

# DINAMICS AND TENDENCIES IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE COMMON SUPPORT HOUSES FOR THE EMPLOYEES

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**Abstract** *The present article is created around three main axes: the organisation, activity and tendencies of the Common Help Houses for the employees; the social perspective concerning these organisations; the support forms for the vulnerable groups from Romania.*

*This activity underlines the importance of the CARS for the society both in the period of financial uncertainty and the economical equilibrium period too (the Romanian regions where the research was made are Bucharest-Ilfov and the South-East region). Also, these ES entities address both to the population with a decent living and also to the vulnerable groups from our country. The data that are at the basis of this study come from the research created by ICCV as partner in the project "INTEGRAT – Resources for the Roma women and groups that are socially excluded."\**

**Keywords:** *the common support houses for the employees, vulnerable groups, Roma minority, Social Economy (SE) entities.*

## 1. Introducere

This article proposes an analysis of the CARS<sup>2</sup> as an entity of ES<sup>3</sup> of two development regions of Romania: South-east Region (S-E) and Bucharest-Ilfov

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\* Abbreviations: CAR – Common Help Houses for the employees; ES – Social Economy ICCV – Institute of Quality of Life Research; ESF – European Social Fund; NBF/ IFN – Non-bank Financial Institutions; NBR – National Bank of Romania; CARP – Mutual Aid Houses of Retired Persons; FEDCAR.

<sup>2</sup> Employees Mutual Aid Fund.

<sup>3</sup> Social Economy.

Development Region (Bucharest-Ilfov). The data that this analysis is based on, comes from a research of ICCV<sup>1</sup>, as a partner in the project “Integrated – Resource for women and socially excluded Roma groups”, funded by ESF. According to Romanian authors, social economy include all organizations situated between the public and private sector in terms of organization, operation and principles declared (Pirvu, D.; Ungureanu, E.; Hagi, A., 2009, p. 53).

The research was done by gathering information from the population, but also from the SE entities – including CARS – which allows analysis from two perspectives: the CARS perspectives as a service provider specific to SE entities, and from population’s perspective as a beneficiary of the services provided by CARS. The survey data were organized into two separate databases that we are going to identify as: „Integrat – Offer” database (contains data from representatives of SE’s entities, including CARS) and „Integrat – Demand” database (includes data obtained from the population).

The chapter is organized following the two perspectives of analysis: in the first part we analyze the information received from the CARS representatives, and in the second part we are going to analyze data received from the population. Our start premise is: CARS represents a support factor for a large part of the Romanian employees, especially in the economical crisis time. For several years, Romania is facing economic problems exacerbated by the international economic crisis, and because of that, we expect increased visibility and activity of Employees Mutual Aid Fund.

## ***2. Organization and trends***

CARSs are governed by Law no. 135 of 11.04.2002, according to which, the activity of these entities is „attracting deposits, as savings and loans, which returns to the social fund members after the deduction of the statutory cost”. Due to their characteristics, CARS were included in the SE entities. Although about SE and the entities that form it, is spoken in Romania only in the last two years, due to the structural funds that are generally oriented to finance this sector, CARS held a consistent activity for a long time.

Among other SE entities, CARS is one of the oldest in Romania. First Credit Unions that had almost the same characteristics of today’s unions, appeared in Romania in the second half of the nineteenth century and adopted, as an organization and functioning form, the German systems: Raiffeisen and Schulze-Delezech. CARS’s Romanian origin is set in some documents from 1722, when in Resita was established the „Brotherly box” also known as Brudelade, organized by the tradition of mining companies from the Central Europe<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Research Institute of Quality of life.

<sup>2</sup> <http://carpensionari.wordpress.com>.

In time, this organized form of mutual help has spread also in the other regions of the country. The oldest entities of this kind, included in our research, have started their activity a century later from the first historical record. (Table 1)

**Table 1**  
*Foundation year of social economy entity (CARS)*

<b>Foundation year</b>	<b>CARS (%)</b>
1848-1944	3.7
1945-1964	11.2
1965-1989	31.9
1990-1994	10.1
1995-1999	25.5
2000-2004	10.6
2005-2008	6.4
2009-2011	0.5

Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

The survey data show that in the most cases, CARS were created between 1965 and 1989, a period characterized by rapid industrialization of Romania (Table 1) and, in consequence, by increasing the number of employees. Not only have expanded in number, but also in terms of activity, CARS were very active in that period. The main factor who intensify the CARS's activity, was the fact that before the '90, in Romania, Romanians possibilities to borrow money for their needs were extremely limited (only CEC<sup>1</sup> grant instalment credit for house purchase). In almost each company exists a CAR and the biggest part of employee become members? The vast majority of Romanians, who today are aged 50 years and over, remembers how it purchased first furniture or appliances, taking loan from CAR<sup>2</sup>. This also because the population incomes, as nowadays, insufficient for consumers need, was safe so that people could better plan their expenses. Today, financial stability has become a dream that most Romanians aspire to, but that don't stop them to "consume", sometimes, beyond what they can afford. Today, as in the recent past, CARS supports Romanians for their consumption needs.

