

ANALYSIS OF THE EFFICIENCY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FINANCING PROGRAMS FROM THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND ON EDUCATION IN THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to achieve a centralization of educational units with a specific focus on the trend of student enrolled in different forms of education versus the number of graduates since 1990. The importance of this article is given both by the historical context of this period, being characterized by the fall of the communist regime and the start of the reform processes in all fields, including education, following that from 2007, with Romania's accession to the European Union, the education system should benefit the implementation of funding programs from the European Social Fund (ESF), placing more emphasis on education in rural areas in Romania. It was also aimed at analyzing the results recorded in reducing educational gaps between rural and urban environments, as well as the impact on the socio-economic development of rural communities. In conclusion, recommendations will be proposed to optimize the efficiency of the implementation of ESF financing programs, for the purpose of rural education and supporting sustainable rural development.

Key words: education, graduates, education, financing, rural, Romania

INTRODUCTION

The educational level represents a stage of the education system that provides basic, intermediate, or higher education according to educational programs [1]. According to the methodology of the National Institute of Statistics, the post-1990 educational system includes all units and educational institutions of various types, levels, and forms of organization, which facilitate the development of the education and training process for the school population at all levels of education, for its professional training [8]. The school population represents the set of children in kindergartens and nurseries, pupils and students involved in the learning and education process in a school/university year within the framework of formal education, regardless of the types of education followed, the study program and age [7, 3]. According to law 198/04.07.2023 published in the Official Gazette of July 5, 2023 Article 13(1)

Compulsory education includes pre-school education, primary education, middle school education and high school education, with the exception of the provisions of paragraph 1, students from the technological stream, who do not opt for continuing high school studies after obtaining a level 3 qualification certificate, is considered that they completed the compulsory education, without reaching a level 4 qualification.

Starting with 2013, the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2011) categorizes the levels in the National Education System: preschool education (ISCED level 01); preschool (ISCED level 02), primary (ISCED level 1); secondary school (level 2 ISCED); high school and vocational (ISCED level 3); post-secondary and foremen (ISCED level 4); and higher (tertiary) (ISCED levels 6, 7 and 8) [2].

In Figure 1, it is presented the structure of the education system in Romania.

