

Demographic Ageing, a Social Problem in the Rural Area. A Regional Study in Romania

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Abstract

One of the key demographic challenges facing rural areas is the ageing of the population, and the migration of young people, not only among farmers but also among the rural population in general. The ageing of the population is a problem that can be found not only in Romania but also at the European level. This trend is visible in the transformations of the age structure of the population and is reflected in an increasing share of people aged 65 and over, coupled with a decreasing share of young, active, able-bodied people in the total population. This demographic phenomenon is even more acute in rural areas, which face both ageing and depopulation. Abandoned villages are the result of rural depopulation based on several reasons: economic (loss of the ability to compete economically between farmers), social (ageing population or low level of qualification of the rural population) or psychological. Starting from these reasons of demographic ageing and the rural area's depopulation, in the paper's framework we proposed to analyze the phenomenon of young people's migration in Romania, as the main cause of the decline of the rural area. The analysis starts with the determinants of rural youth migration, assessing the impact of rural youth migration on agriculture and rural development and finally presents a series of policy and program interventions to reduce rural youth migration.

Keywords: Population Ageing, Youth Migration, Rural Development

1. Introduction

Migration is an option for the rural population and especially for young people. In Romania, rural areas face major challenges related to migration and youth employment. A much larger number of young people migrate out of rural areas, either to urban areas or to other EU states. If no mitigating measures are taken, if the root causes of migration remain unsolved, an increasing number of rural areas will be put in danger of being lost over time due to the ageing of the existing population and especially due to the phenomenon of migration.

Migrants are a potential resource for agriculture and rural development, as well as poverty reduction in their home areas. However, rural youth migration can lead to the loss of an important part of the most vital and dynamic part of the labor force, with obvious consequences for agricultural productivity. Therefore, a policy to promote agriculture and rural development must take labor migration and mobility into account. In particular, policies aimed at reducing rural youth migration should consider the need to generate viable options for rural youth in agricultural and non-agricultural activities [28, 27].

Migration is a complex phenomenon and a key component of the standard of living in rural households, which focuses on the diversification of household incomes. In general, there are a number of reasons for migration (civil unrest, ethnic conflicts, deterioration of the natural environment), but for Romania, in most cases, migrants decide to leave their community for economic reasons to look for work elsewhere [6, 24].

Thus, agriculture and rural development are essential to reduce the rate of rural migration to urban areas. The agricultural sector must support and involve youth in the agricultural sector. By doing so, agriculture can balance migration from rural areas, mitigate existing gaps in the territorial profile and thus contribute to the long-term development of rural areas [3, 26].

2. Proposed Algorithm

One of the key demographic challenges facing rural areas is the ageing of the population, not only among farmers but also among the rural population in general. Demographic ageing is defined by specialists as an increase in the percentage of people over 65 in the total population, compared to the other population categories: young people and adults [18, 19, 7].

In most cases, older farmers remain active beyond the normal retirement age because the farm is not only their economic activity but also their home. Some farmers may reduce their farming activities to a minimum but continue to work to supplement their income.

The ageing of the population is a problem that can be found at the European level. This trend is visible in the transformations of the age structure of the population and is reflected in an increasing share of people aged 65 and over, coupled with a decreasing share of active, able-bodied people in the total population.

Population ageing is the dominant demographic phenomenon of the 21st century. In general, the phenomenon of the demographic ageing of the population is a result of two important factors: the increase in life expectancy and the decrease in the birth rate. Steadily low fertility levels over many years have contributed to an ageing population, with fewer births leading to a decline in the proportion of young people in the total population. In the case of Romania, this ageing phenomenon is based on the decrease in fertility and the migration of the economically active workforce and less on the increase in life expectancy of the elderly [1, 29, 9].

This demographic phenomenon is even more acute in rural areas, especially in those remote regions that are experiencing both ageing and depopulation.

