

THE LEVEL OF EMPLOYABILITY IN THE ROMANIAN RURAL AREA

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Abstract

It has been argued that finding ways to diversify working opportunities in the rural areas is a solution for increasing the living standards in these areas (Diaconeasa and Chirculescu, 2015), but the employability level of the rural population in Romania was not taken into consideration explicitly. The present paper has a two part structure, the first one delimits the employability concept and its determinants and also it exposes the relevance of the topic in the context of a free workforce market where someone 'skills must be at a very high level in order to ensure a high paid job. The second part of the paper follows the evolution of the employability determinants in the Romanian rural area, on a five year period and setting a frame for the actual situation. The purpose of the paper is to prove that the employability level of the Romanian rural population is low and that the actual state of the determinants shows an impossibility of raising this level. In conclusion, the public investment in raising this indicator should be a priority in order to fulfill the objectives of Horizon 2020 Strategy (NSDS, 2008)

Keywords:

Employability; skills; education; sustainable rural development

Introduction

A current and highly debated problem in the meetings of the European authorities is the one of developing the rural area in a sustainable way (COM (2010) 2020 final, 2010). It has been observed that agriculture has a very high share of the rural economy. In Romania, more than 30% of the population works in agriculture (CAP Indicators, 2016), the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy, even if they have a higher productivity are less preferred in the rural area. The training in agriculture is not a formal one, it is given by practical experience, and more than 90% of the farm managers have only practical experience (CAP Indicators, 2016).

This fact has given the opportunity for the present research regarding the real possibility of the rural population to take a job outside the agricultural sector, taking into consideration the current conditions of training and the possibility of the population to respond to the non-agriculture workforce demand.

It is reasonable to believe that before financing investment measures in developing the non-agricultural sector in the rural area, the training level of the population, both youth and older should be analyzed and their training possibilities through the perspective of continuing education or changing profession. The investment measures should first meet the gaps observed in the training section.

The research question of the present paper is: Does the current employability level of the rural population allow a diversification of jobs in the non-agricultural sector?

The relevance of the paper comes in the context of a 45% population living in the rural area (NSI, 2016), more than 30% are employed in agriculture, the highest percent in the European Union (CAP Indicators, 2016). Another reason is that the current National Rural Development Program (NRDP) is offering important amounts for projects regarding starting or developing a non-agricultural business in the rural area (NRDP, 2014).

An analysis of the populations' capacity of successfully taking a new non-agricultural job in the current state of training is fitted.

The research method consists of delimiting the determinants of a person's employability and studying the statistical data of indicators that influence those determinants with the available data from 2010 to 2015.

The hypothesis of the study is that the employability level of the rural population is low and that situation limits the possibility of getting a job in the non-agricultural sector.

1. Literature review

The rural population of Romania represents about 45% of the total population in the country (NSI, 2016) so reducing the economic and social gaps between rural and urban have become a priority. Still, the specificity of the rural area must not be forgotten, its culture and unique way of accustoming novelty in a time characterized by deep changes and digitalisation. The rural area ensures most of the food the country needs in the way it knows for many years, keeping its traditions. These facts should be taken into consideration when carving development strategies and knowing that embracing novelty will not happen as fast as in the urban area.

Still, rural area can adapt and the NRDP is the most important instrument to help in that way offering financial support for both public and private initiatives.

Employability is defined briefly as the relative chances a person has for getting and maintaining a job (Brown et al, 2003). In a wider sense, employability is the result of a joint investment in contributing to personal and professional skills of employees in a way that makes them adequately gifted for maintaining their activity to potential employers in a competitive and changing workforce market (Cohen, 2011).

It is considered that students should know how rather than knowing that (Robinson and Garton, 2008) and they should be prepared for a job prior to entering in activity (Tetreault, 1997).

The determinants of a person's employability are represented first by education and training than by personal development, family, financial stability, health and finally by the legacy left behind (Cohen, 2011).

While the value of the information doesn't need any more scientific validation, making its own presentation through the need of information felt every day and at every level, some researchers imagine a world where rural area is connected to the information market the same way the urban area is. The only difference between the two would be the cheaper workforce in the rural area and that is seen only as a competitive advantage (Prekumar and Roberts, 1999). But things in Romania are far away from that picture.