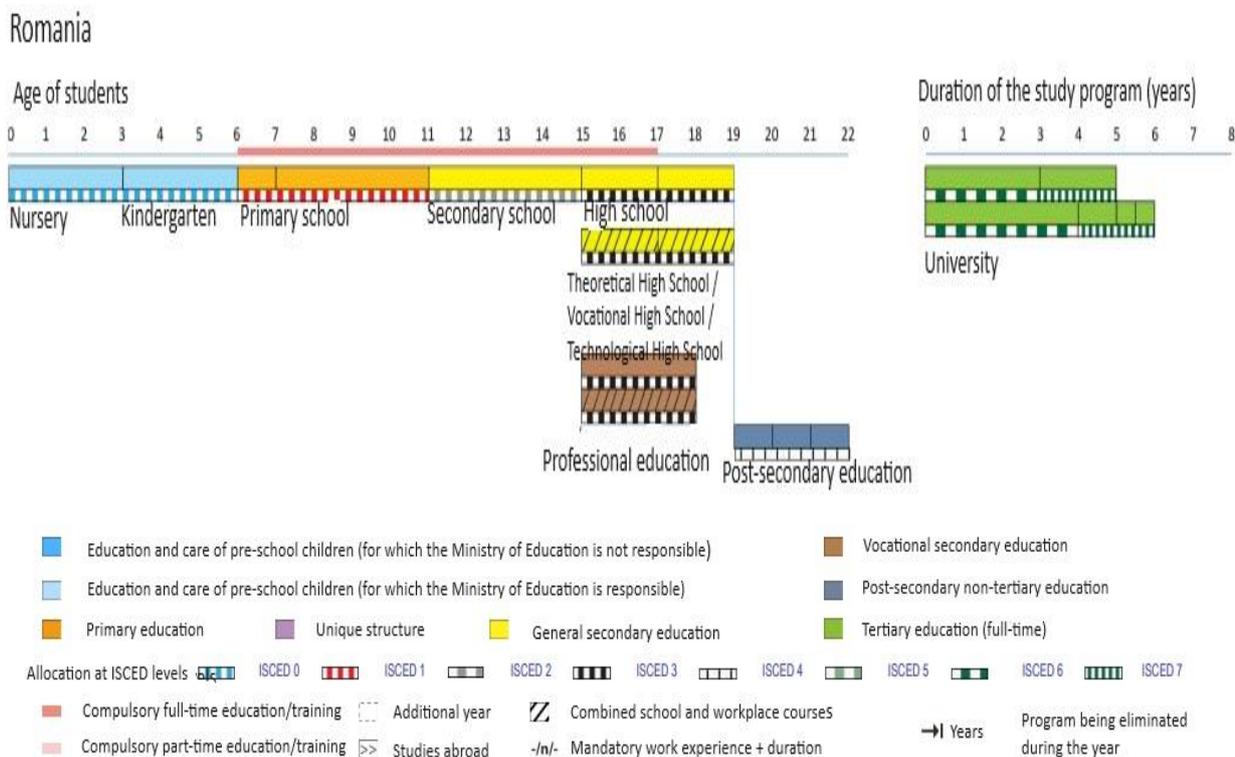


Fig. 1. The structure of the education system in Romania
 Source: <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice> [17].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study involved researching, analysis and interpreting statistical data collected from the National Institute of Statistics in Romania, regarding the number of educational institutions and the quantity of students enrolled in a form of mainstream education in the pre-accession and post-accession period (Romania to the European Union).

These data, superimposed with the theoretical aspects from the specialized literature, facilitated the identification of the dynamics and results of the education system in Romania.

The methodology included descriptive data analysis and comparative analysis, the results being presented in the form of tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to the methodology of the National Institute of Statistics, the educational system after 1990 represents the set of educational units and institutions of different types, levels

and forms of organization of education and training activities, which ensure the educational process of the school population from all levels of education, in order to its professional training [6].

According to the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, an interesting fluctuation can be observed in the number of educational units in the categories presented in Table 1. For example, the number of kindergartens started at 12,529, and remained approximately at this level until the year 2000, then a sudden decrease in their number began, reaching 1,241 in the year 2022. There is also a decrease in the number of primary and secondary education schools, starting from 13,511 school units in the year 1990, reaching the year 2022 to only 3,988 units [4]. Regarding high school education, the situation is better, in the sense that in 1990 there were 1,198 such units, their number following an upward trend until 2007, reaching 1,426, an increase that continued until 2011, followed by a slight decrease, situation which means that in 2022 there will be 1,462 secondary

education units in Romania, cycle 2 [15]. The most important thing to mention is the fact that vocational schools have almost disappeared, and in recent years there has been a concern to bring them back to the attention of students [16].

Table 1. The progress of the number of school units across different levels of schooling since 1990

Categories of educ. units	1990	2000	2007	2008	2011	2012	2013	2020	2021	2022	Dif. 1990 vs.2000	Dif. 2007 vs. 2022
School units for preschool education	12,529.	10,080	1,731	1,718	1,367	1,222	1,187	1,153	1,200	1,241	-11,288	-10,978
Primary and secondary school (including special education)	13,511	12,709	4,737	4,727	4,022	4,024	4,045	3,998	4,002	3,988	-9,523	-8,874
High school-secondary education cycle 2	1,187	1,367	1,426	1,444	1,615	1,606	1,605	1,461	1,459	1,462	264	228
Schools of vocational education - secondary education cycle 2	707	93	147	147	6	9	7	83	85	84	-623	-560
Higher education institutions	48	126	106	106	108	107	103	89	88	87	39	58
Total	27,993	24,375	8,147	8,142	7,118	6,968	6,947	6,784	6,834	6,862	-21,131	-19,846

Source: Processing, NIS database [12].

The evolution of the number of educational units in the years 1990-2007-2022 is shown in

Figure 2.

