LABOUR MARKET VULNERABILITIES IN ROMANIA DURING THE POST- CRISIS PERIOD

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Abstract

After eight or nine years since the outbreak of the financial and economic crisis, the world economy entered into a stage of slight economic growth which continues to be much under the values recorded in the pre-crisis period and is much too slow for solving the issues created by it on the labour market. These developments have intensified existing vulnerabilities on the labour market, and making harder the efforts to diminish unemployment and under-employment of the labour force, at least up to the level preceding the crisis in the majority of countries.

The vulnerable groups on the labour market have as dominant characteristics the heterogeneity of the group and the fact that its members share, perhaps, just the involuntary character of their current statute (Atkinson, 2000). Labour market vulnerabilities may be associated with regional factors, or economic ones, with the particularities of the local labour market, or with the specifics of economic agents' management and, last but not least, with individual or social traits (gender, ethnicity, disability, age, area or residence, etc.).

The paper presents a brief comparative analysis of the labour market vulnerabilities from Romania.

Keywords: labour market, vulnerabilities, employment rate, unemployment, migration, inequalities, informal labour market

JEL Classification: E24, J21, J23, J61, J62, J81

Introduction

Often, in legislative documents, or in research reports, the term of vulnerable group is used similarly to the one of disadvantaged, marginalised, excluded group or risk group, and all these concepts are related to the wider-spread phenomenon of poverty.

More often, by vulnerability is understood 'weakness', 'defenceless', 'lack of means'. The vulnerable groups are groups lacking support and these are often in a chronic state of poverty being incapable of taking advantage of opportunities, or of defending themselves against issues that might emerge.

There are various approaches for identifying and characterising vulnerable, excluded and discriminated groups. The concept of vulnerability is not a shared common concept, as it has connections to the notions of social exclusion, poverty, discrimination and marginalisation. Another meaning of the vulnerability refers to exposure to risks that might lead to a welfare level placed under the threshold of what is considered by society as acceptable/desirable [Hoogeveen et al., 2004].

The labour market from Romania changed dramatically during the economic transition. One of the main features was and still is the diminishment in the numbers of employed population. The restructuring of enterprises led to losses of jobs that were not compensated by the creation of new jobs. The marked population ageing process and significant migration (including here temporary migration) led to labour force deficits. These, together with the increases in the number of NEETs, in early school-leaving, gender differences and informal work are but few of the major vulnerabilities of the Romanian labour force market.

Population ageing, the migration processes from Romania led to an essential change in the age structure in the labour market both in the urban and rural area, but also to increased vulnerabilities on the labour market.

1. Vulnerabilities on the labour market. Conceptual approaches

Frequently, the specialised literature regarding labour force vulnerability in less developed countries makes reference to the uncertainty of the workplace as major concern for the poor. In developed countries, most times, labour force employment vulnerabilities refer to the unfavourable treatment at the job, to inadequate working conditions, or to the "risk of not having a decent job" [Sparreboom and de Gier 2008].

In defining labour force employment vulnerabilities, three main approaches can be identified:

i) the approach developed by the International Labour Office [ILO, 2010] according to which for quantifying the vulnerability on the

- labour market an indicator is proposed for this phenomenon defined as the sum of self-employed and unpaid family workers;
- ii) the one taking into account the low level of incomes. For instance, the vulnerable worker is defined as a worker earning under one third of the median hourly wage and who does not benefit from terms and conditions negotiated by a trade union [Hudson, 2006], or as the one who obtain under the median hourly earnings and does not have trade union support [Pollert and Charlwood, 2009];
- iii) the multidimensional approach where employment vulnerability is defined by means of some employment characteristics/indicators related to the risk of not being able to develop a decent activity [Bewley and Forth, 2010].

The most vulnerable individuals in the labour market are considered by Hudson (2006) as being those low-paid, atypical workers, workers not represented by unions, those excluded from collective negotiations regarding employment protection rights and from the national insurance system. For full-time employed persons the probability of being vulnerable on the labour force market is relatively low as compared with the situation of those working part-time, self-employed, or workers without contract [Elliott & Freeman, 2003], [Chaykowski, 2005].

Authors, such as Bardhan and Tong (2010) are focused on the employment vulnerability defined as job vulnerability as result of negative economic shocks, and focus on occupations and less on employees.

