DEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS IN THE ROMANIAN RURAL AREA. A CASE-STUDY

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Abstract: Throughout the 20th century the female population was more numerous than the male one. The process of feminisation was steadily going on, but at different rates, a tendency that appears to be irreversible over the first decades of the 21st century at least. In the countryside this situation correlates with other phenomena such as migration of male labour to town before 1990 and abroad after that date, as well as population aging characteristic of the past few decades. Family relationships indicate that wives continued to be dependent on husbands, a dependence extrapolated to society where women usually rank second. Requirements and interests differ with each age-group, family size, family componece and the children’s age. Recent economic and social changes also affected the female population. Ensuring equal opportunities between men and women, which is a E.U. social policy priority, is imperative also for Romania in view of its integration into the Community structures.

An analysis of the sex ratio in Romania’s population shows that there are more women than men (51% and 49%, respectively on average) (2002). The only time when there was a greater proportion of women was during the Second World War when causalties among men were extremely high. In 1948, the male population represented 51.7% of the country’s inhabitants. In the second half of the 20th century, the feminity ratio was on the decrease (Table 1).

Until 1992, the rural female population overcame the male population, with a higher feminity ratio in town. The causes of this decrease were the same everywhere, that is, low birth rates, higher death-rates and the migration of a significant part of the male labour to town before 1990 and abroad afterwards.

Until 1992, the urban male ratio was pretty high due to immigrations from the rural; however, after that date and up to 2002, the ratio was decreasing because internal labour migration shifted from town, due to industrial restructuring, to village where private property represented the new basis of agriculture.

Table 1. Evolution of the population sex structure and the feminity ratio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census date</th>
<th>No. inhabitants</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Feminity ratio (Rf=Pf/Pm)x100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 29, 1930</td>
<td>14,280,729</td>
<td>7,015,771</td>
<td>7,264,958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 25, 1948</td>
<td>15,872,624</td>
<td>7,671,983</td>
<td>8,200,641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 21, 1956</td>
<td>17,489,450</td>
<td>8,503,420</td>
<td>8,986,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 15, 1966</td>
<td>19,103,163</td>
<td>9,351,075</td>
<td>9,752,088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 5, 1977</td>
<td>21,559,910</td>
<td>10,626,055</td>
<td>10,933,455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 7, 1992</td>
<td>22,810,035</td>
<td>11,213,763</td>
<td>11,596,272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 18, 2002</td>
<td>21,698,181</td>
<td>10,581,350</td>
<td>11,116,831</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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In the village area the process of feminisation continued throughout the 1977-2002 period studied, a situation mirrored by the higher proportion of women in the overall rural population of all counties (Fig. 1). As a whole, feminisation was an almost continuous process in the 20th century, a trend that seems to be irreversible and foreseeable also for the first decades of the 21st century.

In 1977, three-fourth of Romania’s counties had an over 50% female population, with more than 51% in 19 counties, and averaging 50.9% in the rural area. Over the 1977-2002 period, the phenomenon slowed down to a certain extent. There were two distinct groups of counties: one in the east (Moldavia, Dobrogea) with a majority male population, the other in the west (Banat), where women formed the majority. The national average of 50.5% women was maintained. The attenuation of the feminisation process over 1992-2002 can be correlated, on the one hand, with the urban-to-rural migration of some population groups as the living standard in town worsened in the wake of lay-offs and lower incomes and, on the other hand, with the Land Reform which sanctioned the right of private property over the land.

![Fig. 1. The sex structure of the rural population](image)

The feminisation of the rural is also connected with a demographic phenomenon characteristic of the past few decades, namely, population ageing. Age groups are dominated by women. True enough, more boys are born every year, but on the other hand the over 80 year-old group is formed in majority of women. As a matter of fact, the gap between sexes becomes obvious also in the adult groups aged over 50, because the mortality rate among men, a category in which disordered life-styles are more causing
health problems (cardio-vascular accidents, lung cancers, etc.) is higher. Besides that category also faces other risks more frequently (labour accidents, traffic accidents, etc.).

In 2002, the female population aged 60 and over represented 21% of all women in this country, rural percentages rising to 25, a situation visible at county level, especially in the south and west of Romania (Fig. 2).

On the other hand, during the last stages of urbanisation (in the 1980s and the 1990s) numerous young people would come to town to learn at school or find a better paid job. In this way, the proportion of rural elderly women increased.

![Fig. 2. The age and sex structure of the rural population](image)

The Romanian society in general, and the rural one, in particular is still of the paternalistic type, women being dependent on men all along their lives (on mothers but also on fathers in childhood, on husbands later in life, on their usually male bosses at the workplace). This dependence is largely a matter of education, because man is viewed as the head of the family. The village social life continues on the line of this principle, while in town, some changes are noticeable. The average marriage age in the village is lower than in town (Fig. 3).

