# RURAL-URBAN DISPARITIES IN THE NORTH WEST REGION OF ROMANIA

# DECALAJE RURAL-URBAN ÎN REGIUNEA DE DEZVOLTARE NORD VEST A ROMÂNIEI

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***Abstract:*** *In the North West Region there exist rural-urban disparities, more or less pronounced in terms of economic and social development. From a demographic perspective, there is a decline in both environments, due to the negative natural growth rate and to migration. The difference between urban and rural areas consists in the economic, social and cultural status. In urban areas, the employment rate is much higher than in rural areas, the socio-professional structure is also different. Education is another aspect that creates major differences between rural and urban areas. Although three quarters of the poor live in rural areas, urban poverty is more pronounced. Life expectancy is higher in urban than in rural areas.*

***Key words:*** *disparities, development, rural, urban, region, convergence*

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development requires a fair and balanced economic development in both urban and rural environments, with high socio-economic cohesion and inclusion (Merce E., Pocol C., 2009). Romania's main objectives regarding sustainable development are related to mitigating the development differences between regions, but also between rural and urban areas by increasing the access of the rural population to education, health and employment other than in agriculture. Sustainable rural development is considered by certain authors as a factor of sustainable economic growth, which can be obtained by medium and long term investments in the food production sectors (Otiman P.I., 2011). This implies a harmonious combination between the agricultural and non-agricultural component.

Human development is a process equally studied by economists and sociologists, by calculating the human development index, with the three components: standard of living, education and health (www.onuionfo.ro). Closely related to this, the poverty rate is calculated. In a rural sociology treaty the urban-rural disparities are compared, using this indicator as a basis for comparison. In Romania, "living in the rural areas implies being exposed to a risk of extreme poverty, three times higher than in urban areas" (Bădescu I. *et al.*, 2009).

Urban-rural inequalities are analyzed by numerous specialists worldwide. Therefore, in an article published in 2008, Chinese researchers measure the differences in education, using the Gini coefficient. The main results of this research show that the disparities between the two areas are determined primarily by access to education and secondly by the geographical position of the localities studied (Xiaolei Q., Russell S., 2008). Urban-rural disparities are analyzed in terms of medical care as well. According to some researches, there are important disparities regarding the number of doctors per 1000 inhabitants in the two environments (Johnson M. E. *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, the comparative analysis between the rural-urban distribution of income and expenditure by occupational categories reveals that there have been changes in these patterns over the past two decades (Basanta K. *et al.*, 2000).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present research is based on data from the Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2011, regarding the six counties from the North West Region: Cluj, Bihor, Bistrita Nasaud, Maramures, Satu Mare and Salaj. Based on these data, a rural-urban comparison was undertaken using economic and social indicators. The first issue studied is related to the distribution of the population in both residential environments, trying to identify the counties with the highest degree of urbanization and those with the highest degree of ruralization. The present study also investigates the distribution by gender and age groups in both environments. Another important demographic indicator is related to the migratory movement, internal and external. From a social perspective, the poverty rate and life expectancy at birth are examined.

Employment is another important aspect that is studied in order to demonstrate the disparities between rural and urban areas. Closely related to this aspect, the unemployment rate in the region is analyzed as well. The regional economic profile is constructed through an analysis of the GDP and the general dynamics of SMEs in the region. Last but not least, the role of education and training in the development of the North West Region is investigated.

## RESULTS AND DISCUTIONS

The demographic situation of the North West Region is characterized by a continuing population decline over the past two decades, due to lower birth rates and migration. In terms of population distribution in the two areas of residence urban-rural, the North West Region is relatively balanced (53.31% urban and 46.69% rural areas), approaching the national average (55% urban and 45% rural), figures that indicate a strong level of rurality in Romania compared to other European countries.

