second highest in the EU in regard to relative poverty rates, after Lithuania. Having one of the lowest relative poverty thresholds in EU,

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[2] In the text, we mention only "NIS data".

[3] At risk of poverty rates come from Eurostat, EU SILC data, absolute poverty rates come from MLFSP, 2010, HBS data.

Romania had in 2010 an at risk of poverty rate of 17.2%. Absolute poverty affected in 2010 a number of 1,110,000 people.

Most exposed to poverty risks are children, youth, households with dependent children (especially those with three or more children), single persons and single persons with dependent children, the unemployed, those self employed in agriculture and low educated people. In 2010, the poverty risk of persons under 18 was almost two times higher than that of persons of 65 years and over. Children and youth (under 30) represent almost half of the number of people in absolute poverty. Households with dependent children face a significantly higher risk of poverty than those without children. Most exposed to poverty are the households of two adults with three or more children and in 2010, in Romania, at risk poverty for households with three or more dependent children was the second highest in Europe after Bulgaria and was more than two times higher than the EU27 average. Unemployed people face a risk of poverty almost three times higher than the employed and maintain high and relatively stable risks over time. However, the self employed in agriculture seem to be most exposed to absolute poverty.

Inequalities are marked in Romania not only by individual and households characteristics but also by rural/urban and development region. In 2010 the gap between rural and urban areas was important as the absolute poverty was four times higher in rural than in urban areas. In Romania pockets of poverty are concentrated mostly in rural areas as 76.7% of the poor are living in rural and only 23.3% live in urban areas. In time, the gap between the two areas tended to deepen: in 2000 the absolute poverty in rural areas was less than 2 times higher than in urban areas, while in 2010 it was 4 times higher. The pattern was that, even though the rural population has been less affected by recession, the urban population has tended to gain to higher extent from recovery (Zaman and Stănculescu, 2009).

Important disparities appear between regions. The poorest region (North-East) has poverty rates fivefold higher in comparison to the richest one (Bucharest – Ilfov). The ratio is even bigger (eightfold) according to absolute poverty rates. Some of the disparities have deepened in time, even in times of economic growth, when poverty decreased. For example, in the period 2003–2006 the West region registered a 62% drop in the number of poor, in the South the number of poor was reduced by more than half, while in the Centre region the decrease was much lower, of only 34%. The differences in the pace of poverty reduction have led to increasing regional disparities (World Bank 2007).

Roma represent a deep pocket of poverty as in 2010 their absolute poverty rate was 31.4% in comparison to that of the Romanian population of 4.4%. The gap between Roma and the Romanian gradually increased in time as in 2003 the Roma poverty risk was 3 times higher than the Romanian poverty risk, whereas in 2010 was more than 7 times higher.

Employment rates are low in Romania: in 2011 total employment rate (15–64 years old) in Romania was 58.5%, well below the EU 27 average (64.3%) and much lower than the developed western countries like the Netherlands (74.9%),

Sweden (74.1%) or Denmark (73.1%). From 1997 to 2001, employment rates declined continuously and fell more abruptly in 2002, to remain rather stable to the present. The declining employment rates in early 2000s were due to the accelerated reforms and economic restructuring, coupled with early retirement schemes. The older age groups (55–64), the female labour force, those with low education experienced more important declines in employment rates, while for younger work force (15–24) the decline was rather steady.

In term of regions, employment rates vary from a low 53.5% in the Centre to a high 64.3% in Bucuresti-Ilfov region, reflecting once again disparities in development of the various regions and therefore the different capacity to absorb the work force.

Roma population is picturing a difficult situation. Roma employment rate is much lower than the national average, being situated at only 35.5%[4] while inequalities are related to gender, education, age and basic abilities (reading and writing). The employment rate is significantly higher for men (44.3%) than for women (27.4%), for the higher educated (67%) in comparison to lower educated (33.6%), and significantly lower for younger age groups (16–24) (28%) in comparison to those between 25 and 54 years old (39.3%) (Preoteasa, 2012). A combination of factors contribute to particularly difficult situation of Roma: the low level of education, low level of qualification and skills, the tradition of specific jobs which do not match the current conditions on the labour market and the discrimination faced from employers who generally offer less qualified jobs to Roma (Preoteasa 2010, Cace et al. 2010).

High unemployment rates display the youth, the low educated, males in comparison to females, urban areas in comparison to rural ones. An interesting case is represented by the higher educated as during the past three years their unemployment rate almost doubled. They seem to have been impacted more during the time of the economic crisis. This can be explained by the higher graduation rates from tertiary education and the incapacity of the labour market to absorb the more educated labour force during the crisis. Higher unemployment rates for males than females probably originate in the economic restructuring process, which affected to a higher extent the male workforce. In urban areas, unemployment is considerably higher than in rural areas, as agriculture accommodated an important segment of the jobless. However, it was justified that in the agricultural sector there is also substantial hidden unemployment (Zaman and Stănculescu 2007).

Real wages suffered a dramatic reduction during the transition as in 1996 they reached 56.2% of their 1990 level. It took 17 years into transition to recover to their value in the first year of transition. Moreover, wages in Romania are among the most unequal in EU: in 2006 the P90/P10 wage ratio was 5.5 in Romania while in other countries of the EU the ratio was as low as 2.1 in Sweden and 2.3 in Finland.

Wages represent an essential source of income at household level although their contribution to total income of households remains low in Romania, at about

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[4] Survey data, Soros, 2011.

half of the total income. Their contribution to household income is important for the employed, for those living in urban areas, and for the most affluent households. Disparities in wages maintain currently between economic sectors, public and private sectors and by gender.

A series of inequalities characterize education in Romania, among which those determined by income, residence and ethnicity are crucial.

Income introduces an important divide in education, even though public education is tax free. The costs associated with education (transportation, clothing, meals, sometimes textbooks etc) introduce a divide between low income families and the rest of the population in regard to access to school. Income becomes important also when looking at the quality of education. Private tutoring, a widespread model in Romania, supplements low quality education in some schools or disciplines, prepares the children for evaluations and admissions etc. Consequently, those who cannot afford private tutoring and rely on the public education system are disadvantaged in comparison to the others. Moreover, the introduction in lower secondary of tax based school contests which count towards the children's portfolio for high school admission (although it is not yet clear what their role is) discriminate between children coming from low income families, who cannot afford to pay the taxes for participation and the others who appear to have better chances in accessing high schools.

Another important divide is the omnipresent rural/urban disparity. While schools in urban areas generally have a better infrastructure, higher qualified staff and provide better opportunities for their students, those in rural areas tend to illustrate the opposite. Participation in education is significantly higher in urban than in rural areas and is especially deep for higher levels of education: upper secondary and tertiary. Participation rates in higher education are more than double in urban (56.3%) than in rural areas (27.2%). Rural residence seems to provide lower educational opportunities to children all along their educational path.

Rural populations also have a generally lower education, which further impedes on its development: in 2009, only 4% of population living in rural areas had a university degree, while the percentage was 25.4 in urban areas.

Roma children are disadvantaged in comparison to others. In 2011, 20% of the Roma children (6–16 years old) were not enrolled in school. Illiteracy affects 25% of the Roma aged 16 and older, being higher in rural areas, Roma compact communities and among women. Educational attainment is very low among Roma, as almost half either have no formal education or graduated from primary school, around one third graduated from lower secondary education while only 15% have upper secondary education. Those with a university degree are only 1% (Tarnovski 2012).

Other vulnerable groups of children face important problems in regard to participation in education: children coming from disadvantaged families, HIV infected or children with special educational needs (Preda 2009).

Transition to the labour market is rather difficult in Romania and is evident in the high unemployment rate of the young population which in 2011 was 23.5% for the age group 15–24 much higher than the 7.4% rate at national level (NIS 2012).