2. Vulnerable groups on the Romanian labour force market

Because there is no formal definition of the vulnerable groups included in the official documents at European level or at national level, the term is often used in relation to the concept of social inclusion which presupposes the access of individuals to the necessary opportunities and resources for participating fully to the economic, social, and cultural life and to enjoy a living standard regarded as normal/desirable in the society where they live: "promoting equality and social inclusion presupposes making efforts in order for all individual, including all vulnerable groups to be able to play an active role in the labour market and in society and to benefit of equal chances in this respect".

The situation of employing individuals in the labour market represents one of the most important criteria in defining vulnerable groups.

European Comission, Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2010. What Social Policy Can Do for You, http://ec.europa.eu/social/

In Table no. 1 is presented a synthesis of the vulnerable groups in the labour market from Romania.

Table no. 1 Defining vulnerable groups

Table no. 1 Defining vulnerable groups		
Denomination	Characteristics	
Disadvantaged	- persons with handicap	
groups from the	- women	
viewpoint of	 youths without work experience 	
occupational	- unemployed over the age of 45 years	
opportunities	- Rroma	
Individuals	- Rroma	
disadvantaged in the	- persons with handicap	
labour market	- women	
	 post-institutionalised youths 	
	- persons over 45 years of age single mono-	
	parental family supporter	
	- long-term unemployed	
	 persons released from detention 	
	- sentenced persons with measures that do	
	not restrict liberty	
Vulnerable persons	- Rroma ethnicity population	
at risk of social	- youths over 18 years of age leaving the	
exclusion,	state's child's protection system	
vulnerable groups	- disabled persons	
	- single family supporters	
	- persons from the rural area searching for	
	jobs	
	 persons released from detention 	
	- elderly searching for jobs	
Special categories of	- unemployed over the age of 45 years	
unemployed from	- unemployed who are single mono-parental	
the viewpoint of	family supporters	
exemptions granted	 persons with handicap 	
for employers	- unemployed who in 3 years as of the date	
	of employment will fulfil according to the	
	law the conditions for requesting partial	
	anticipated pension, or pensions for age	
	limit	
Women at risk of	- women from the rural area	
social	- women aged over 45 years	
marginalisation	 women victims of family violence 	
from the viewpoint	 women victims of human trafficking 	

Denomination	Characteristics
of insertion on the	- women with HIV/AIDS
labour market	- drug dependent women
	- women released from the detention system

Source: Synthesis based on the data presented in the *Research Report regarding the social economy in Romania in compared European perspective*, Ministry of Labour, 2010, annex 9 – Statistical analysis of vulnerable groups from Romania, completed by data from the *National Development Plan* 2007-2013

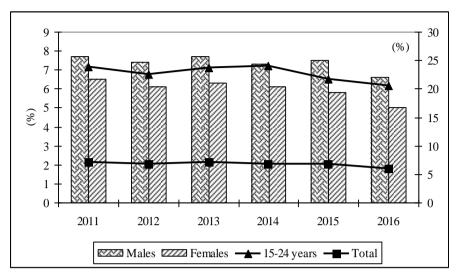
The most frequent issues of the labour force market are the imbalances between demand and supply, informal work, labour force migration, and labour force deficit in some sectors, the demographic situation, weight of employment, the unemployment rate, and the NEET rate.

In the absence of an official definition of vulnerable groups at European Union level and the level of legislative documents from Romania, very often, vulnerable groups are described with the help of some indicators. Thus, in determining their structure and size was used a wide variety of indicators, from those regarding incomes/living standard/poverty/labour market, access to labour market, education, housing, health state, type of household or community, and social participation to indicators delineating the social issues, such as institutionalisation, exploitation, human trafficking, domestic violence or drug consumption.

> Unemployment rate

The unemployment rate according to the methodology of the International Labour Office (ILO) might be regarded as an indicator of labour market vulnerability. In Romania, the unemployment rate registered constant decrease for the last six years and was of just 4.8% in the year 2016 (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Evolution of the unemployment rate in Romania for the period 2011 - 2016



Data source: Tempo online databank, Romania's National Institute of Statistics, www.insse.ro

By analysing the profile of unemployed, ILO notices that the highest unemployment risk have young individuals with ages between 15 and 24 years of age (20.6% in the year 2016), and this risk decreased constantly as individuals grow in age. The unemployment rate is higher for men than for women: this fact is not necessarily due to a better situation for women but to a higher percentage of homemakers among them (this might represent hidden forms of unemployment). In the rural area the situation is relatively similar – unemployment may be hidden as individuals identify themselves as farmers (more often it is in fact subsistence agriculture, with high risk of being actual poverty).