3. Experiment and Result

A. Determinants of Rural Youth Migration

Table 1: Determinants of Rural Youth Migration

| | | |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Context | Rural Poverty | Rural labour markets are not functioning well; and the seasonal nature of agricultural work results in fluctuations in wages and employment opportunities, especially for young people |
| | Food Insecurity | Migration is an adaptation strategy to deal with deteriorating food security |
| | Environmental Degradation | To mitigate the dangers of climate change, harmful management practices are sometimes adopted that degrade the environment (agricultural land or water resources) and may result in migration once livelihood opportunities have been significantly damaged |
| | Limited Income Generation Opportunities | In rural areas, there are limited opportunities to engage in off-farm activities due to lack of investment and low socio-economic infrastructure |
| | Inequality | Rural populations are more at risk of poverty because there is rural-urban inequality in wages and employment opportunities and social infrastructure. |
| Agricultural Household | The Level of Education of the Farm Head | The more educated he is, the better able he is to seek and process the information needed to migrate to a better-paying job |
| | Household (Family) Size | As family size increases, income per family member decreases and some family members may migrate to look for work elsewhere. |
| | Family Composition | The share of active members and dependents (children and elderly) influences a household's income-generating capacity and therefore its propensity to migrate. |
| | Extended Family | It can arrange jobs for migrants before they arrive. Furthermore, migrants rely on them when they arrive at their destination for food, shelter and language. |
| | Cultural And Social Traditions | When young people leave the parental home, it is considered a stage of maturation through which they can acquire the status of an adult recognized in society. |
| Individual Preferences | Age | The propensity to migrate is highest among young people and decreases with age. |
| | Gender | According to some studies, women are less willing than men to migrate due to their responsibilities of caring for family members and the fact that they are more vulnerable. |
| | Ethnicity | The propensity to migrate varies among ethnic groups, depending on their sociocultural characteristics. |
| | Education | Young people from rural areas also migrate for educational purposes, which depend on two factors: education offers them opportunities for more qualified and better-paid jobs. |

| | | |
|--|------------------------|--|
| | Employment Status | Unemployed or unemployed young people are significantly more likely to migrate than employed ones. |
| | Individual Aspirations | Most young people want emancipation and want to get rid of the subordination relationships that sometimes persist in rural areas. Sometimes they may feel socially excluded; because in most cases they do not participate in the decision-making processes in the family. |

We can say that the reasons underlying the phenomenon of migration are complex; they vary greatly between rural regions of a country and depend on the stages of its structural transformation, but if we discuss the migration of young people from rural areas, the main reasons are determined by the fact that they do not have access to quality education and decent living opportunities. Instead, urban areas become attractive to a large number of young people from rural areas [4, 13].

B. Assessment of the Impact of Rural Youth Migration on Agriculture and Rural Development

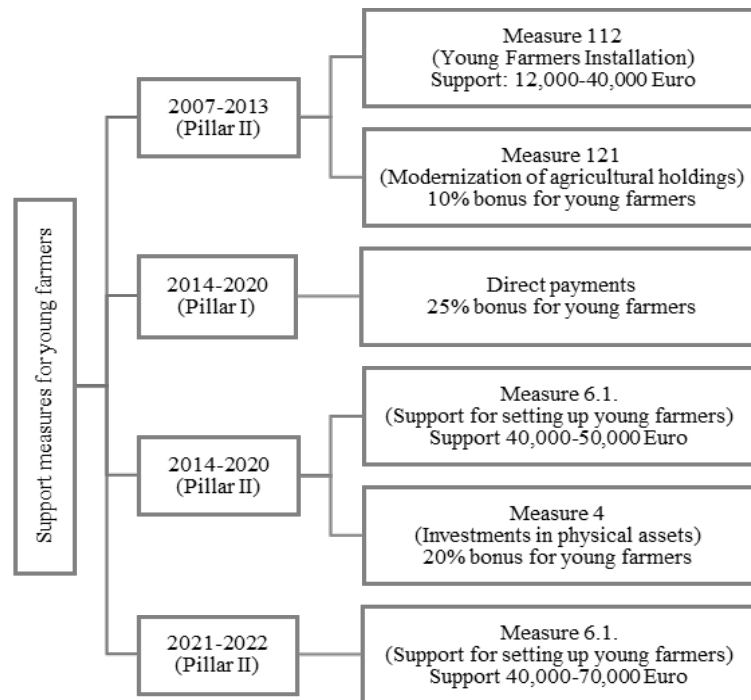
Migration has a significant impact on the migrant's life. In destination areas, there could be more attractive opportunities for employment, education and training, as well as better access to certain services. However, negative experiences may affect young people more than adult migrants due to their greater vulnerability and being less experienced. In particular, young rural migrants may not be competitive in urban labour markets and risk ending up in low-paid jobs with no job security [12, 14].