There is a sort of asymmetry between the education system and the modern requirements of the labour market, as the education system is not flexibly adapted to the needs of the labour market. To this misfit contributes the low participation in adult training in Romania in comparison to other European countries. The skills gap in the labour markets comes also from the emphasis for a relatively long time on vocational education at the secondary level and the relatively modest coverage of higher education (World Bank 2008).

Romania is characterized by low returns to education and even though an increasing trend in time is noticeable, the growth is still modest. Returns to schooling are low for those with less-than-tertiary education, especially for the graduates of vocational secondary schools who are working in the private sector. Poor children are more likely to be directed into low-return education paths (namely vocational schools), while wealthy children are more likely to attend general secondary and tertiary education institutions. This has obvious implications for the reproduction of inequality. For tertiary education, returns to education are higher, but they are still significantly lower than in other countries (World Bank 2008).

HOUSEHOLD INCOME INEQUALITY

In 2010 Romania had a median equivalised income of 2,037 Euro, which was the smallest in EU and around ten times smaller than that of some developed western countries like the Netherlands (20,292 Euro), Austria (20,618 Euro) or France (20,046 Euro), and less than half of the NMS12 average (4,431 Euro) (Eurostat).

Early '90s saw a moderate increase in the Gini coefficient in a time of economic recession (*Figure 1*[5]). In the second part of the '90s, with the start of modest economic growth, the Gini coefficient registered another increase, followed by a relatively stable period. The most significant increase in the Gini coefficient occurred after 2001, when the economy entered a path of more robust growth. The Gini coefficient maintained a very high level all through the time of economic growth and reached a peak in 2007 when Romania ranked the highest in the EU in regard to income inequality (Eurostat data). Only starting with 2008, for the first time after 1990, the Gini coefficient recorded a significant decrease although the country still remains one of the most unequal in EU.

In Romania, own consumption played an important role in reducing poverty and lessening inequality, especially throughout the time of economic recession.

In 2000, the value of the Gini coefficient excluding own consumption was 37.8 while the value of the same coefficient including own consumption was 29.4, the difference between the two being 8.4 Gini points. In time, up to 2007, the

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[5] Here we use Transmonee data as is the most complete series available for Gini coefficient. International comparisons are based on Eurostat data which start the series in 2000. The Eurostat measure is the Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income using the modified OECD scale and the Transmonee refer to the distribution of population by per capita household net income.
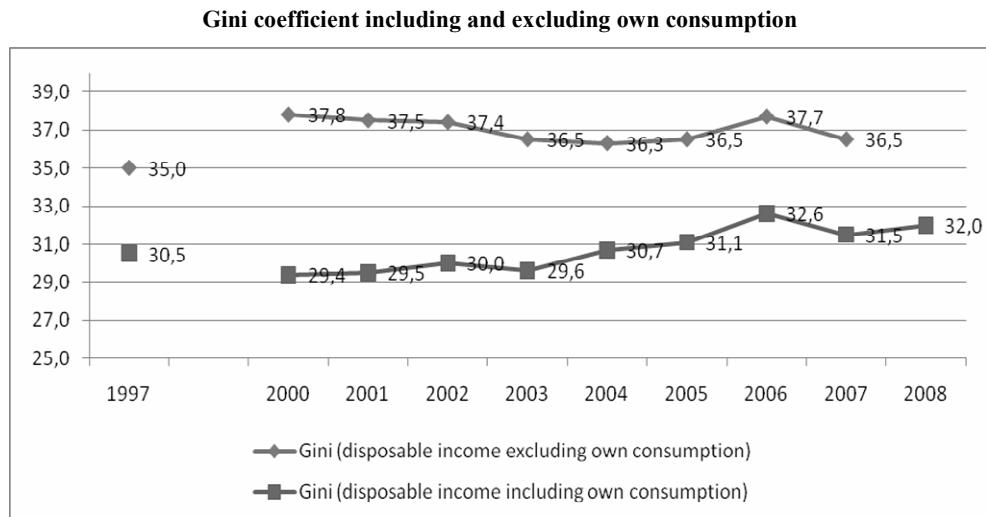
differentiation between the two decreased to 5 Gini points, showing a diminishing significance of own consumption (*Figure 2*).

Distribution of per capita household net income: Gini coefficient, 1990–2009
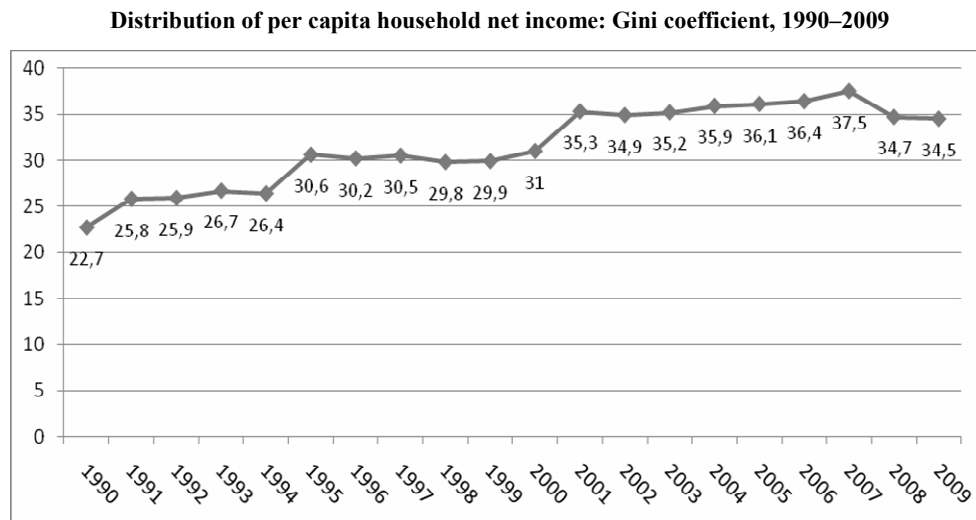
Source: Transmonee, based on NIS data.

Gini coefficient including and excluding own consumption

Source: Zamfir et al., 2010, NIS data.

Subsistence agriculture carried out by individual farmers on small plots of land represented an important means that contributed to the households budgets and helped to maintaining some households barely above the poverty line and

furthermore was a factor in decreasing income inequality (Mărginean, 2006). This was especially important for the poorest households, as for example, the most important income sources for those in the first income decile are agriculture and social benefits (NIS data).

The income quintile ratio (S80/S20) depicts approximately the same picture of income inequality as the Gini coefficient. In 2010 the S80/S20 ratio was 6, which ranks Romania fourth in the EU, after the countries with the most unequal income distribution represented by Spain (6.9), Lithuania (7.3) and Latvia (6.9), and higher than the EU27 average (5). The highest ratio was registered in 2007, when it reached 7.8 (Eurostat data).

TRENDS IN POVERTY RISKS

In 2010, Romania ranked the second highest in the EU in regard to relative poverty rates. According to Eurostat data[6], the at-risk of poverty rate in Romania was 21.1%, second after Lithuania (21.3%), higher than the EU27 average (16.4%) and much higher than in countries like the Netherlands (10.3%) or France (13.5%). It is also worth mentioning that Romania has one of the lowest poverty thresholds in EU.

Table no. 1

Relative poverty 2000–2010: at risk of poverty rate

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
At risk of poverty rate	17.1	17	18.1	17.3	17.9	18.2	18.6	18.5	18.2	17.5	17.2

Source: MLFSP 2010, NIS data.

Relative poverty, calculated by using a threshold fixed at 60 percent of the national annual median disposable income, shows little change since 2000. Despite a period of economic growth from 2000 to 2008, which led to an increase in time in incomes and consumption, the poverty rates remained rather stable as the median income also changed.

The relative poverty measure does not capture the dynamics of poverty in Romania. For this reason, another measure of poverty was calculated nationally that is able to reflect the changes in the level of welfare, against an absolute poverty line anchored in a minimum consumption basket.