Table 1

**Distribution of the urban/rural population in the North West Region, 2010**

| County | Total population | Urban Population | % Urban population of the total population | Rural population | % Rural population of the total population |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **BIHOR** | 592957 | 297712 | **50.21** | 295245 | 49.79 |
| **CLUJ** | 692339 | 460825 | **66.56** | 231514 | 33.44 |
| **MARAMURES** | 511093 | 300702 | **58.84** | 210391 | 41.16 |
| **BISTRITA NASAUD** | 317316 | 118145 | 37.23 | 199171 | **62.77** |
| **SATU MARE** | 364597 | 172797 | 47.39 | 191800 | **52.61** |
| **SALAJ** | 241417 | 99674 | 41.29 | 141743 | **58.71** |
| **NV REGION** | 2719719 | 1449855 | 53.31 | 1269864 | 46.69 |

*Source: Own processing after data from the Romanian Statistical Yearbook, 2011*

In the North West Region there are counties with a higher degree of rurality - Bistrita Nasaud, Salaj, Satu Mare - and more "urban" counties – Bihor, Cluj and Maramures (Table 1). Economic development level correlates with the degree of urbanization. Therefore, Cluj county has the highest percentage of urban population in the total population, of approximately 66.56%. Regarding gender, the data show a slight predominance of females in both urban and rural areas (Table 2).

Table 2

**Gender distribution in the urban and rural areas in the North West Region, 2010**

| County | Male rural | % | Female rural | % | Male urban | % | Female urban | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **BIHOR** | 146505 | 50 | 148740 | 50 | 141469 | 48 | 156243 | 52 |
| **CLUJ** | 114839 | 50 | 116675 | 50 | 217787 | 47 | 243038 | 53 |
| **MARAMURES** | 105431 | 50 | 104960 | 50 | 145880 | 49 | 154882 | 51 |
| **BISTRITA NASAUD** | 100035 | 50 | 99136 | 50 | 57535 | 49 | 60610 | 51 |
| **SATU MARE** | 94851 | 49 | 96949 | 51 | 82115 | 48 | 90682 | 52 |
| **SALAJ** | 69465 | 49 | 72278 | 51 | 48812 | 49 | 50862 | 51 |
| **NV REGION** | 631126 | 49 | 638738 | 51 | 693598 | 47 | 756317 | 53 |

*Source: Own processing after data from the Romanian Statistical Yearbook, 2011*

However, it can be noticed a greater balance in terms of gender distribution in the rural areas. In terms of age, in the North West Region, there has been a certain positive development during the last five years due to the growth of the active population segment (15-59 years) and due to the decrease of the population over 60 years (figure 1). Early in 2010, the rural population by age groups shows a relatively high proportion of people aged 60 years and over (23%), which is reflected in the labor force in agriculture.

Regarding migration, the present analysis has two components: on the one hand, internal migration and on the other hand external migration. Internal migration is in turn in two ways: from urban towards the rural,

segment represented by the age group that is 45 years old or over, as a result of the industrial decline from large cities, the high cost of living, restitution of agricultural land; and from rural to urban, in the case of young people, seeking a job. The most mobile segment of the rural population is represented by the age group between 25 and 34 years old. International migration, in addition to the internal one, has affected the population from the two environments. Nevertheless, there are no clear official figures regarding the number of migrants abroad, from the North West Region. However, the region is less affected by this phenomenon, compared with the Western or North Eastern Regions; this being, in general, a temporary external migration, without a change of residence.