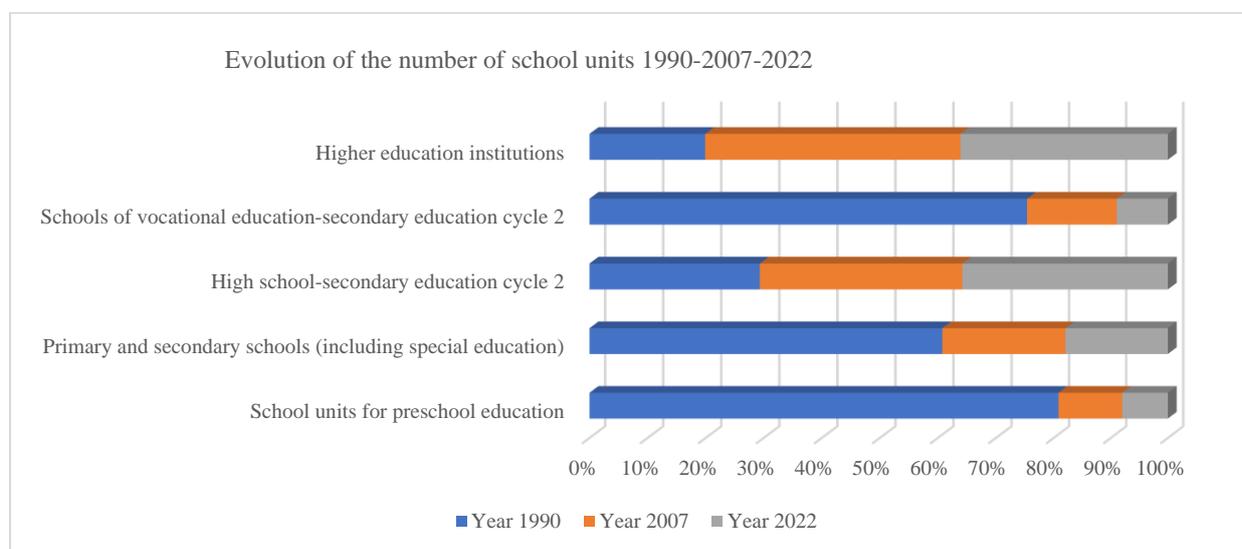


Fig. 2. The progress of the number of educational units in the years 1990-2007-2022.

Source: Data processing Table 1.

The present centralization presents the situation recorded in the case of pre-university and university undergraduate education and considers the following dimensions: human resources and the number of participating pupils and students enrolled at different levels of education (preschool, primary and secondary, high school, vocational and higher education) [10]. For the statistical analysis,

databases generated by the National Institute of Statistics were used and processed to obtain a clear picture of the evolution of the human resource and the total number of people registered in the educational system on the International Standard Classifications of Education ISCED 11, in the present case reporting - us from ISCED 0 to ISCED 6, within the pre-accession length, respectively

the years 1990 and 2000, the year 2007 which marks Romania's accession to the European Union, and the post-accession years 2008, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022. The analysis of the data shows the evolution of the staff numbers in pre-university and undergraduate education shows a fluctuation in them, in conclusion, there is an increase in teaching staff. In the length 1990-2022, in Romania, the evolution of teaching staff and the number of students was influenced by various social, economic and educational factors. Compared to the year 1990, in 2022 the number of teaching staff related to preschool education increased by 157 teachers, there was an exponential grow

in the number of teaching staff also among higher education undergraduate program, the year 2022 registering a number of 26,649 thousand teaching staff, more by 12,722 thousand more than in 1990 [11]. In line with the selected sample, after 2013 the number of students included in the Romanian pre-university education system was declining from year to year [5]. The decreasing in the number of students manifests itself differently depending on the level of education at which it is enrolled. According to the level of study, the lowest ratio (students/teachers) is recorded in the case of high school education [1, 7] (Table 2).