The absolute poverty measure is based on a national methodology, developed by NIS, Government experts, researchers, and the World Bank. This methodology uses a consumption-based welfare indicator, and an absolute poverty line based on the cost of basic needs method. The consumption-based welfare indicator includes own consumption. The poverty line is absolute, including a food component plus

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[6] The figures for at risk poverty rate slightly differ between Eurostat and NIS data based on HBS. Here, we used Eurostat for international comparisons and NIS national data for trends in time.

an allowance for essential non-foods and services. The food component is determined as the cost of a food basket preferred by the individuals from the second and third deciles. The equivalence scale is empirical, taking into account economies of scale and relative cost of children over adults (each adult = 1, each child = 0.5, economy of scale parameter = 0.9) (Word Bank 2007).

In Romania, absolute poverty rose sharply after 1990, along with the economic recession, until 1995, when it began to decrease for two consecutive years as the economy seemed to recover to a certain extent. Once again, with a new economic recession, starting with 1997, absolute poverty rose again abruptly up to 2000, when economic growth re-launched more robustly, and continued to fall until 2010 when the effects of the economic crisis were heavily experienced by population. In 2000, the number of persons affected by absolute poverty was 8,045,000, while in 2010 the number decreased to 1,110,000.

Figure 3

Absolute poverty rates 1990–2010
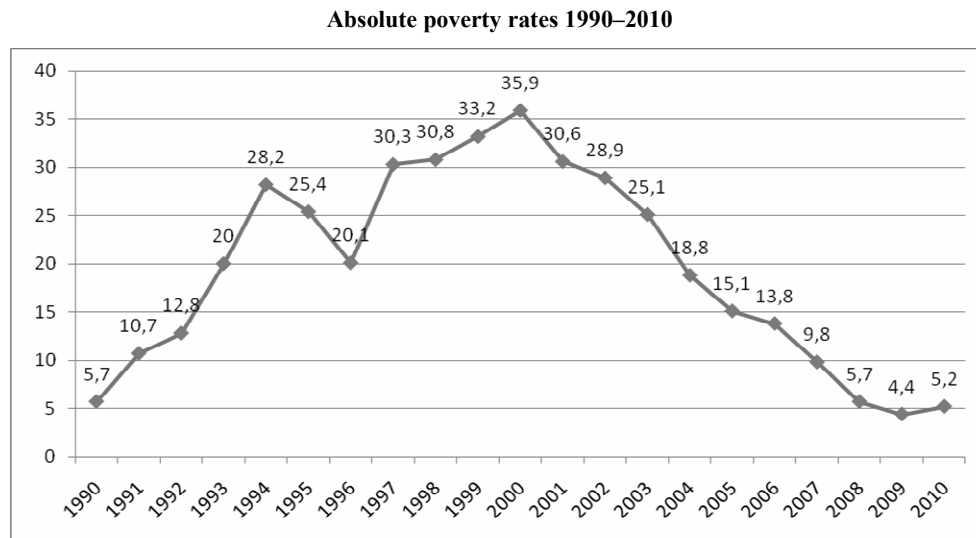
Source: MLSFP, 2010, NIS data.

The relative poverty measure is well suited for international comparison as well as for understanding the position that various social groups hold relatively to the national standard of living.

Following, we will detail the various inequalities by social and individual characteristics that are highlighted by the relative poverty measure and we will complete the picture with absolute poverty data only when the latter better highlights disparities. Essentially, poverty profiles based on the relative poverty measure and the absolute poverty measure are very similar.

In regard to age, the highest poverty risk is faced by children and youth. In 2010, the poverty risk of persons under 18 was almost two times higher (31.3%) than that of

persons of 65 years and over (16.7%). In time, between 2007 and 2010, the poverty risk decreased significantly only for those between 55 and 64 years old and for those of 65 and older (*Table no. 2*). Although the elderly were a rather vulnerable category in the nineties, lately it registered a higher reduction of the poverty risk probably as a consequence of the increases in farmers' pensions and in the pensions recorrelation that was implemented. When looking at absolute poverty, we observe that children and youth (under 30) are indeed most exposed to poverty while representing almost half of the number of people in absolute poverty (MLFSP 2010, NIS data).

Table no. 2

At risk of poverty rate by age

Age	2007	2008	2009	2010
less than 18	32,8	32,9	32,9	31,3
18–24	23,3	22,9	23,2	22,9
25–54	20,8	20,1	20,1	19,4
55–64	20,2	17	15,5	13,9
65 years or over	30,6	26	21	16,7

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC data.

When looking at household type (*Table no. 3*), households with dependent children face a significantly higher risk of poverty than those without children. Most exposed to poverty are the households of two adults with three or more children. In 2010, in Romania, at risk poverty for households with three or more dependent children was the second highest in Europe in 2010 (60.4%) after Bulgaria (65%) and was more than two times higher than the average of EU27 (25.9%). Single persons with dependent children also have high poverty risks. In time, from 2007 to 2010 poverty risks decreased for most types of households with the exception of those made up of two adults with dependent children for which the risks increased.

Table no. 3

At risk of poverty rate by household type

Household type	2007	2008	2009	2010
Households without dependent children	22	18,4	16,5	14,3
single person	36,2	32,9	29,1	26,7
two adults, younger than 65	17	13,8	13,1	13,5
two adults, at least one aged 65 or older	25,8	20	14,5	11,3
three or more adults	16,8	12,7	13,1	10,3
Households with dependent children	26,5	26,3	26,2	25,3
single person with dependent children	42,5	39,9	35,3	31,9
two adults with one dependent child	14,9	14,1	14,9	16,4
two adults with two dependent children	22,4	24	24,3	26,7
two adults with three or more children	54,8	57,3	56,3	60,4
three or more adults with dependent children	26,7	25,7	25,2	22,4

Source: Eurostat, EUSILC data.

As expected, in regard to most frequent activity status, unemployed people are most exposed to poverty (45.4%), facing a risk almost three times higher than the employed (17.2%) and maintaining high and relatively stable risks over time. Other inactive people also face higher poverty risks (*Table no. 4*).

However, when looking at absolute poverty rates and trying to analyse poverty rates by a more refined activity status, we can observe that the self employed in agriculture have the highest poverty rate (12.9%) representing also the highest share in the number of people in absolute poverty (22.9%). Self employed in non agricultural domain (10.7%) and housewives (10.2) also face higher risks of poverty, while the unemployed ranked fourth, with a poverty rate of 9.4%. Other categories are less exposed to poverty: old people and preschool children (8.4%), students (6.5%), retired (2%) and employed (1%) (MLFSP 2010, NIS data).

Table no. 4

At risk of poverty rate by most frequent activity status

Most frequent activity status	2007	2008	2009	2010
employed	18,3	17,5	17,6	17,2
not employed	27,9	24,7	22,3	20,5
unemployed	46,4	42,7	46,4	45,4
retired	22,9	19	15,7	12,8
other inactive	33,1	31,8	30,7	29,8

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC data.

When looking at education (*Table no. 5*), the data show that highly educated people are well protected against poverty while the least educated (ISCED 0–2) represent the most vulnerable category in this respect. In time, from 2007 to 2010 poverty rates decreased significantly for those with low education.

Table no. 5

At risk of poverty rate by highest level of education achieved

| Highest level of education achieved	2007	2008	2009	2010
ISCED 0–2	40,5	36	35,1	33,2
ISCED 3–4	14,2	13,7	12,1	12,5
ISCED 5–6	1,2	0,7	1,6	1,1

Source: Eurostat, EUSILC data.

Inequalities are marked in Romania not only by individual and households characteristics but also by location. NIS data from HBS highlight further inequalities between urban and rural on the one hand and various development regions on the other hand.

At risk of poverty rate was in 2010 three times higher in rural (27.1%) than in urban areas (9%). When looking at absolute poverty, in 2010 the gap between rural and urban areas was even deeper: the absolute poverty gap was four times higher in rural (8.8%) than in urban (2.2%). In Romania pockets of poverty are concentrated

mostly in rural areas as 76.7% of the poor are living in rural and only 23.3% live in urban areas (MLFSP 2010, NIS data).