Table 2. Impact of Migration on Agriculture and Rural Development

| | Positive Impact | Negative Impact |
|--|---|--|
| Labour Productivity | Less pressure on the local labour market | Loss of the most productive workforce: a shortage of skilled labor in agriculture and lower agricultural yields |
| Household Income | More stable income through remittances | Dependence on remittances and increased vulnerability of remittance recipients |
| Transfer of Skills and Technology | Increasing the number of people aware of new agricultural skills and knowledge | Declining human capital stock and slowing agricultural innovation and transformation. |
| Protection of Vulnerable Household Members | Using remittances to pursue educational opportunities and increase access to social services. | Increasing the workload for those remaining in the countryside and reducing the possibilities of care for children and the elderly |
| Land Degradation/Impact on the Environment | Reducing population density and improving the environment | Remittances are used to purchase energy-intensive goods. |

C. Policies and Programs to Reduce Youth Migration from Rural Areas

In order to prevent the negative effects of a considerable loss of the most dynamic part of the rural workforce, agriculture and rural development policies and programs must provide young people with concrete and viable opportunities in their rural areas of origin to contribute to their development [17, 21, 23, 5, 10, 16].

Figure 1: European Union Support Measures for Young Farmers 2007-2020

There is a diverse range of interventions to address rural youth migration, reflecting its many root causes. Agricultural and rural development policies and programs have so far not included migration as a singular objective for several reasons, including the lack of relevant and evolving data on the phenomenon of migration; the unavailability of expertise and financial resources to address the link between migration and rural development; the complexity of institutional structures, given that migration and agriculture and rural development fall under the responsibility of different government ministries and departments [11, 20].

Although the existing Common Agricultural Policy measures aimed at supporting young farmers pay a lot of attention to ensuring the economic stability of established young farms, more attention should also be paid by national bodies to increase the possibilities of young farmers to acquire land and to increase health and social funding to motivate young people to stay in rural areas and engage in agricultural activities [2]. Comparing the new support measures, it is found that there is a significant difference between the problems faced by young farmers and the government's actions [30, 22, 8].

In Romania, support for young farmers within the Common Agricultural Policy was introduced as early as 2007, through Measure 112 "Installation of young farmers". The scheme offered financial support to people under the age of forty who wanted to start an agricultural business as a sole proprietor. The support measure for young farmers was also continued in the 2014-2020 programming period through sub-measure 6.1 "Support for the installation of young farmers", the intensity of the support being higher compared to the previous period, reaching 50,000 Euro/project. Currently, for the transition period 2021-2022, the sub-measure supporting young farmers has established different non-refundable support ceilings that can reach up to 70,000 Euros/project. Other indirect support measures for young farmers through funding through the National Rural Development Program also served the purpose of intergenerational change in farmers.

Between 2007 and 2013, the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy included a measure encouraging older farmers to retire in order to pass on their farms to a successor [25]. In the following period, 2014-2020, this measure was discontinued, and the support of the Common Agricultural Policy for generational renewal, within both pillars, focused on incentives for young farmers [15].

In addition to the existing measure in the National Rural Development Program, supporting the installation of young people as sole heads of agricultural holdings, in the 2007-2020 period there were other support measures for young farmers.

4. Conclusion

Migration is a complex phenomenon and a key component of the standard of living in rural households, which focuses on the diversification of household incomes. In general, there are a number of reasons for migration (civil unrest, ethnic conflicts, deterioration of the natural environment), but for Romania, in most cases, migrants decide to leave their community for economic reasons to look for work elsewhere.

Most of the time, the choice to migrate from the rural area is the only viable option for getting out of the lack of subsistence options. Such suffering is usually associated with limited economic and employment opportunities and/or small holding sizes that provide insufficient harvests and thereby food insecurity.

This phenomenon is particularly acute among young people from rural areas. For most of them, migration is not a voluntary choice, but the only perceived option to improve employment and life prospects and to meet their specific aspirations and needs.

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