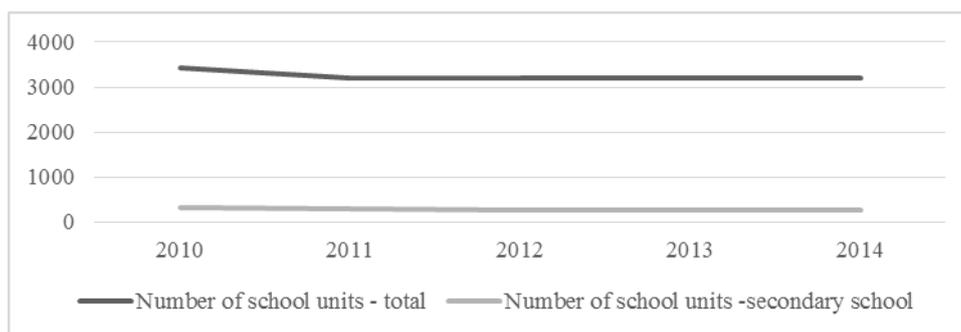
As it has been seen in other European countries that are going through the development process, in Romania the lack of vocational training proves to be an obstacle in front of diversifying rural economy due to the lack of skilled workers (Daci-Zejnullahi, 2015) and so a problem in implementing the strategic objectives for 2020 like developing rural economy and increasing the number of jobs. Supporting small entrepreneurs to start a new business like shops or workshops in order to maintain the traditions and diversify jobs, developing tourist facilities with the purpose of supporting the local economy and so on (NSDS, 2008) are difficult to fulfill if the workforce is not prepared for that.

Among the possibilities of the rural population considering their skills and knowledge for working in non-agricultural sector and the investment measures from non-refundable funds for developing such activities there is a missing piece. That missing piece is the public investment for developing basic knowledge and skills and further that determines a person's employability. I refer to the public investment in education, health and family safety. But to offer weight I will analyze relevant indicators for these determinants in the following part of the paper.

2. The factors that influence employability

2.1 Education

The education factor is not randomly chosen as first, but because it refers directly to the education an individual gets in the years prior to entering activity and that it makes him employable. In the rural area, certificating the work experience is difficult (Jigau et al, 2003). The rural population, on one hand doesn't trust in continuing education and is constantly auto setting the competence level at the level of the last official form of schooling, prior to entering into the activity (Jigau et al, 2003), on the other hand much of the practical knowledge about agriculture and other jobs specific to the rural area are transmitted through apprenticeship and by word of mouth so there is no form of certification for them. Statistically speaking the situation of the number of school units existing in the rural area can be seen in Figure 1.



Source: Insse.ro, tempo online, education, 2016

Fig. 1 Number of school units in rural area

The number of school units in secondary school has been selected for comparison because it is the period that can define a person's job. Although the number of these units is relatively constant, the number of practical and vocational high schools is very low, which means that the possibility to get a job when finished high school is also low. There are only 7 veterinary high schools, 38 with a service oriented profile, 10 agricultural high schools and 14 vocational schools as the official data show. (NSI, tempo online, education, 2016).

The number of high school students drops with about 13000 between 2010 and 2014, from 66000 to 53000 (NSI, 2016). The number of students for each teacher in the rural area is 14, and each high school has an average of 200 students.

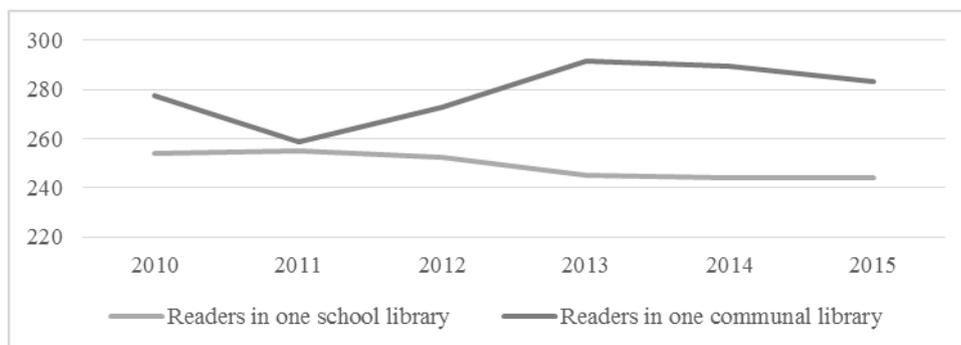
The number of communes and villages must be mentioned. Romania has 2861 communes and 12975 villages (NSI, 2016), that means there is one school for every 4 villages and one high school for every 49 villages in 2014. That is a very high number and it shows a need for a better school infrastructure, as another proof for that stands the 18.10% school dropout rate (NSI, 2016). The development objective for 2020 is a 10% school dropout rate (NSDS, 2008).

In these conditions the education factor shows that an average employment level is a very low one, the rural population is occupied in physical jobs far more than in those involving mental work. The role of a farm manager is equivalent to the head of the family and not to a very well trained person. So each one of the 3 million farms (NRDP, 2014) has a farm manager, no matter the training.