Table 2. Evolution of teaching staff and students in preschool, primary and secondary education (including special education), high school, professional and higher education institutions (Number of people)

Education level	1990	2000	2007	2008	2011	2012	2013	2019	2020	2021	2022	Dif. 1990 & 2022	Dif. 2007 & 2022
Children enrolled in kinder gardens	753,141	611,036	650,324	652,855	673,641	581,144	568,659	526,216	505,179	517,898	521,826	-230,315	-128,498
Teaching staff for preschool	37,007	34,023	37,348	38,253	37,391	35,071	35,433	34,897	35,143	36,266	37,164	157	-184
No. of students per teaching staff	20.32	17.96	17.41	17.06	18.02	16.57	16.05	15.08	14.37	14.28	14.04	-6.28	-3.37
Pupils enrolled in primary and secondary education (including special education)	2,730,306	2,411,505	1,789,693	1,752,335	1,629,405	1,744,192	1,743,254	1,622,641	1,589,432	1,609,941	1,606,975	-1,123,331	-182,718
Teaching staff in primary and secondary education (including special education)	163,865	162,606	138,972	138,560	120,927	123,640	125,454	115,761	116,603	118,067	118,985	-44,880	-19,887
No. of students/teaching staff	16.66	14.83	12.88	12.65	13.47	14.11	13.90	14.02	13.63	13.64	13.51	-3.15	+0.63
Students enrolled in the second cycle secondary high school education	995,689	687,919	791,348	784,361	888,768	831,810	776,616	618,275	620,625	597,789	595,252	-400,437	-196,096
Teaching staff in high school education	51,731	64,729	61,620	60,647	59,380	57,080	56,843	53,454	53,569	52,714	52,720	989	-8,900
No. of students per teaching staff	19.25	10.63	12.84	12.93	14.97	14.57	13.66	11.56	11.59	11.34	11.29	-7.96	-1.55
Students enrolled in the cycle 2 secondary vocational education	365,860	239,550	220,335	189,254	12,382	19,734	26,493	100,775	109,721	104,986	96,263	-269,597	-124,072
Teaching staff in vocational education	4,209	5,576	5,939	5,129	64	150	142	1,499	1,566	1,430	1,469	-2,740	-4,470
No. of students per teaching staff	86.92	42.96	37.10	36.90	193.47	131.56	186.57	67.23	70.06	73.42	65.53	-21.39	-28.43
Students enrolls undergraduate university education	192,810	533,152	907,353	891,098	539,852	464,592	433,234	407,373	418,346	415,839	410,181	217,371	-497,172
Teaching staff in university education	13,927	28,674	31,964	31,973	28,365	27,555	28,211	26,429	25,991	26,555	26,649	12,722	-5,315
No. of students per teaching staff	13.84	18.59	28.39	27.87	19.03	16.86	15.36	15.41	16.10	15.66	15.39	-1.55	-13

Source: Processing, NIS database <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table> Accessed on April 15, 2024.[12].

Based on the data from Table 2, the share of teachers in pre-university education was calculated. Of the complete workforce in pre-university education, over half work in primary and secondary schools, almost 25%

in high school, while about 16% in preschool education. Vocational education has the smallest proportion of teachers, less than 1% of the total [14].

Table 3. Share of teaching staff by education level

	Year 1990	Year 2000	Year 2007	Year 2008	Year 2011	Year 2012	Year 2013	Year 2019	Year 2020	Year 2021	Year 2022
Subtotal pre-university	256,812.00	266,934.00	243,879.00	242,589.00	217,762.00	215,941.00	217,872.00	205,621.00	206,881.00	208,477.00	210,338.00
Preschool share of total teaching staff	14.41%	12.75%	15.31%	15.77%	17.17%	16.24%	16.26%	16.97%	16.99%	17.40%	17.67%
Share in primary/secondary school out of total teaching	63.81%	60.92%	56.98%	57.12%	55.53%	57.26%	57.58%	56.30%	56.36%	56.63%	56.57%
Share in high school out of total teaching staff	20.14%	24.25%	25.27%	25.00%	27.27%	26.43%	26.09%	26.00%	25.89%	25.29%	25.06%
Professional share of total teaching staff	1.64%	2.09%	2.44%	2.11%	0.03%	0.07%	0.07%	0.73%	0.76%	0.69%	0.70%
TOTAL	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Source: Data processing Table 2.