The unemployment level is determined to a large extent also by the work experience of the individuals. As a rule, it is considered that specifically individuals who have never worked are faced with the issue of unemployment to a larger extent. At the same time, the statistical data show that more affected by unemployment are certain individuals with work experience. Thus, in the year 2016, almost 75% of the unemployed have work experience. The same trend is noticed for both genders. Nevertheless, unemployed men are more affected by unemployment than unemployed women with work experience, this also due to the fact that persons with work experience are looking for more attractive and better paid jobs.

Vulnerabilities among youths: NEET population

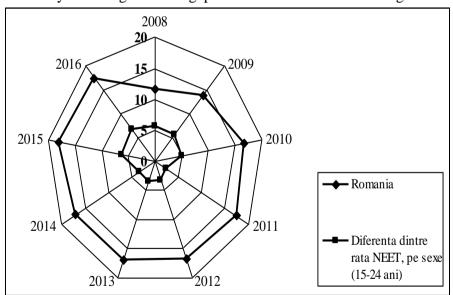
Another vulnerable group on the labour market is represented by the NEET youths. Even though since adopting the Lisbon Strategy the number of opportunities for accessing education and labour market increased,

unemployment among youths continued to be much higher than among adults, and with the outbreak of the present global economic crisis their numbers continued to grow at a worrying rate.

According to the latest Eurostat estimates, in the year 2016, the share of youths who are not gainfully employed nor follow an education or training programme increased to 11.5% for the population aged between 15 and 24 years of age in EU-27. This share varies significantly from one member-state to another: from 4.6% in the Netherlands, to 19.9% in Italy. Save for Germany, Austria, Cyprus, Latvia and Lithuania, in all other member-states the NEET rate registered slight decreases in the year 2016.

The analysis of the development of the NEET youths' rate in Romania, compared with the one registered at EU-27 level shows that between 2002 and the outbreak of the crisis, it had a more marked decreasing trend. If the gap between the NEET youths rate in Romania and the one of EU-27 was of just 8.6 p.p. in 2002, this rate diminished to 0.7 p.p. in 2008, and in 2016 it reached the value of 5.9. In Romania, the NEET youths rate decreased from 21.6% in the year 2002 to 11.6% in the year 2008, and increased to 18.1% in the year 2016 (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Evolution of the NEET rate for individuals with ages between 15 and 24 years of age and the gap between the NEET rates on genders

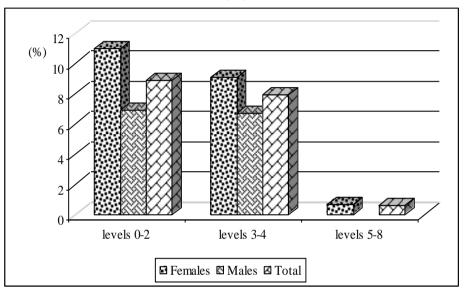


Data source: Eurostat statistics (online data code: [yth_empl_160])

In the NEET category are included young individuals, irrespective of their educational level. The analysis of the education level of the youths in the NEET category reveals that those with lower educational levels are overrepresented in the NEET group.

The analysis of the data regarding the structure of the NEET population with ages between 15 and 24 years of age, in the year 2016, shows that in Romania young individuals with a lower education level had the highest weight in total NEET population (Figure 3).

Figure 3 NEET rate in Romania, on genders and education level, in the year 2016



Data source: Eurostat statistics (online data code: [yth_empl_160])

♣ Determinant factors of classifying youths in the NEET category

The emergence, size and structure of the NEET category is determined by a series of social, economic, personal and family factors.