2.2 Personal development

A person's environment and his/her opportunities influence the way that person develops. This process doesn't stop at a certain age and it contributes to a person's way of accepting novelty, other persons and to the curiosity and wish for knowledge in any domain. The indicators selected for measuring this determinant are the number of libraries and readers in libraries in the communes and also the number of cinema rooms and theatre rooms.

Each year, a school library has about 245 visitors, while a community library has an average of 283 visitors (NSI, 2016). The numbers are dropping for both types of libraries as it can be seen in Figure 2.



Source: NSI, tempo online, culture, 2016

Fig. 2 Number of readers in libraries

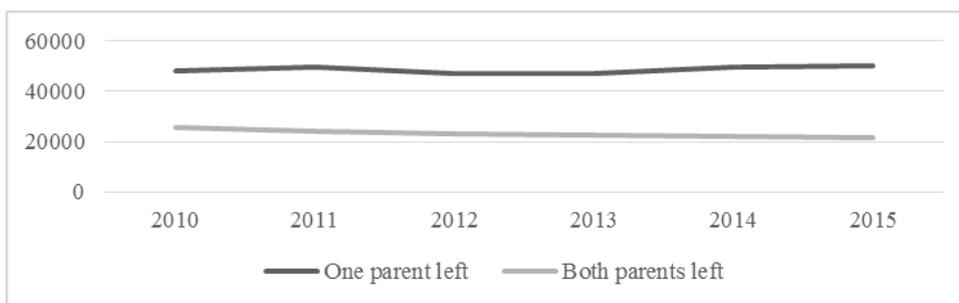
The numbers show a dramatic situation, because there is not at least one reader each day of the year in these units. A limitation of this study is the lack of data regarding the materials available in these libraries and the number of home leases made in each unit.

The number of cinema rooms raised from 67 in 2010 to 77 in 2014 and the number of theatre rooms raised from 158 in 2010 to 242 in 2014 (NSI, 2016). Still, taking into consideration first, the fact that most of these rooms are in towns, in the important towns, to be clear, second, the price of a ticket is the equivalent of a meal and a third, in addition to the ticket price there is a transportation cost. These three things contribute to this kind of activity not being a personal development option for the rural population with low incomes. Considering these aspects, the rural population possibilities for personal development are reduced. People need to pay both for the ticket and transportation, and that amount of money is usually unavailable. In this case the personal development determined doesn't have a positive effect over the employability level of the rural population, on the contrary, it has a reducing power over the employability of a person.

2.3 Family

Family is the determinant with the greatest emotional influence over a person. The family's support or the lack of it shape a person since early age and it influences a young person's confidence in finding a better job than his parents or, on the contrary, it gets him to believe that he is limited to the same life as his parents.

A problem in a positive development in the family comes from migration. Many families have been separated by the leaving of one or both parents to work in another state, the child or children are left with a relative or even neighbors. These kind of situations leave a profound emotional trauma for the children. The official statistics for the number of children with parents working in another state can be seen in Figure 3.



Source: ANPDCA, 2016

Fig. 3 Number of children with parents working in another country

The numbers do not offer information separated from living areas and they refer to those persons that left formally. Still, private investigations talk about bigger numbers, 350,000 children that are not in their parent's care (ProTv, 2016) because many people left to work on the black market, taking the lowest jobs.

A study released on a 1302 person sample from the Romanian youth category, with a 95% confidence level that makes it relevant for all the youth population in Romania, shows that in the rural area, 74% of the youth lives with the parents because it is seen as the best option both for them and the parents (FES, 2015).

The family determinant can be considered to be the most important because it shapes a person since birth. From the point of view of influencing the employability level, in the rural area, 48% of the youth population envision themselves having a better life than their parents. This can be seen as a motivation for them to find a better job and so to raise the employability level.

2.4 Financial stability

The influence of the financial stability determinant comes in many different forms. One can be the lack of financial resources, case in which a person will seek for a job at a very early age with the best payment that he can get influenced by his/her education. The second can come in the form of family with financial stability that will give the children the possibility to better education and so to a better job. The EU has calculated that the annual income (in euro/hour of work) for a family of farmers is 28.2% of the income of a worker in other economic sectors in 2010, 82.9% in 2011, 55.0% in 2012, 65.4% in 2013 and 70.9% in 2014 (CAP Indicators, 2016). The high differences between years show the dependence of agriculture to the climate conditions each year. The steady increase on the last years can be explained through the influence of the rural development measures in NRDP.

Yet, the income of an entire family is lower than a single employee in other domains than agriculture. That makes the farmer's family have a reduced possibility to financially support the children's studies so they could get a better job when starting their activity.

A study that analyses the Romanian youth's preferences and perceptions show that 40.4% of the rural youth see themselves in a certain caste due to the financial stability (FES, 2015). This stands as proof of financial stability being a determinant not only for a person's employability level, but for a person's confidence and psychic.