In time, absolute poverty rates dropped considerably both in urban and rural areas. However, poverty reduction was much more important in urban than in rural: between 2000 and 2010, absolute poverty became 11 times lower in urban and only about 5 times in rural areas. The gap between the two areas tended to deepen with only small variations in time: in 2000 the absolute poverty in rural areas was less than 2 times higher than in urban areas, while in 2010 it was 4 times higher.

Figure 4

Absolute poverty by residence
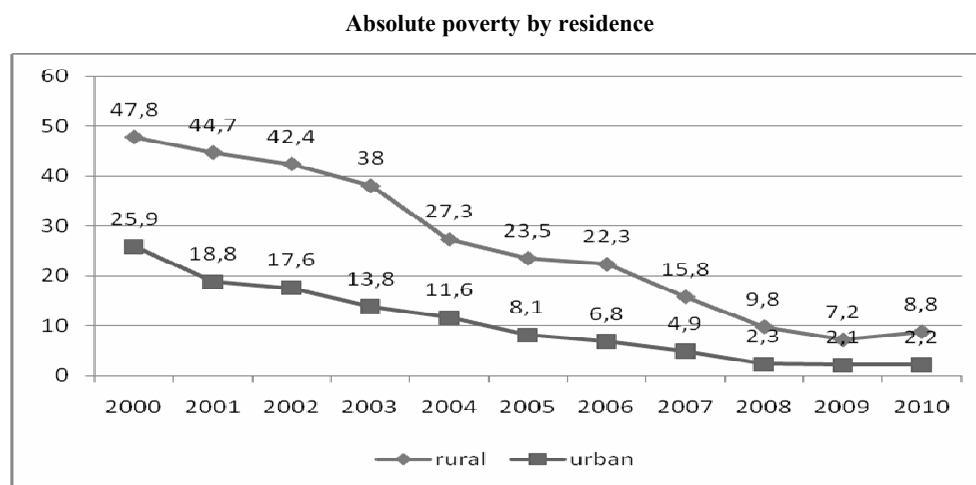
Source: MLFSP, 2010, NIS data.

Figure 5

Absolute poverty rates by development region
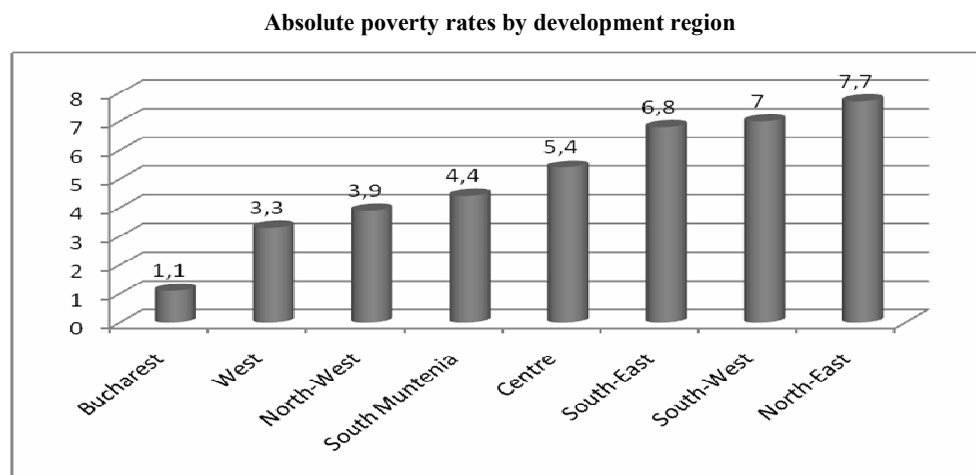
Source: MLFSP, 2010, NIS data.

Looking further at the spatial distribution of poverty, big disparities become evident: the highest relative poverty rates are to be found in North-East region (26.2%) and South-East region (23.1%) while the lowest incidence of poverty is in Bucharest – Ilfov region (5.3%). According to absolute poverty rates, the regional divide is even bigger: the poorest region has poverty rates almost 8 times higher than the Bucharest region (*Figure 5*). Some of the disparities deepened in time, even in times of economic growth, when poverty decreased. For example, in the period 2003–2006 the West region registered a 62% drop in the number of poor, in the South the number of poor was reduced by more than half, while in the Centre region the decrease was much lower, at only 34%. The differences in the pace of poverty reduction lead to increasing regional disparities (World Bank 2007).

In Romania, there are also important disparities associated with ethnicity. Roma represent a deep pocket of poverty as in 2010 their absolute poverty rate was 31.4% in comparison to that of the Romanian population of 4.4% and of the Hungarian population of 2.4%. Roma absolute poverty rate decreased from 76.8% in 2003 to 31.4% in 2010. However, the gap between Roma and the Romanian gradually increased in time as in 2003 the Roma poverty risk was 3 times higher than the Romanian poverty risk, whereas in 2010 was more than 7 times higher (MLFSP 2010, NIS data).

LABOUR MARKET INEQUALITY

In 2011 the total employment rate (15–64 years old) in Romania was 58.5%, well below the EU 27 average (64.3%) and much lower the developed western countries like the Netherlands (74.9%), Sweden (74.1%) or Denmark (73.1%). Employment rates were similar to those in Italy (56.9%) and Bulgaria (58.5%). From 1997 to 2001, employment rates declined continuously and fell more abruptly in 2002, to remain rather stable to the present. The declining employment rates in early 2000s were due to the accelerated reforms and economic restructuring, coupled with early retirement schemes. For female labour force the drop in employment was a bit sharper than for the male labour force (*Figure 6*). In 2011, female employment rates, although lower than the EU average (58%), were higher than in countries like Greece (45.1%), Italy (46.5%), Hungary (50.6%) and Malta (41%) (Eurostat, LFS data).

Employment rates declined for all age groups (*Figure 7*) in a similar way from 1997 to 2002, when a significant drop was registered for older age groups (55–64), while for the younger work force (15–24) the decline was rather steady. It has been explained (Zaman and Stănculescu 2007) that the early retirement schemes along with the changing working environment can account for the changes evident for the older work force. In this case, employees have not been sufficiently able to adapt to new challenges of market economy especially during
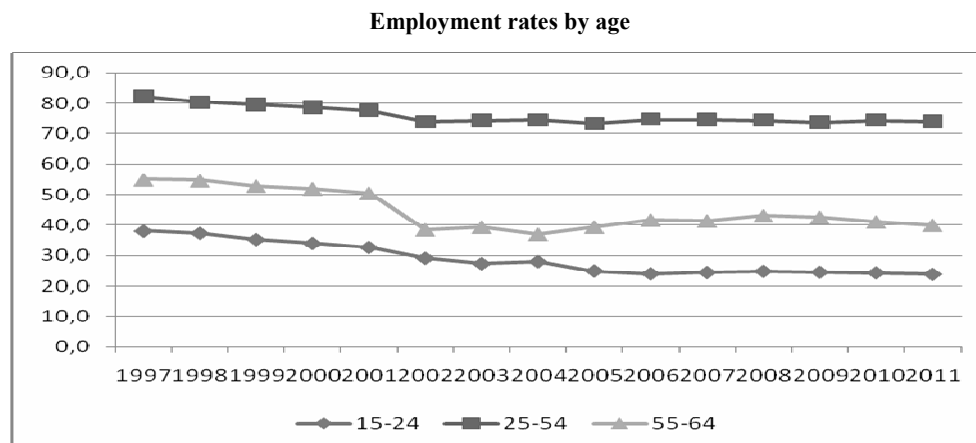
the time of economic growth in early 2000s. For younger age groups, increasing enrolment in higher education can explain the drop in activity rates.