After 1990, the changes in Romanian society have allowed CARS to remain independent from political parties and trade unions, becoming non-bank financial institutions (NBFi) with legal personality. In this situation, they are not under the control of National Bank of Romania (NBR), the bank has only a record of CARS, but

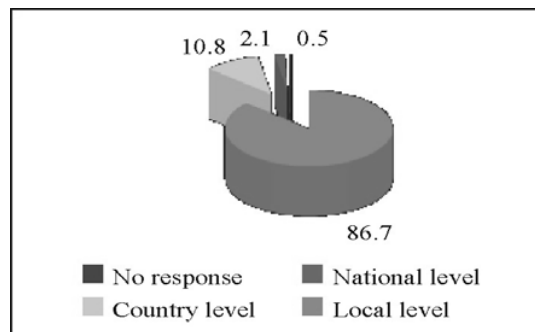
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<sup>1</sup> CEC Bank.

<sup>2</sup> Mutual Aid Fund.

is not a “censor” of their lending activity, as it happens with commercial banks. This is because CARS, unlike the other banking and non-banking institution, use only members money and their services (loans /credits) are exclusively to members. After 1990, CARS were reorganized in local an national structures and have manage to attract new members from among employees. Most of them work locally and just a few are affiliated to any organization or national union (for example the National Federation of CAR’s). This is reflected also by our research data:

**Graphic 1**  
*The activity’s level of ECU in Bucharest-Ifov and South-East (%)*



Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011

The circumstance that the activity of most of them has a local character is explained by their formation history: around or inside the local economic units. Also, the CARS members are residents of a county or a county’s town. CARS’s Care Policy explains their dominant local activity character: many CARS when they a person, they requests information about it either from their work companies, of from those living in the same town or village. Extending work beyond the county means assuming greater risks, more employees, but also taking some new rules and regulations, resulted from this expansion.

**Table 2**  
*ECU’s distribution on the two development regions*

Form of organization	Bucharest-Ifov	South-East
ECU	17.4%	82.6%
Total (number)	34	161

Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011

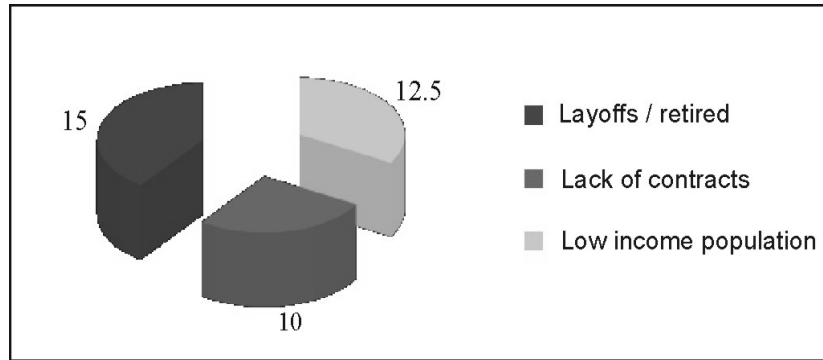
CARS's distribution on the two development regions analyzed is better in the S-E Development Region (Table 2): a greater number of this kind of entities is in the counties from S-E region as compared with Bucharest-Ilfov Development Region. A possible explanation for this distribution is the different economic development levels of the two regions, but also the diversity credit offers. Bucharest-Ilfov Region is the most developed region of Romania, where the standard of living of the population is much higher than the in the country. Bucharest-Ilfov, as a region, includes the capital of Romania, the main economic centre; all the banking and non-financial institution have in Bucharest, if not the headquarters, at least one representative office. The population's higher incomes and the diversified supply offer led to restricting, or even abolition of CARS.

One of the main purpose for which CAR was created is to grant loans based on criteria agreed separately in each entity. Among these, essential are: the membership and the obligation to pay a sum of money to establish the social fund. Thus, the CAR is distinguished by other financial institutions and also by others SE entities, through that encourages savings among its members.