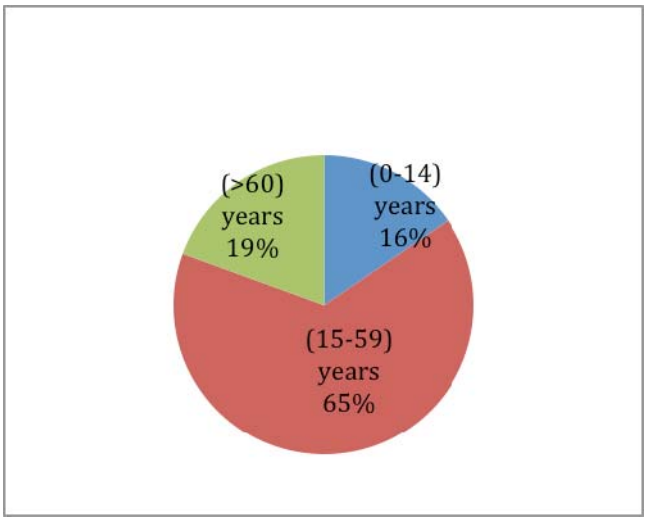


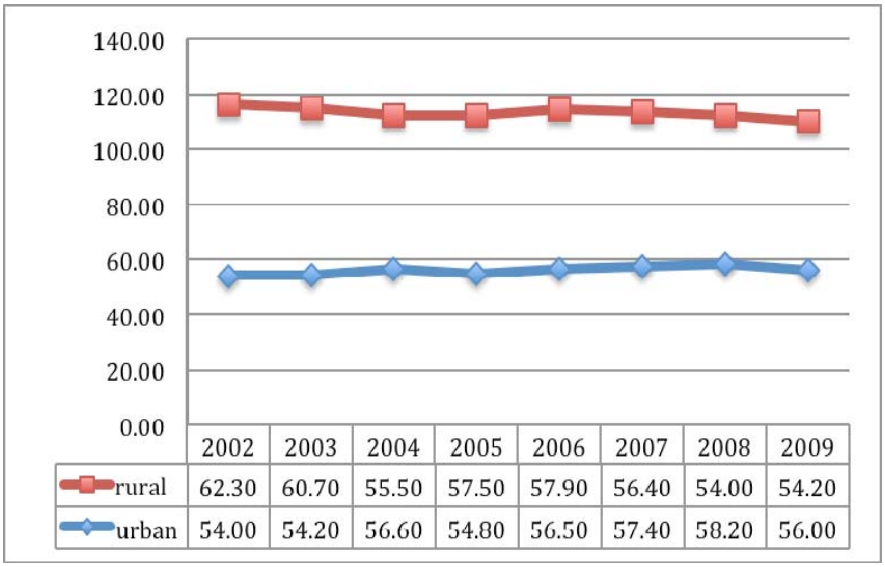

Figure 1: Distribution by age of the population from the North West Region, 2010

Poverty incidence remained stable mostly in rural areas (70%), poor categories being represented by people who are self-employed in agriculture (the risk of poverty is almost 60% in their case) and by the unemployed (with a risk of poverty of approximately 39%). Poverty rate declines as individuals progress in the labor market, workers presenting, as it is natural, the lowest level of poverty (9%). The determining factor influencing the incidence of poverty is education. Thus, in rural areas, the number of people with higher education is 10 times lower than those from urban areas,

creating economic and social development disparities between the two areas.

Life expectancy registers similar values between the urban and rural areas, this being of 66-68 years for the male population and 74-78 years for the female population, not having a significant influence upon the increase of discrepancies.

Analyzing the employment rate in the period 2002-2009, in the North West Region, there is a slight increase in the urban areas, from 54% to 56%, and a more pronounced decrease in rural areas, from 62.3% to 54.2% (figure 2).




| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| rural | 62.30 | 60.70 | 55.50 | 57.50 | 57.90 | 56.40 | 54.00 | 54.20 |
| urban | 54.00 | 54.20 | 56.60 | 54.80 | 56.50 | 57.40 | 58.20 | 56.00 |

Figure 2: Employment rate of persons aged between 15-64 years in the two rural-urban areas, during 2002-2008, own processing after data from the Regional Plan of Action for Education, 2011-2013, North West Development Region

The highest employment rate, of 82%, is recorded in the case of a low education level in rural areas, while in urban areas, the highest rate, of over 85%, is recorded in the case of a higher level of training. In close correlation with the employment rate, there is the unemployment rate. By comparing the years 2008 and 2009, it increased from 4.2% in 2008 to 6.9% in 2009 in urban areas and from 3.3% to 3.9% in rural areas, the most

affected categories being those with low education in urban areas (from 9.8% to 11.1%) and those with a higher level of education in rural areas (from 1.4% to 4.9%). As regards the SMEs, the North West Region experienced a drop of over one third of their number, due to the economic crisis, which led to increased unemployment. Regional GDP had a positive trend during 1999-2008, based mainly on agriculture and industry. Starting with 2008, the GDP recorded a decline that still continues in the present.

## CONCLUSIONS

The North West Region presents some disparities between urban and rural areas, in terms of socio-economic development. The share of the urban and rural population is a significant indicator that correlates with the distribution of the human development index, the predominant rural counties presenting a lower index than the predominant urban areas, as a result of the living conditions, education and access to medical care. The greatest discrepancies between the two areas are recorded at the level of education, poverty rate and employment rate. Life expectancy records similar values, this component not having a significant impact upon the acceleration of disparities. The main objectives regarding the development of the North West Region would be the capitalization of natural resources present both in the urban and rural areas (agriculture, forestry, mineral resources) that through exploitation should increase the employment rate, both for the segment of young and adult population. Another objective would be the development of professions oriented towards domains with real chances of future growth - organic agriculture and advanced technology.

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