Figure 6

Employment rates by gender
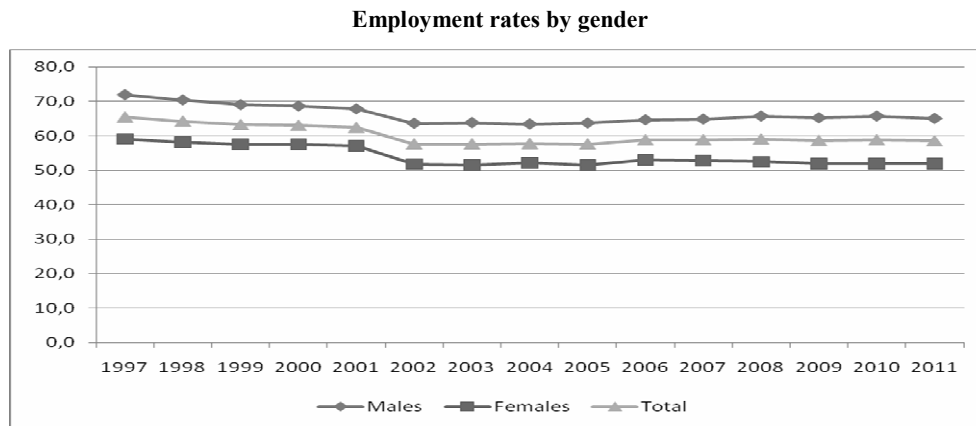
Source: Eurostat, LFS data.

Figure 7

Employment rates by age

Source: Eurostat, LFS data.

The employment rates of individuals with higher education (*Figure 8*) remained rather stable during the time described by the data and even registered a small increase in 2004. Generally, those with secondary education also have employment rates characterized by stability. Most important decrease in employment rates was registered in early 2000s for those with low education. The economic restructuring at the time seems to have impacted most on the less educated. On the one hand, opportunities are less important for this category on the

market, on the other hand, less educated individuals are more strongly represented among older cohorts which went into early retirement at a higher rate than the rest of the population (as also explained by Zaman and Stănculescu 2007).

Figure 8

Employment rates by education
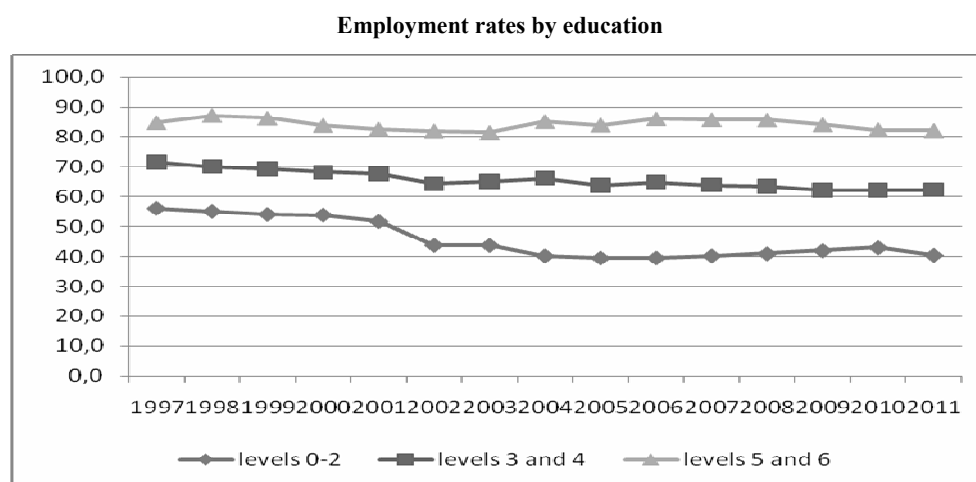
Source: Eurostat, LFS data.

Employment rates also vary by region (*Table no. 6*), from a low 53.5% in the Centre to a high 64.3% in Bucuresti-Ilfov region, reflecting disparities in development of the various regions and therefore the different capacity to absorb the work force.

Table no. 6

Employment rates by region

	Employment rate
North West	57.7
Centre	53.5
North East	62
South East	55.5
South Muntenia	59.7
Bucuresti Ilfov	64.3
South West Oltenia	59.2
West	57.9

Source: NIS, Annual Statistical Yearbook, 2010.

In regard to change in employment according to occupational categories (*Table no. 7*), several occupational categories saw their numbers reduced over time: managers, technicians and associate professionals, skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers, craft and related trades workers and plant, machine

operators and assemblers. Most of these changes are related to economic restructuring. The occupational categories that saw their numbers increase are professionals, service and sales workers and elementary occupations. In case of professionals, the expansion of higher education can account for their rising numbers, while for service and sales workers, the change in numbers reflects the increasing share in the economy of services.

Table no. 7

Change in employment according to occupational categories (ISCO) (thousands)

	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
Total employed persons	10,013.3	9,538.5	8,723.4	8,592.3	8,637.3	8,764.5	8,675.8	8,960.6
Managers	278.0	232.9	252.6	255.6	241.7	224.6	170.2	195.3
Professionals	654.6	707.3	675.6	776.0	862.6	945.0	1,059.8	1,236.7
Technicians and associate professionals	946.0	883.3	857.5	832.2	836.7	864.0	818.4	583.0
Clerical support workers	423.3	423.0	394.3	399.7	373.4	448.7	425.2	368.9
Service and sales workers	725.2	751.4	800.4	843.9	934.8	946.1	1,062.5	1,223.3
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	3,157.4	3,088.8	2,369.6	1,986.1	1,913.6	1,675.8	1,728.6	1,841.8
Craft and related trades workers	2,039.9	1,783.3	1,720.9	1,579.6	1,506.3	1,523.5	1,407.6	1,506.1
Plant and machine operators, and assemblers	1,061.4	972.1	973.2	1,058.4	985.6	1,056.9	955.4	935.4
Elementary occupations	727.5	696.5	679.4	860.8	907.5	1,003.9	982.9	988.8
Armed forces occupations	:	:	:	:	75.2	75.7	65.1	81.3

Source: Eurostat, LFS.
Note: 1998, 2012 data is for trimester II, 2002–2010 data is for trimester IV.

A specific situation in regard to employment in Romania is represented by the Roma population. A study undertaken in 2011 on Roma population proved that the Roma employment rate is much lower than the national average, being situated

at only 35.5%[7] (Preoteasa, 2012). The same study showed that inequalities are related to gender, education, age and basic abilities (reading and writing) while residence is not important. Employment rate is significantly higher for men (44.3%) than for women (27.4%), for the higher educated (67%) in comparison to lower educated (33.6%), and significantly lower for younger age groups (16–24) (28%) in comparison to those between 25 and 54 years old (39.3%).

In time, employment rates declined for this population: in 1992, 22% of the Roma (Zamfir and Zamfir 1993) were employed, whereas in 1998 the share of the employed in the Roma population was only 12.9% (Zamfir and Preda 2002). Currently, only 10% of the Roma (Preoteasa, 2012) declared being permanently employed over the past two years. A combination of factors contribute to the particularly difficult situation of Roma: the low level of education, low level of qualification and skills, the tradition of specific jobs which do not match the current conditions on the labour market and the discrimination faced from employers who generally offer less qualified jobs to Roma (Preoteasa 2010, Cace et al. 2010).

UNEMPLOYMENT

In 2011, unemployment rates were moderate in Romania (7.7%) and lower than the EU average (9.7%). Unemployment rate for the youth (*Table 8*) is significantly higher than for other age groups and economic crisis seems to have impacted heavily on this category (15–24) for which unemployment rose significantly since 2008 to the present. Young people in Romania have a higher unemployment rate than the EU average (21.3%), while the other age groups have lower unemployment rates than the EU average.

In regard to education, higher unemployment rates are registered for the low educated, followed closely by those with upper secondary and post-secondary education. In time, a significant increase in unemployment rates is to be observed for the higher educated who show the highest growth during the time described by data: from 2008 to 2011, their unemployment rates almost doubled. This category was especially impacted during the time of the economic crisis, as a particular increase in unemployment rates registered in 2009. This can be explained by the higher graduation rates from tertiary education and the incapacity of the labour market to absorb the more educated labour force during the crisis.