2.5 Health

The health determinant is a very important one. A person with health problems has additional trouble finding a job. Agriculture is not an accessible domain for those with any kind of health problems because of the hard working conditions. So a person in the rural area with a health condition finds itself in the impossibility of finding a job, at least not close to home.

The number of dispensaries – as a medical unit specific to the rural area – has dropped from 204 in 2010 to 187 in 2015, only in 2012 has an increase to 191 units (NSI, 2016). By reporting the number of communes, a very high lack of medical units can be seen so the people in need of treatment must search help in the nearest hospitals, one dispensary to every 69 villages. The treatment time increases and makes a person to be less desirable for an employer.

The difficult working conditions in agriculture and the poor health infrastructure influence the employability level in a negative way. The hard conditions for diagnosis and treatment and the additional costs with transportation to the nearest medical unit lower the employability level of the rural population.

2.6 Inheritance

This determinant has a psychological nature and it refers to the possibility of an employee to leave an inheritance to the family. Considering the rural area, the most usual and desirable inheritance one can leave for the children is land.

Considering this determinant, the rural population is inclined to gather things and land surfaces they consider valuable during life, in order for them to be inherited by the children. Meanwhile, that gathering causes a resource blockage, particularly of agricultural land that is not properly used by the elderly population. This way, the younger population has lower possibilities to do a high performance agriculture and further on to increase the incomes and financially support the studies of a new generation.

Results and conclusions

Both the employment rate and the unemployment rate in the rural area are relatively equal to those at national level, as it can be seen in Table 1. The highest employment rate in the rural area can be found in the 35 – 44 years old category and the highest unemployment rate, of 18.5%, can be found in the 15-24 years old category.

Table 1 Employment rate in rural area of Romania

	Activity rate	Employment rate	Unemployment rate
TOTAL	54.5%	50.8%	6.8%
RURAL	54. %3	50.7%	6.6%

Source: NSI, AMIGO Investigation, 2016

The Romanian young population in rural area appreciates the lack of employment, safety as very bad with 65.2%, while only 1.1% don't see a problem in this matter (FES, 2015).

A high employability level implies a high confidence level in the possibility of getting a well-paid job. Such an appreciation as the one above, proves that the young population doesn't have a high confidence in finding a well-paid job and so, a low employability level. From the educational perspective, the poor infrastructure of school units, the prevalence of theory before practice, the gaps between the workforce market demand and the educational

offer contribute to a low level of employability of the young population when entering the workforce market.

The prevalence of working in agriculture correlated to a lower work productivity in this field and with a low training of the farm managers see that the employability level doesn't increase during career time.

From the personal development perspective, the lack of entertainment and library access possibilities have a negative influence on the employability level. So does the lack of financial possibility for personal development.

Family is the determinant with a positive impact over employability. The majority of the youth population visualizes a better life than their parents. Whether it is about a family split by the migration of the parents for working abroad or a family that could financially support the children, the youth sees the possibility of a better life for them and that has a positive effect on the employability level. The family determinant has a positive influence through motivation.

Financial stability in the rural area is a determinant that holds powerful influences from the uncontrollable climate conditions because of the prevalence of extensive agriculture as an activity. The financial situation is an important stimulus for the youth population in determining their social position in front of others. Considering the dependence of the financial stability to uncontrollable factors the employability level is low, a person is inclined to accept any kind of job for ensuring an income.

Health is another determinant that positions the employability in the rural area at a low level by the lack of medical units and high treatment costs. The lack of health insurances for the day by day workers is another factor that influences employability in a negative way.

Inheritance is considered to be a motivational factor for the rural population, many of the elders want to leave at least a piece of agricultural land for their children and that their whole life's work will help the descendants. Yet, keeping the land in order to make it an inheritance creates a resource retention for the youth and a delay in creating an intensive agriculture in the Romanian rural area. So the inheritance determinant has a negative influence over the employability level instead of a motivational one.

Overall, the initial hypothesis of this study is confirmed, the employability level in the rural area is low and that makes employment in non-agricultural sectors to be difficult both for the population of every age and employers.

The public investment in educational and health infrastructure can help increase the employability level in the rural area. Adapting the courses offer to the regional specificities and to the workforce demand can positively contribute to opening the options of jobs for the population, especially for the youth.

Attracting private investments in rural area by raising the employability level can contribute both to the financial stability of the population and to changing perception over inheritance. A decent and stable income offers a person the time needed for finding personal development possibilities and becoming more productive at work and also reducing the stress that affects the health.

The study can be expanded by differentiating the analysis of age categories and perceptions with a questionnaire applied to a relevant sample.

The limits of this study consist in the lack of statistical data regarding the quality of educational units, health units and cultural institutions. This can be also expanded with the questionnaire method.

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