CARS saw two large "peaks periods" in the market economy, both were superimposed over the most difficult socio-economic periods for Romania, characterized by decreasing incomes, restructuring of the work force, increasing poverty, etc: in the second half of '90 and in 2009 – 2011 period. Like many other SE entities, CARS becomes important in the society in difficult moments for the population and has become the main element of support.

Socio-economic changes of a country do not remain without effect on the development of SE institutions. CARS's evolution is eloquent both in terms of activity and members: period of restricted activity have alternated the stagnation and accelerated development. Before the '90, the intense activity of CARS was due their uniqueness, regarding population crediting. After '90, Romanians lending options have become more diversified, regarding accreditation, because of the increased number and type of institutions who lend money: from bank institutions to non-bank institutions or directly to the merchants (known as "credit with ID card"). Lending offer diversification wasn't proportional with the income growth of the majority of populations. As well, some companies that operated before 1990 restructured or closed, and employees have become unemployed or retired. In both cases were no longer eligible to be CARS members. This led to the loss of membership and implicit reduce the financial resources of these entities. There is another aspect that affected CARS in terms of lending, is that the loans of these entities are limited comparative with banks, and limited reimbursing terms – 2 years at most. For the employees with high incomes proprietary are the commercial banks, who grant loans with higher value and longer periods of time, CARS rarely become an option in these cases. From this reason, CARS have lost not only some potential customers, but also members and so they were forced to reduce the number of employees.

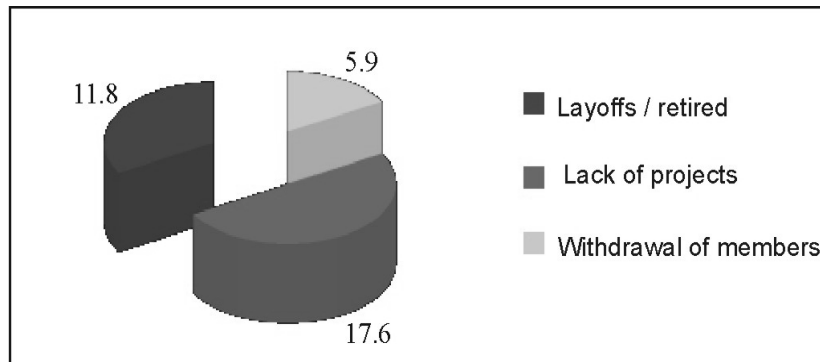
**Graphic 2**  
*The main reasons for reducing the number of members (%)*



Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

According to our research, the main reasons of reducing the number of members, is the layoffs or retirements (Chart 2). The retirees can also be found in the CARS s of retired members, but the biggest problem is represented by the dismissed persons who have a limited access to any form of credit. If these people have contracted a loan in the time they were employed, the risk to be in incapacity of paying off and lose their purchased goods is really high.

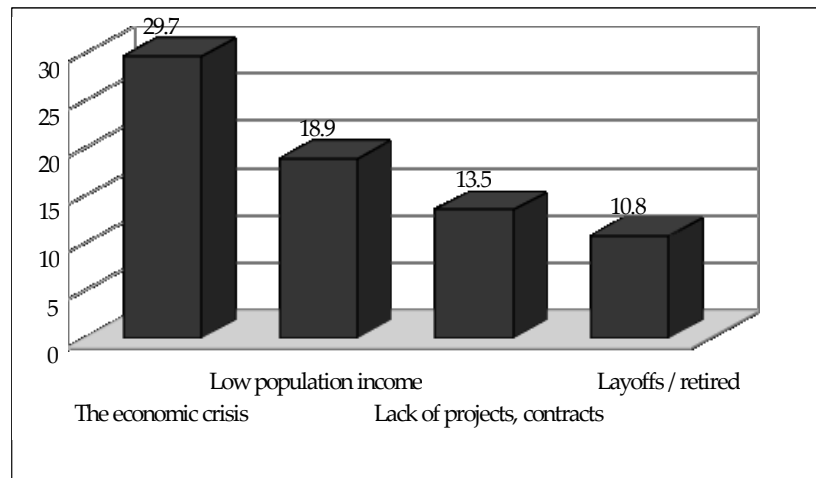
**Graphic 3**  
*The main reasons for reducing the number of employees (%)*



Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

In this kind of institutions of SE, the number of employees depends not only on the number of de customers it serves – many customers means more employees and vice versa, decrease customer number entails fewer employees – but also the institution’s ability to identify new growth opportunities. The income deduction of some classes of employees (other than SE entities), entails the damage of the living standards of other class of employees: some CARS employees may become unemployed. The lack of projects contributed to the decrease of the incomes, even if they would have allowed, not only creating new jobs, but also preserving the existing ones (Chart 3).