Higher unemployment rates for males than females probably originate in the economic restructuring process, which affected to a higher extent the male workforce. In urban, unemployment are considerably higher than in rural, as agriculture attracted an important segment of the jobless. In 2011, unemployment rate was 8.8 in urban and 5.5 in rural (NIS data). However, it was justified that in

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[7] Survey data, Soros, 2011.

the agricultural sector there is also a substantial hidden unemployment (Zaman and Stănculescu 2007).

Unemployment rate[8] by age, education, gender and residence

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Total	7.7	7.3	8.8	7.4	8.1	7.5	7.6	6.8	6.1	7.2	7.6	7.7
Age												
15–24	17.8	17.6	22.2	19.5	22.3	20.2	21.4	20.1	18.6	20.8	22.1	23.7
25–54	6.9	6.3	7.3	6.2	6.4	6.4	6.4	5.6	5.0	6.1	6.4	6.4
55–64	1.1	1.7	1.5	1.9	3.3	2.4	2.6	2.3	2.5	3.0	3.3	3.7
Education												
levels 0–2	5.3	5.4	7.6	7.1	9.8	8.0	9.0	8.6	8.6	8.9	7.2	8.6
levels 3 and 4	9.5	8.6	10.0	8.2	8.4	8.1	7.9	6.9	6.0	7.3	8.3	8.1
levels 5 and 6	3.6	3.9	4.1	3.4	3.1	3.9	3.8	3.0	2.7	4.4	5.4	5.2
Gender												
males	8.2	7.7	9.1	7.8	9.4	8.1	8.5	7.6	7.0	8.0	8.2	8.2
females	7.1	6.8	8.3	6.8	6.5	6.8	6.4	5.7	5.0	6.2	6.9	7.1

Source: Eurostat, LFS data 1997–2010, for 2011 NIS (2011), LFS data.
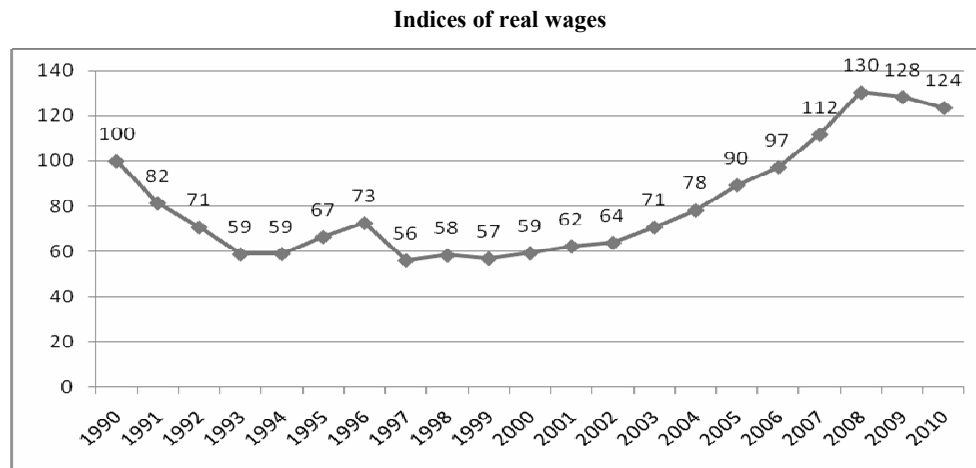
WAGES

During the first years of transition, real monthly wages diminished abruptly and in 1993 they reached 58.9% of their 1990 level (*Figure 9*). A new record low was registered in 1996 when they were only 56.2% of the 1990 level. They picked up slowly but it was only in 2007 that they superseded their value in the first year of transition.

In 2006, according to Eurostat data, wages in Romania were among the most unequal in the EU: the P90/P10 wage ratio in Romania (5.5) was the second highest in EU after Latvia (6). In the developed countries of EU, the P90/P10 wage ratio was as low as 2.1 in Sweden, 2.3 in Finland and 2.4 in Denmark.

At household level, wages represent an essential source of income, although their contribution to total income of households remains low in Romania, at about half of the total income. In 2011, wages represented 48.4% of the total incomes of households. For households where the head is employed, wages represented 80.8% of their incomes while for households with the head working in agriculture, wages constituted only 5.9% of their total incomes. Discrepancies are also evident by residence: in urban wages are 62.9% of total incomes whereas in rural they represent only 26%. (NIS 2012a)

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[8] Unemployment rates figures differ between NIS and Eurostat.

Indices of real wages

Source: NIS, Statistical Yearbook, 2011.

There are also discrepancies in the way they contribute to household income. In 2007 for the poorest households (first decile) wages represented only 3.8% of their total income, the most important income source for this category being incomes from social transfers (25.2%), followed by income from agriculture (9.2%) and self employment (5%). The most affluent households (tenth decile) relied mostly on income from wages as they represented 74.5% of their total income and self-employment. Income from social transfers constituted 7.3% of total income while non agricultural self employment contributed with 2%.

The average net monthly wage varies by economy sectors. In 2010 (NIS data, Statistical Yearbook, 2011) the financial intermediation and insurance sector had wages far above the national average, more than double the national average and four times higher than the ones in the hotels and restaurant sector. While education and health sectors have wages close to national average, other sectors stand out with much higher wages than the average. The energy, mining and telecommunication sectors have net monthly wages up to two times higher than the average.

A main policy concern has been for a long time the relationship between productivity and wages on one hand and the disparities in wages between public and private sectors on the other hand. It was showed (OECD 2000; Zaman and Stănculescu 2007) that many times in the public sectors wages increased in no relation with productivity, like it was the case prior to election in 2004, and the following two years, while in the private they generally kept up with productivity. An important wage differential that maintained for an important part of the transition was that between some of the former regie autonomes[9] and other public enterprises.

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[9] State-owned enterprises organised as public utilities. At the end of 90s they started to be transformed into corporations.

In state-owned companies and most regies autonomes, the lack of hard-budget limits and other corporate-governance problems contributed to wages becoming out of line with productivity. Several factors (OECD, 2000) accounted for the "soft" budget limits in these enterprises: political interference in banks' decisions, monopolistic pricing and tolerance of payment arrears. As a result, enterprises could frequently continue to operate irrespective of heavy losses.

Currently, there is still a wage differential between public and private sectors in favour of the public. In 2010 the average net wage was 1,599 RON in public and 1,294 RON in private sector, while the national average was 1,391 RON). The differential lowered in 2010 in comparison to the previous year: the wages in the public sector declined while those in the private sector increased. The decrease in the public sector is explained by the 25% cuts in salaries in 2010. Moreover, in the beginning of 2010 the law of unitary salaries was introduced, aimed at reducing the major discrepancies between the various public sector categories of employees by introducing wage coefficients ranging on a scale from 1 to 12. The differences private-public, even though lower in the present, still remain, although they might be in reality a little lower than shown by the data, as in private sector, especially the small and medium sized employees may underreport wages paid in order to minimise payroll taxes.

There is also a wage differential between men and women that tended to deepen a little between 2009 and 2010, which is generally explained by the participation of women in activities with lower value added. The average net wage in 2010 was 1,466 RON in case of men and 1,308 in case of women.

EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY

Romania went through a process of educational expansion in the 1960s similar to the other European countries. The most important extension took place between 1960s and 1980s, while in the last decade of the communist regime, the expansion stabilized. The proportion of population attending school saw the highest increase between 1960/1961 and 1980/1981 when it grew from 17.2% in to 25%. The total number of schools grew from 23,890 in 1960/1961 to 29,766 in 1980/1981, registering an increase of 25%. The proportion in total population of students attending higher education also grew from 0.4% students in total population in 1960/1961 to 0.9% in 1980/1981 (based on NIS[10] data). However, higher education was very much kept under control by the communist regime through "numerus clausus" principle. During the first decade of transition, the population attending school started to contract due to lowering fertility, while the number of schools also declined by the end of the decade.