On a regional level, the youngest average age for women to marry is recorded in the North-East Region (22.9 years of age), the South-East and the North-West regions (23 years); at the other end stands the West Region (25.7 years) and Bucharest Region.

There are many situations when some social problems have a negative impact on family life making women less dependent on men, and increasing the rate of divorces, especially in the urban area (1.9‰ compared to 0.8‰ in the rural and 1.3‰ at national level).
The highest divorce rate is recorded in the majority of villages located in the east of Romania, the North-East Region (0.96‰), the South-East and the West regions; at the other end of the spectrum stand Bucharest and the South-West Region with less than 0.60‰ each, and the North-West Region with  66‰ (Fig. 4).

Over 1995-2000 the number of divorce cases was higher in the urban; in the case of marriages differences between the two environments were reduced, but lower values were registered in town.

In 45% of the divorce cases, at least one or two children are left in the care of their mothers.
As regards the relation between the rural job market and the active female population the findings show that female labour in the countryside represents 37% of the active population comparatively with more than 46% in town. Traditionally, the village woman is assigned the care of the household, of children, of works in the fields and in the garden. These are not activities acknowledged by society, and there are no home-work regulations in the Romanian legislation. Most family workers (over 90% among which 70% women) live in the countryside and are not paid for their work. Village jobs which require a certain level of professional training and are occupied mostly by women are in the field of education, health services and commerce.

Over the past ten years, foreign and native investments made into the rural area have created jobs in the food industry, commerce and services in which also women are employed.

The inactive population is dominated by the female segment, with over 60% pensioners and recipients of social benefits. In many counties of the South, Centre and West regions, the proportion of retired women stands between 60-70% of all pensioners (Fig. 5).

![Fig. 5. The proportion of retired women / total pensioners, 2002](image)

In general, women are discriminated for wages and little involved in public life or bussiness. There is a multitude of negative social aspects in the rural area which deserve being studied. An acute social problem, ever more frequently reported, is victimisation of women. The number of murders, murder attempts, injuries, robberies and rapes is on the increase. Sexual harassment is a social problem and the majority of its victims are women, but legal norms in this matter are almost absent in the Civil Code, so that women cannot benefit from adequate protection at the workplace or at home.

Today, NGOs and, often enough, also the mass media are involved in trying to change this situation. However, securing real equality and partnership between sexes at the level of society as a whole requires viable policies to attain a better balanced distribution of authority and responsibility in family life and in society.

There are two EU-sponsored programmes, LEADER I, II and PNUD promoting women’s integrity and rights, as well as the tools required to sustain their implementation. In Romania, a country on the way of joining the EU, this implementation is still in an early stage. Nevertheless, there are some case-studies on the topic and some pilot-units have
been created. But the programmes themselves should be adjusted to the Romanian social context. The main goals of this programme have in view the local territorial development (all rural areas are eligible), stimulation of the local population’s active participation, of cooperation and creation of working networks between rural areas. Priority activities: the improvement of the quality of rural life; the introduction of the most appropriate techniques for using the natural and cultural resources; the elaboration of strategies to ensure equal opportunities for rural women and rural youth. An important initiative is the establishment of some pilot-projects to put forward integrated strategies of rural development in small rural areas (under 100,000 inhabitants).

Among the projects initiated by the Institute of Science and Social Reform (PNUD) is the reconsideration and coordination of rural women’s economic role. The Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Romania – Rom/98/010 was a project implemented by the Ministry of Forests and Rural Development over 1998-2001 at an estimated value of 400,000 USD. The aim of that project was to put in place the local mechanisms capable to strengthen the rural women’s economic role on the local plane. A number of small-scale food processing demonstrative pilot-units were set up to stimulate commercial dealings. These units were constantly supervised and provided technical assistance. At the same time, the project had in view to develop an institutional model for both sexes, but with services sensibly oriented towards stimulating women’s entrepreneurship and offer the necessary means for new decentralised occupations to be created, sustaining participation and the building of new enterprises on the local plane. The main aim was to eradicate poverty, extend sustainable food availabilities, and increase rural women’s economic role. The socio-economic studies conducted by PNUD covered four local communities: Negreşti town and three communes – Muntenii de Jos (Vaslui County), Sâgeată and Ruşeţu (Buzău County).

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Ensuring equal opportunities to men and women is a EU social policy priority. Therefore, this provision should be systematically included in the elaboration and implementation of rural development programmes and projects in order to assure equal participation in the job market and equal benefits.

Rural women discharge distinct roles and have distinct occupations in their communities. Their needs also differ with the age-group, the size and composition of their families and the children’s age. The economic and social changes experienced by the Romanian rural space over the last decade affect the female population in the same way, and sometimes challenges are difficult to cope with.

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