The situation results from a complex interaction of institutional, structural and individual factors [Bynner, 2005], [Hodkinson, 1996], [Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997]. In general, among the NEET generating factors might be reminded:

- > emigration: youth *from among the immigrants* are by 70% more exposed to the risk of becoming NEETs than young individuals from other social categories;
- ➤ education level: young individuals with a *low educational level* are three times more exposed to the risk of becoming NEET than those with higher education;
- residence in *isolated areas* increases by up to 1.5 times the probability of becoming NEET;

- > youths that have a *certain handicap* are by 40% more exposed to the risk of becoming NEET than the others;
- > youths with *low household incomes* are more exposed to the risk of becoming NEET than those with average incomes;
- ➤ in the case of young individuals whose *parents were unemployed* the probability of becoming NEET is by 17% higher than for other categories of young individuals;
- in the case of young individuals whose *parents have a low education level* the probability of becoming NEET doubles;
- ➤ young individuals with *divorced parents* are by 30% more exposed to the risk of becoming NEET.

The data provided by various studies and analyses regarding the vulnerabilities among young NEETs from Romania have highlighted that a series of factors are determinant in increasing the probability of these youths entering into the NEET category, respectively:

- ➤ the diminishment of the activity rate of young individuals on the background of discouragement, emigration, or lacking work willingness;
- > low level of youths' participation and representation;
- > low information about market opportunities;
- > surplus of graduates of higher education institutions in some economic or legal specialties, and their absence from technical higher education or training, and from the services' delivery education or training;
- insufficient instruments for the enrolment and inclusion of youths returning from abroad;
- insufficient training of youths for meeting the demands of the labour market;
- low attractiveness of jobs and lower wages for youths;
- > stereotypes regarding the lacking experience and the professionalism of youths;
- > weak competitiveness of youths on the labour market;
- > mismatch between labour force supply and demand;
- insufficient opportunities of part-time employment during the study period;
- > youths' migration from rural to urban areas;
- lacking capacities for supporting the youths;
- ➤ lack of provisions and norms that might protect youths at the level of collective labour contracts and conventions;
- ➤ lack of an efficient system of quality internship and practice stages;

- > the component 'professional guidance' has minimum impact on the youths' situation;
- ➤ lacking financial-fiscal instruments that might support employers in hiring youths.

Despite the higher probability of accumulating more disadvantages, the NEET category is heterogeneous including a variety of sub-categories. Within this category on one hand are found individuals who have no control over the situation they find themselves in: young ill unemployed or unemployed with a handicap, and the young individuals caring for family members. On the other hand, other sub-categories of youths have full control of the situation they are in: those who are not actively searching a job, or do not continue their studies while there are no constraints for them in pursuing this because of other obligations or situations of incapacity.

As result of this statute for a longer period, a wide variety of the unfavourable social conditions might emerge: isolation, employment in precarious working conditions and low wages, criminality, mental and physical health issues, and failure to set up a family or divorce, etc. Each of these consequences brings with it a certain cost and, as result, the NEET status does not represent an issue only for the person concerned but also for the society and economy as a whole.

➤ Gender differences – a lasting vulnerability of the labour market

Even though the legislation from Romania discourage gender discrimination, the economic practice favours it still, which leads to significant differences between the main indicators of the labour market for the two genders. An essential reason for the emergence of gender differences is represented by the difficulties encountered in managing the double status of the woman as mother and employed person in the labour market. At the same time, women are often met in informal activities.

> Demographic ageing and emigration – factors of labour market imbalance

The demographic ageing process becomes more marked both in Romania.

On January 1st 2017, Romania's resident population was of over 19.63 million persons, on decrease by 122000 persons against January 1st 2016. The main reason for this decrease is the negative natural increase. At the same time, the weight of elderly increased (65 years of age and over), the demographic ageing index increasing from 112.1 (on January 1st 2016) to 114.4 elderly per 100 young individuals (on January 1st 2017).

The emigration phenomenon represents the second main reason for the country's population decrease. The balance of international migration was negative in the year 2016, the number of emigrants exceeding the number of immigrants by over 76000 individuals. During the year 2016, men emigrated in a higher share than women (55.4%).

This demographic ageing phenomenon risks to have effects of particular significance on the future cohorts and structure of labour force with consequences for the sustainability of economic growth and for the social system in the event that no policies will be adopted in the future for improving or even eliminating the negative effects of this process, on one hand, and for hindering its increase on the other hand.

Another dimension of the migration effect on the labour market is that it stimulates economic inactivity for those receiving money from abroad. The migrants' families that live from remittances opt rather not to work, than work in bad paid jobs. As result, the money remittances trigger increases in the reserve wages, respectively the lowest wage accepted for delivered work.

