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DEPOPULATION OF RURAL AREAS IN BIHOR COUNTY, ROMANIA: CHALLENGES FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *The paper examines rural depopulation in Bihor County on the basis of statistical data and a review of the literature. Between 1992 and 2021 the county lost 13.7% of its population. The rural population appears stable, but this conceals a strong territorial polarisation: suburbanisation around Oradea contrasts with marked population losses and ageing in peripheral communes, which calls for differentiated rural development policies.*

Key words: *rural depopulation, suburbanisation, demographic ageing, rural development, Bihor County*

• Introduction

Rural depopulation is one of the most persistent demographic processes in post-1990 Romania, resulting from population ageing and the out-migration of young adults towards urban centres and abroad.

Bihor County is a relevant case study, as it combines a dynamic regional pole, Oradea, with lowland, hill and mountain areas affected by population loss. The aim of the study is to assess the intensity and spatial pattern of rural population change and its implications for rural development.

• Material and method

The research is based on the analysis of the statistical data available at the level of Bihor County, corroborated with a bibliographic analysis of the scientific literature on rural depopulation and rural development. The data were obtained from the Population and Housing Censuses (1992–2021) and from the statistical series of the National Institute of Statistics and the Bihor County Statistics Directorate (2021–2025). The indicators analysed (population change, urban–rural distribution, natural increase and ageing index) were processed by comparative analysis and represented graphically.

Fig. 1. Population of Bihor County (*2025: resident population estimate)

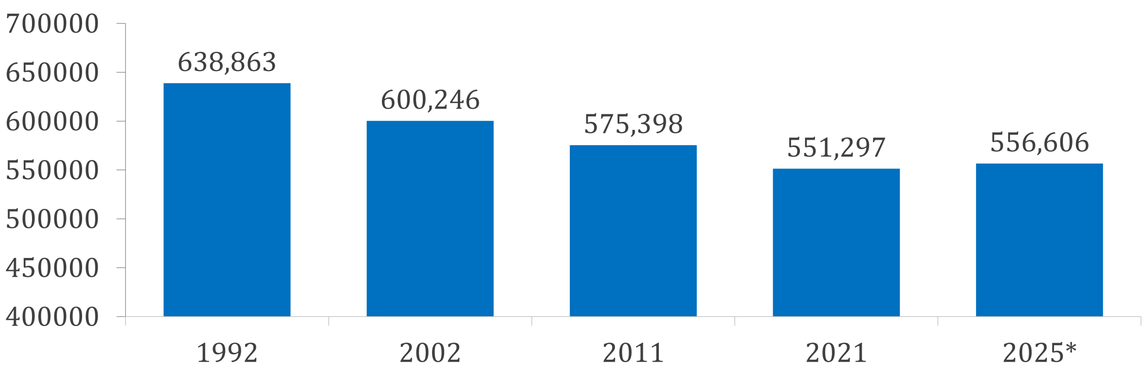
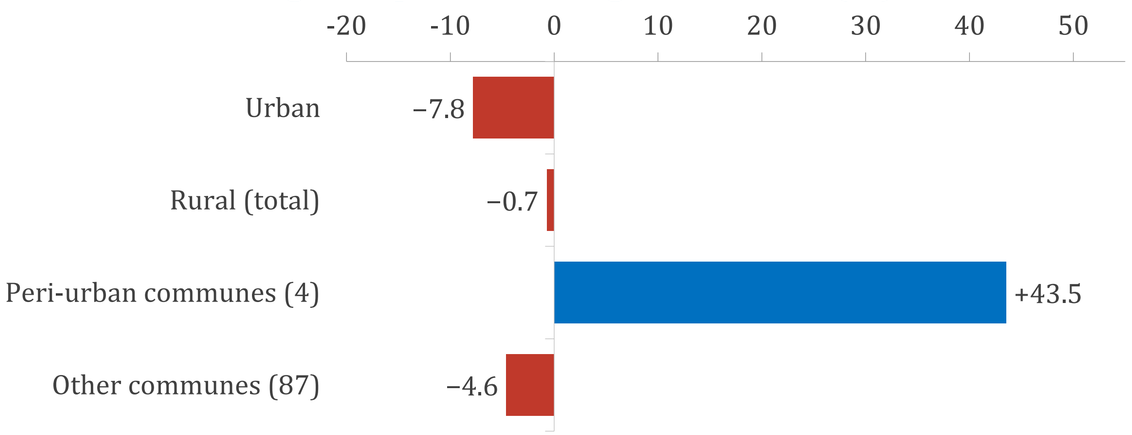


Fig. 2. Population change 2011–2021 (%)



• Results and discussions

The population of Bihor County decreased continuously, from 638,863 inhabitants in 1992 to 551,297 in 2021 (−13.7%) (Fig. 1). Between 2011 and 2021 the urban population declined by 7.8%, while the rural population remained almost stable (−0.7%).

This apparent stability conceals a marked polarisation: the four peri-urban communes of Oradea grew by 43.5% through suburbanisation, whereas the remaining 87 communes lost 4.6% of their inhabitants (Fig. 2). The most severe losses were recorded in peripheral communes such as Derna, Boianu Mare and Căpâlna, each exceeding 22% (Fig. 3).

Recent data confirm the trend: in 2025 the natural increase was −1,809 persons (−2.98‰), and the ageing index reached 122 elderly persons per 100 young persons.

• Conclusions

Rural depopulation in Bihor County is a spatially differentiated process, in which suburbanisation around Oradea masks significant losses in peripheral communes. Natural decrease and ageing threaten the viability of these communities; rural development policies should therefore be territorially differentiated, combining jobs, access to services and support for young people in remote areas.

Fig. 3. Communes with the largest growth and decline, 2011–2021 (%)