Table 4. Share of the number of students by education level (%)

	1990	2000	2007	2008	2011	2012	2013	2019	2020	2021	2022
Effective subtotal of preuniversity students	4,843,996	3,950,010	3,451,700	3,378,805	3,204,197	3,176,880	3,115,022	2,867,907	2,824,957	2,830,614	2,820,316
Preschool share of total students	15.53	15.47	18.84	19.32	21.02	18.29	18.26	18.35	17.88	18.30	18.50
Share in primary/secondary school of total students	56.38	61.05	51.85	51.86	50.85	54.90	55.96	56.58	56.26	56.88	56.98
Share in high school out of total students	20.56	17.42	22.93	23.21	27.74	26.18	24.93	21.56	21.97	21.12	21.11
Professional share of total students	7.55	6.06	6.38	5.60	0.39	0.62	0.85	3.51	3.88	3.71	3.41
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Data processing Table 2.

Of the actual total of students registered in pre-university education, more than half are registered in the primary/secondary cycle, almost 23% at the high school level, 18% preschoolers and a share of less than 4% at the professional level.

It can be concluded that the ratio between the number of teaching staff and students remains consistently steady, in the years under analysis. This ratio provides better understand the distribution of the number of graduates by region, the composition of the macroregions by development region is mentioned: Macroregion One includes the North West Region and the Central Region; Macroregion Two includes the North East Region and South East Region, Macroregion Three includes South Muntenia Region and Bucharest Ilfov Region; Macroregion four includes the South West Oltenia Region and the West Region [13] (Table 5).

After we have interpreted and presented the data on the existing school population in Table 3, it is normal to refer further to the evolution of the number of graduates by education levels, we will have as a reference period, 2000-2021, so that the data is easy

comparable. Thus, in the year 2000 the total number of graduates was 617,700, of which 301,695 in secondary education, 239,775 students in secondary, second cycle, high school and professional education and 76,230 students with a bachelor's degree. The number fluctuated and the situation reached, at the end of 2021, 430,212 graduates, of which 170,607 in secondary school studies, 177,151 in high school and professional courses and 82,454 graduates of undergraduate university studies [6]. Starting from the data in the previous Table, the number of graduates was broken down by means of residence, keeping the same reference period. The analysis of graduates by environment (urban and rural), shows the special share of people from the urban environment. In high school education, the share of students from rural areas is very small, 6.33% in 2000 and 5.87% in 2021. With Romania's accession to the European space, special emphasis was placed on increasing the quality and efficiency of the educational system by building an offer in line with the indicators imposed by the European Union. Programs with funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) were accessed.

For example, the Human Capital Operational Program (POCU) 2014-2020 establishes Romania's intervention priorities in the field of employment, social inclusion, and education [10].

Table 5. Graduates by education levels and macro-regions

Tabel 3. Absolvenți pe niveluri de educație și macroregiuni										
Education levels	Macroregions, development regions and counties	Year 2000	Year 2007	Year 2008	Year 2011	Anul 2012	Year 2013	Year 2019	Year 2020	Year 2021
		Number of people								
Primary and secondary education (Including special education)	MACROREGION ONE	72737	49704	49228	44942	44688	44794	45438	35610	42317
	MACROREGION TWO	96929	66592	65967	59690	59623	60560	56809	46227	53766
	MACROREGION THREE	74354	48862	47824	43965	43144	43456	46559	36628	44874
	MACROREGION FOUR	57675	42640	40999	36002	35295	35236	32511	24495	29650
	TOTAL	301695	207798	204018	184599	182750	184046	181317	142960	170607
Secondary high school education cycle 2	MACROREGION ONE	41239	53464	51333	47787	49749	42409	34781	34082	34348
	MACROREGION TWO	43471	61497	56729	53317	58353	50722	44642	43600	43883
	MACROREGION THREE	43525	58068	50629	46365	49226	42975	38622	37655	38455
	MACROREGION FOUR	32870	45176	43422	40052	42676	36507	29960	28876	29412
	TOTAL	161106	218205	202113	187521	200004	172613	148005	144213	146098
Secondary vocational education cycle 2	MACROREGION ONE	21190	30233	26937	1903	1937	3705	7351	7458	8317
	MACROREGION TWO	26836	35941	31972	1707	2207	4671	8993	8932	11405
	MACROREGION THREE	17267	24919	22616	445	812	1766	3483	3923	5444
	MACROREGION FOUR	13376	21991	19376	515	687	1773	4124	4363	5887
	TOTAL	78669	113084	100901	4570	5643	11915	23951	24676	31053
University education - graduates with a bachelor's degree	MACROREGION ONE	19630	53799	48904	33296	29125	25062	24075	23881	23046
	MACROREGION TWO	13790	38997	35152	27408	21705	19416	17121	16907	16345
	MACROREGION THREE	28877	103829	96936	51148	39352	33546	30719	30937	29371
	MACROREGION FOUR	13933	36260	33834	24819	20846	16998	13864	13940	13692
	TOTAL	76230	232885	214826	136671	111028	95022	85779	85665	82454