Education as vulnerability and risk factor on the labour market

Another element leading to an increased vulnerability degree of some individuals on the labour market is *school abandon*. At national level, the early school-leaving rate was of 1.8% for primary and secondary education, and of 3.6% for upper secondary education (high-school and vocational) and of 9.7% for post-upper-secondary education and foremen vocational training. In Romania's regions of development, this indicator for primary and secondary education exceeds the value at national level in the regions Centre (2.5%), West (2.3%) and South-East (2.1%).

The early school-leavers represent 3.6% from the young Romanians and 18.5% from them declare that they abandoned school for economic reasons. (Here are included the fact that they are too poor to afford the costs, or that they need to earn money to support their families, etc.). Taking into account that compulsory education is free of charge, these motivations might be an indicator of the informal expenditures born by the families with children at school for covering the costs of basic services such as heating and health infrastructure which the state budget attempts to ensure for all schools. The absent interest in schooling and the intention to start working are the most common reasons for leaving school early, followed by the learning difficulties.

By stimulating lifelong learning and by providing support in vocational reorientation, individuals with lower educational levels would be less vulnerable.

➤ Informal work – the greatest vulnerability of Romania's labour

Informal economy represents a persistent phenomenon at world level. The presence of unregistered activities known as hidden, grey, underground or informal economy is a common phenomenon shared by the world's countries, irrespective of their development level.

The increase of employment in informal work is not a unique characteristic of the labour market in Romania, but a shared feature of several countries and is usually widespread in transition countries. Subsistence agriculture, 'envelope payments', false self-employment of labour work and unregistered work are the most common forms of informal work in Romania.

The Country Report published by the European Commission¹ draws attention to the disaster on Romania's labour market: at national level is estimated that the number of individuals involved in the informal economy is of about 1.2 million which represents 0.6% from total population and about 15%-20% from GDP.

The non-agricultural sector and the constructions' sector are best represented in the informal economy, and individuals included in the grey economy are the lowest-skilled ones or those with a low education level.

The largest part of informal jobs is in the field of basic occupations. The most important part of informal employment is represented by selfemployed in informal sector enterprises.

Informal employment of labour force is more widespread among youths (15 to 24 years of age) and among unskilled workers as consequence of the mismatch between the needs of the labour market and the educational system.

Conclusions

By and large (from the economic, social and cultural viewpoint), vulnerability associated to various forms of work is a reality of the labour market as it exists both in developed and developing countries.

The recent economic crisis highlighted the fact that individuals with the highest labour market vulnerability are the low-skilled from developing countries, as the unemployment rate and the one of young individuals in particular are high for this type of individuals.

and results of in-depth reviews under Regulation (EU) no. 1176/2011

Romania's Country Report for 2017 accompanying the paper Communication of the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Central Bank, and the Euro-group: the European Semester 2017: Assessment on progress regarding structural reforms, prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances,

The transition periods of the youths from education to job became significantly longer and more complex as in previous periods, and the various obstacles and risks that youths are faced with during this transition contribute to increasing numbers in the NEET category.

The negative consequences of the NEET statutes are numerous and affect not only the individual and his/her family, but also the society as a whole. The exclusion of youths both from the labour market and from the educational or vocational training systems increases the risk of social exclusion of the individual and diminishes the reemployment probability.

The employment vulnerability in the countries of origin may be a factor triggering the emigration especially for low-skilled individuals. In the case of high-skilled individuals, the decrease in employment vulnerability might be seen as an explanation for emigration. The main issue of the high-skilled individuals in some developing countries, including here Romania, is the relatively low number of high-skilled jobs, and they will emigrate in order to find jobs closely linked to their skills, even if they know that employment vulnerability increases in the countries of destination.

Informal work, in absolute terms, generates 'incomes' segmentation' more for the skilled than for the unskilled individuals even if on long-term this trend levels in relative values. Undeclared employment vulnerability for the high-skilled individuals has higher impact on the real economy, in particular on the state budget than for the unskilled individuals.

In general, the vulnerability of those working without labour contract is associated with poverty, but on short-term it diminishes relative poverty and increases long-term vulnerability in particular the social one. On long-term, employment vulnerability without labour contract decreases the education level, and threatens economic development and promoting active policies of social protection.

Regarding the push factors for gender equality it was noticed that the change in attitudes and behaviour of the population, promoting equality of chances for all and combating stereotypes might be achieved first by education. The education system must foster equality of chances and reducing early school-leaving.

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