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[10] Own calculations based on NIS data, Statistical Yearbooks.

After 1990, the most important positive development was the expansion of higher education through the founding of new private universities and diversification of curricula in existing state universities. The number of faculties increased 6 times over a decade, from 101 in 1989/1990 to 629 in 2010/2011. Enrolment rates in higher education grew from 27.7% in 2000/2001 to 53.6% in 2007/2008 when they reached their peak and have been on the decrease since 2009, reaching 45% in 2009/2010 (Ministry of Education, 2008, 2010). The development of higher education was beneficial for younger generations (*Figure 10*) as well as for the middle age generations who were not able to get a degree in communist times due to the policy at the time. The higher educational attainment of the 15–24 age group more than tripled between 2003 to 2011 and doubled for the 25–34 group.

In recent years, the average years of education increased from 14.6 years 2000/2001 to 16.3 years in 2009/2010 (Ministry of Education 2010). This recent increase is mainly due to the expansion of higher education.

Figure 10

Higher educational attainment by age
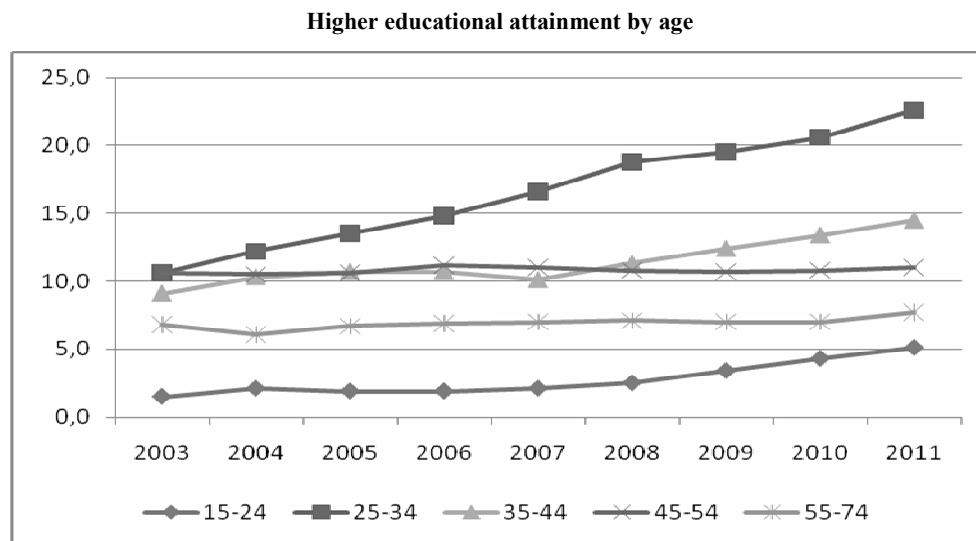
Source: Eurostat.

Although higher education underwent an important extension, according to Eurostat data[11], in 2011 in Romania the proportion in active population of persons with tertiary education was the lowest in Europe, at 13%, and much lower than the EU average (23.6%).

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[11] Eurostat figures slightly differ from national ones. Table no. 8 includes national data that allows breakdown by residence.

Table no. 9

Distribution of active population (15–64) by educational attainment and residence

		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Tertiary	total	9.5	10	10.5	10.6	12.1	12.7	13.7	14.6	15.4	16.4
	urban	16	16.6	12.8	17.2	19.1	20.1	21.4	22.8	23.8	25.4
	rural	2.1	2.3	6.6	2.6	2.8	2.9	3.2	3.5	3.8	4
Postsecondary	total	4.7	4.8	4.9	4.5	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.6	4.4	4.2
	urban	7.5	7.6	7.5	7	7	7.1	6.9	6.5	6.3	6
	rural	1.6	1.7	4	1.6	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.6
Upper secondary	total	32.8	32.7	32.4	32.5	32.2	32.3	33.3	33.7	33.1	33.9
	urban	40.5	40.4	39.8	10	38.4	38.9	39.5	39.9	38.6	39.6
	rural	24	23.8	17.5	23.3	24.1	23.6	24.7	25	25.7	26
Vocational	total	24.3	25	26.1	26.5	26.9	27.1	26.7	26.4	26.1	24.3
	urban	25.5	25.4	30.1	26	25.3	24.8	23.6	22.9	23.5	21.2
	rural	23	24.5	26.4	27	29.1	30.2	31	31.2	29.9	28.6
Lower secondary	total	20.5	20.2	20	20.5	18.5	18.1	17.4	16.8	17.4	18
	urban	8.6	8.3	8.4	8.4	8.6	7.8	7.2	6.4	6.5	6.7
	rural	34.1	33.8	33.8	35.1	31.6	31.6	31.3	31.2	32.5	33.5
Primary	total	8.2	7.3	6.1	8.3	5.5	5	4.1	3.9	3.6	3.3
	urban	2	1.7	1.5	1.3	1.7	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.3
	rural	15.3	13.8	11.6	10.4	10.5	9.8	7.9	7.3	6.6	6

Source: Ministry of Education, 2008, 2010, LFS data.

Romania has a high proportion of early leavers[12] (*Figure 11*), currently 17,5%, higher than the EU average (13.5%). In the EU, the proportion of early leavers varied in 2011 between 4.2% in Slovenia and 26.5% in Spain.

A series of inequalities characterize education in Romania, among which those determined by income, residence and ethnicity are crucial.

Although public education is tax free, income introduces an important divide in education. A series of costs are associated with education (transportation, clothing, meals, sometimes textbooks etc). These costs introduce a divide between low income families and the rest of the population in what regards access to schools as the low income households can hardly afford all the mentioned costs. Income becomes important also when looking at quality of education. Private tutoring is a widespread model in Romania for those who can afford it. The purpose of private tutoring is to prepare children for various school contests, supplement low quality education in some schools or disciplines, prepare the children for evaluations and admissions etc. Consequently, those who cannot afford private tutoring and rely on the public education system are disadvantaged in comparison to the others. Moreover, the introduction in lower secondary of tax

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[12] Early leaver from education and training generally refers to a person aged 18 to 24 who has finished no more than a lower secondary education and is not involved in further education or training.

based school competitions which count towards the children's portfolio for high school admission (although it is not yet clear what their role is) discriminate between children coming from low income families, who cannot afford to pay the taxes for participation and the others who appear to have better chances in accessing high schools.

Figure 11

Early leavers
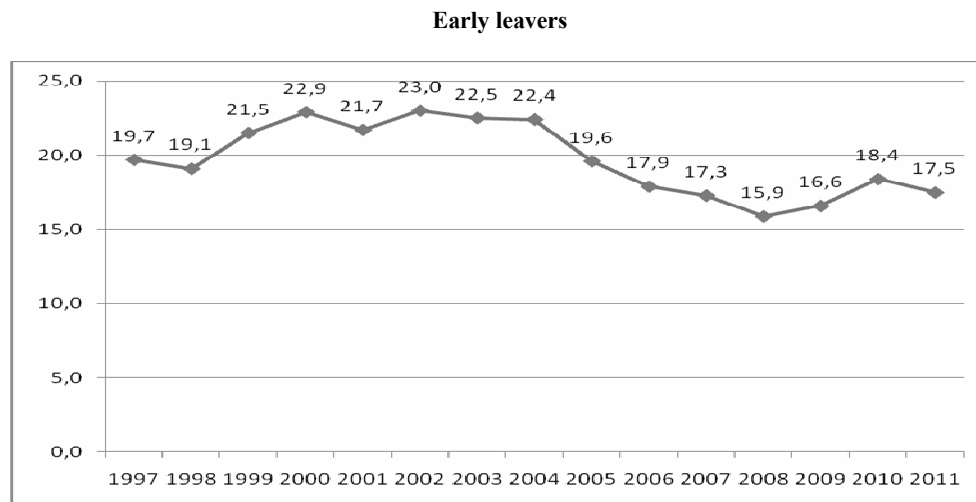
Source: Eurostat.