Source: Processing, NIS database <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>, Accessed on April 15, 2024 [12].

The POCU program supports operations included in 7 priority Axes, Axis 6 being "Education and skills". We list 2 specific objectives of this axis specifically dedicated to improving the educational offer in the rural environment: Objective 6.2 "Increasing participation in pre-school and school education, especially of groups at risk of leaving school early, with an emphasis

on children belonging to the Roma minority and those from rural areas"; [6] Objective 6.2 "Reducing early school leaving through integrated prevention measures and ensuring equal opportunities for students belonging to the Roma minority and students from rural areas/socio-economically disadvantaged communities" [6].

Table 7. Total funds allocated on Axis 6 of the POCU

Priority Axis	Fund	Categ. Reg.	EU contribution (EUR)	RO contribution (EUR)	Total finanțare (EUR)
AP 6	FSE	Less developed region	1,184,587,170	209,044,795	1,393,631,965
AP 6	FSE	Bucharest-Ilfov region	68,003,263	17,000,816	85,004,079

Source: Processing, Ministry of European Projects Implementation database <https://mfe.gov/contracte-in-impletare/> Accessed on April 15, 2024 [9].

Investments from POCU will finance operations in all 8 development regions. Of these, 7 fall into the category of less developed regions (whose GDP per capita is less than 75% of the average GDP of the EU-27), respectively North-East,

South-East, South Muntenia, South West Oltenia, West, North West and Center. The Bucharest-Ilfov region falls into the category of developed regions (whose GDP per capita is higher than 90% of the average GDP of the EU-27).

At the POCU level, differentiated financial allocations are established according to the categories of regions, respectively between developed regions and less developed regions.

Within each request for project proposals, the financial allocations according to the two categories of regions will be clearly indicated.

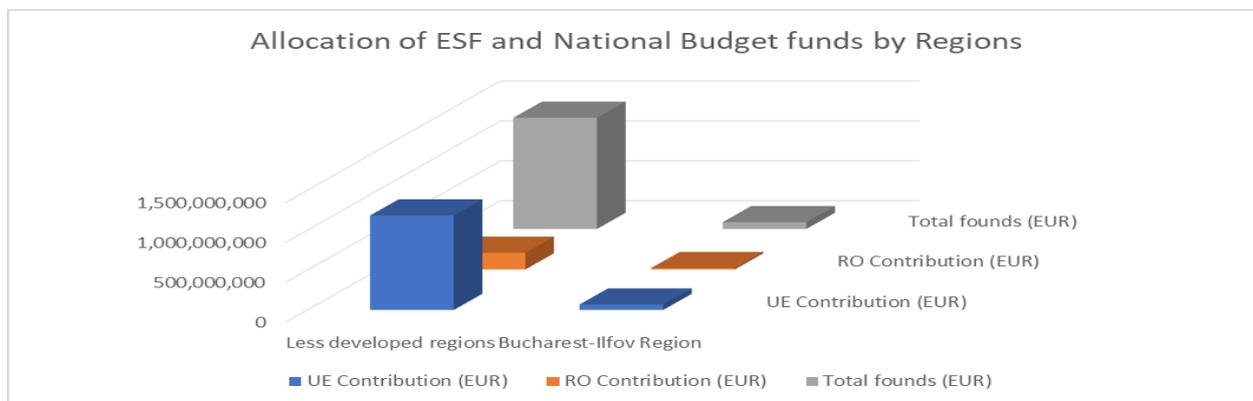


Fig. 3. Allocation of ESF and National Budget funds by Regions
 Source: Data processing Table 7.

Table 8. Implementation by intermediate bodies of projects financed by AXA 6 in the period 2018-2022

AM/OI/OIR.POCU	The eligible value of the project (RON)			Private contribution	Ineligible expenses	Total project value	Payments to beneficiaries (RON)	
	Funding awarded		Beneficiary's own contribution Partnership Leader/Partners				EU funds	National contribution
	EU funds	National budget						
OIR South East	279,110,304	44,445,814	9,017,760	0	0	332,573,878	205,022,575	32,398,256
OIR South West Oltenia	414,193,531	65,827,944	11,349,436	0	110,492	491,481,404	331,044,884	52,648,334
OIR North West	250,736,406	42,460,966	6,207,995	0	342,009	299,747,375	200,877,065	32,792,196
OIR NE Total	310,773,692	49,230,471	8,228,665	0	254,474	368,487,302	272,430,783	41,723,616
OIR Bucharest Ilfov	45,985,252	6,830,818	4,298,446	0	0	57,114,516	26,668,701	4,468,049
OI POCU ME Total	2,410,789,696	291,473,318	149,591,481	0	2,692,167	2,854,546,662	1,670,450,367	201,818,755
OIR Center	333,296,355	50,514,698	16,076,299	0	128,373	400,015,726	263,514,144	38,077,174
OIR South Muntania	334,267,569	50,633,822	13,739,206	0	59,777	398,700,374	231,347,469	32,972,581
OIR West	241,978,040	37,956,805	9,424,587	0	240,305	289,599,737	191,168,094	29,954,418
Total	4,621,130,845	639,374,656	227,933,876	0	3,827,597	5,492,266,973	3,392,524,081	466,853,378

Source: Processing, Ministry of European Projects Implementation database <https://mfe.gov/contracte-in-implimentare/> Accessed on April 15, 2024 [9.]

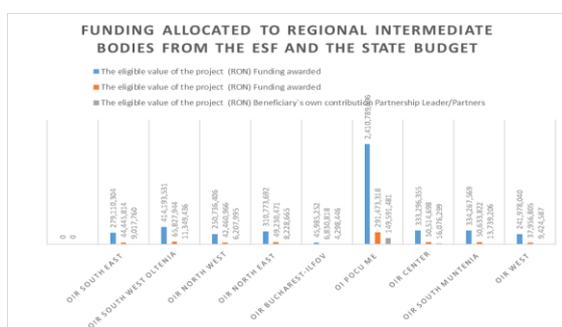


Fig. 4. Funding allocated to regional intermediate bodies from the ESF and the State Budget
 Source: Data processing Table 8.

CONCLUSIONS

Drastic decrease in the number of school units for preschool education in 2022 compared to

1990 may be due to demographic changes, in the course of more than 30 years, the population of Romania and the demographic structure of the country have undergone significant changes, with a decrease of approximately 4.15 million of inhabitants, from 23.2 million in 1990 to 19.05 million inhabitants in 2022, we can say that this can influence the need and number of preschool education units.

Population migration to urban areas, changes in preferences and demand on the labor market, and last but not least, changes in educational policy have led to a drastic decrease in the number of vocational schools.

Therefore, the significant difference in the number of pre-school education units between 1990 and 2022 reflects the changes and developments that have taken place in society, in education and in public policies during these years.

The analyzed data highlight the need for continuous support of the rural environment, through specific projects and measures regarding the development of the network of preschool education units and the support of participation in early education.

This situation of disadvantage in the rural environment is the consequence of the increase in school dropouts and leaving early after completing primary education, as well as the phenomenon of external migration. Discrepancies in residential environments are growing significantly in the last five years and require ameliorative interventions specifically aimed at the rural environment.

Participation in education is the first condition for the development of a nation.

Only through training a nation becomes more civilized and more productive.

If the demographic evolution is strongly downward overlaps with a reduced degree of inclusion in education of the school-age population, then the situation becomes alarming from the perspective of the future.

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