Another important divide is the omnipresent rural/urban disparity that is evident in the various indicators describing education in the two settings. While schools in urban areas generally have a better infrastructure, higher qualified staff and provide better opportunities for their students, those in rural areas tend to illustrate the opposite.

The proportion of qualified personnel in urban areas during the last decade is significantly higher than in rural. In the case of early education, the qualified personnel in 2009/2010 was 97% in urban in comparison to 93.2% in rural areas while in the case of lower secondary, it was 98.7% in urban in comparison to 95.6% in rural areas (Ministry of Education, 2010). There was an increasing trend in time in hiring qualified personnel, while the gaps between the two settings tended to lower, especially during the past years.

The students per teaching staff ratio also varies by residence: in 2009/2010 the ratio was 16 in urban and 19 in rural in case of early education, while for primary education the ratio was 15 in rural and 19 in urban whereas for the other levels the differences are not significant.

Participation in education also varies by residence. In 2009/2010, participation rate in early education in urban areas was 80.7% while in rural areas

was 76%. In time, there was an increasing trend in participation rates from 66.1% in 2000/2001 to 82.1% in 2009/2010, but the gap between urban and rural areas remained relatively stable. Participation in lower secondary education, although high (98.3%) in 2009/2010, also displays the same divide between residences: 106.4%[13] in urban and 91.2% in rural areas. The gap becomes deeper in case of upper secondary education; participation rate is 110.6% in urban and 81.9% in rural. Dropout rates are also higher in rural in comparison to urban areas (Ministry of Education 2010).

Participation rates in higher education are more than double in urban (56.3%) than in rural areas (27.2%). This pattern shows the significantly lower opportunities that rural areas provides to children in comparison to urban areas all along their educational path. In fact, as showed by a study by Voicu and Vasile (2010), a series of factors cumulate in rural that influence the decision to enrol in higher education: values in the network of friends, distance to the university, the demand for higher education graduates on the labour market and the quality of education at lower secondary level. To this, we might add the lower standard of living in rural areas which impedes on choosing longer educational paths by students and their families. The quoted study showed that expansion of higher education in the '90s contributed to higher inequalities, but the years 2000 marked a diminishing of quantitative access inequalities between residences.

The urban/rural divide is much more obvious when looking at the distribution of population by educational attainment in rural and urban areas (Table no. 8). In 2009, only 4% of population living in rural had a university degree, while the percentage was 25.4 in urban areas. The divide maintains in favour of urban for higher levels of education (upper secondary and postsecondary) and reverses for lower levels of education (vocational, lower secondary and primary). For these lower levels, the proportion of graduates is much higher in rural than in urban areas.

A study on Roma (Tarnovski, 2012) showed that 20% of the children (6–16 years old) were not enrolled in school. According to the study, illiteracy affects 25% of the Roma aged 16 and older, being higher in rural, Roma compact communities and among women. Educational attainment, as showed by the quoted study, is very low among Roma, as almost half either have no formal education or graduated primary school, around one third graduated lower secondary education while only 15% have upper secondary education. Those with a university degree are only 1%.

A series of vulnerable groups of children face more important problems in regard to participation in education. A study dedicated to risks and inequalities (Preda 2009) highlighted several vulnerable groups: children coming from

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[13] Percentages over one hundred are due to repeaters and children who go back school after temporary leaving the system.

disadvantaged families, Roma children, HIV infected or children with special educational needs. A complex array of factors can account for their limited access to education. In case of poor children and Roma, the characteristics of communities in which they live impact on their integration in schools: poor development of educational infrastructure or distance to schools, inadequate transportation facilities, lack of positive models in their community of origin etc. The quoted report showed in the case of Roma children that school segregation influences school performance, while further barriers to successful integration are the cultural orientations of Roma, as well as discrimination on the part of schools and society in general. The low participation in education of HIV infected children and of those with special educational needs are largely determined by the culture of the educational organization and teachers, inappropriate facilities for disabled persons, a low number of places in early education system that doesn't allow full participation of children.

Transition to labour market is rather difficult in Romania and is evident in the high unemployment rate of young population which is 23.5% for the age group 15–24 much higher than the 7.4% rate at national level (NIS, 2011 data). There is a sort of asymmetry between the education system and the modern requirements of the labour market, as the education system is not flexibly adapted to the needs of labour market. Most of the explanations converge towards the idea that the many reforms of the education system did not achieve their goals and the system continues to follow old ways. To the mismatch between supply and demand contributes the low participation in adult training in Romania in comparison to other European countries. In 2011, only 1.6% of 25–64 year olds have received education or training, compared to a an EU27 average of 8.9%. The skills gap in the labour market is also influenced by the emphasis for a relatively long time on vocational education at the secondary level and the relatively modest coverage of higher education (World Bank 2008).

RETURNS TO EDUCATION

Romania is characterized by low returns to education and even though an increasing trend in time is noticeable, the growth is still modest. A report by the World Bank (2008) showed that average returns to one year of schooling are less than 6% in Romania in comparison to over 10% worldwide. Returns to schooling are low for those with less-than-tertiary education, especially for the graduates of vocational secondary schools who are working in the private sector. The report reveals that poor children are more likely to be directed into low-return education paths (namely vocational schools), while wealthy children are more likely to attend general secondary and tertiary education institutions. This has obvious implications for the reproduction of inequality. For tertiary education, returns to education are

significantly higher, earnings being 55% higher than in case of basic education (Eurostat, 2002 data), but they are still significantly lower than in other countries of the World (World Bank 2008).

AS A CONCLUSION...

Income inequality grew in Romania during the transformation period to a high extent, turning the country into one of the most unequal in the EU. Today, inequalities are evident by socio-demographic groups, as well as at local level. Not only there is an important divide between a small elite of very rich and a large group of poor people, but there are also important inequalities between several large developed cities and the rest of the country, between rural and urban areas, between big cities and small towns, between large villages and small, poor, aged villages, as well as between various regions of the country. Generally, transition created new opportunities for some categories, while considerably lowered prospects for others. Currently, there is no evidence that the existing divides tend to lower, on the contrary, they already seem deeply-rooted and tend to maintain.

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*Î*n Romania, pe parcursul perioadei de transformare postcomunistă, inegalitatea de venit a cunoscut o creştere majoră, astfel încât, astăzi, România este caracterizată de una din cele mai înalte inegalităţi de venit din UE. Acest articol este o încercare descriptivă de a pune în evidenţă trei dimensiuni ale inegalităţii în România: inegalitatea de venit, inegalitatea pe piaţa muncii şi inegalitatea în domeniul educaţiei. În primul rând, articolul se concentrează pe inegalitatea de venit în încercarea de a înţelege pattern-ul creşterii inegalităţilor în timp. În al doilea rând, lucrarea ia în considerare sărăcia şi profilurile sărăciei, utilizând două măsuri diferite: sărăcia absolută şi cea relativă cu scopul de a înţelege tendinţele în evoluţia sărăciei şi de a evidenţia cele mai vulnerabile grupuri. Inegalitatea pe piaţa muncii este tratată în următoarea secţiune, iar secţiunea finală este dedicată

inegalității în domeniul educației. Articolul utilizează date ale Institutului Național de Statistică și date Eurostat. Datele arată că, deși România are cea mai mică mediană a venitului echivalent din UE, ea este caracterizată, în același timp, de o inegalitate foarte mare a veniturilor. Inegalitățile sunt structurate în funcție de grupurile sociodemografice, dar și la nivel teritorial, în funcție de regiune, mediu de rezidență și tip de comunitate. Ingalitățile în România par să fie deja înrădăcinate și tind să se reproducă.

      Cuvinte-cheie*: inegalitate de venit, inegalitate pe piața muncii, inegalitate în domeniul educațional.*