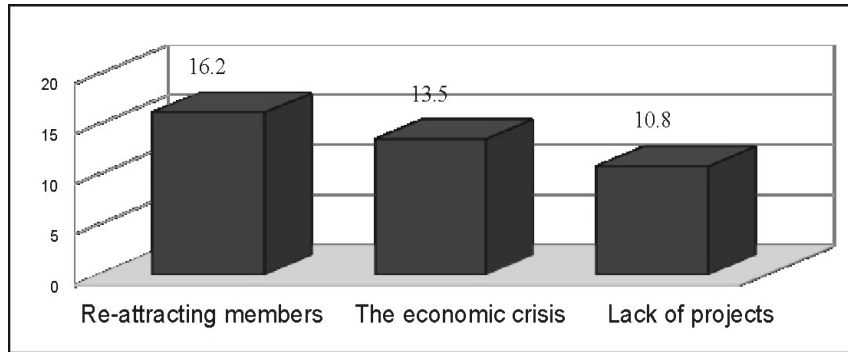
**Graphic 4**  
*The main reasons for de decrease of the turnover*



Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011

An important part of population has suffered a decreasing of their standard of life; this affects other aspects of CARS. Financial, organizational and operational, CARS are independent entities, for this reason each entities or group of this kind, shall find the adequate resources for development. The Romanian economical crisis was the main factor which decreases the profit of CARS, acting like a “domino effect”: economical crisis led to lower incomes, layoffs and reduced turnover of these entities (Chart 4).

**Graphic 5**  
*The main reasons for the decrease in profit (%)*

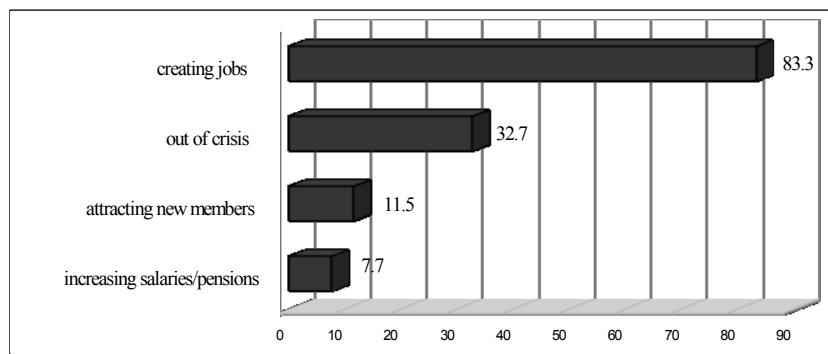


Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

The reasons of decreasing profit are similar: members' withdrawal decreased the social fund, reducing the saving levels, etc. (Chart 5). In terms of turnover and profit, CARS are negatively judged. The opinion of the representatives of these entities is that the main reasons for today's situation are found outside CARS, and to little are the results of their efforts (example - obtaining financial resources through projects).

The research results accentuate this situation: CARS have not found solutions for its problems – lack of funding projects and contracts (Chart 6).

**Graphic 6**  
*Main solution for redress according to CARS (%)*



Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.



The analysis of the reasons of problems that CARS are facing today, but also the solution suggested by them for resolving these problems, reflects that the problems and the solution are positioned outside the entity, or, in any case, to little inside it: to recover, CARS hopes of increasing the number of employees, wherefrom the future members are going to be recruited. In other words, CARS from Romania rely on the internal resources – human and financial – and not the external resources – attracting the international financing.

CARS's policy is centred on carefulness, but should also be on involving within the limits set by law. Furthermore, the identification of new funding sources for entities should be the main concern of the CARS.

Table 3  
*Priority activity of CARS in Bucharest-Ilfov and S-E regions*

<b>Activities types</b>	<b>Insignificant</b>	<b>Less important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Very important</b>	<b>No response</b>
Promoting economic interests	9.8	14.4	32.7	40.5	20.6
Support for heritage protection	6.5	15.7	33.3	39.9	44.6
Members information	8.5	7.8	37.3	43.8	2.6
Facilitating partnership	10.5	15.7	32	37.9	3.9
Promoting useful legislation	3.3	9.2	34	50.3	3.3
Promoting financial interests	3.3	13.1	37.3	42.5	3.9
Attracting international funding sources	22.2	11.1	21.6	40.5	4.6

Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

Although the lack of contracts and projects is indicated as the main cause of lower profits and turnover, attracting funding sources is not one of the priority of CARS (Table 16), The CARS from the two development regions included in the research, are more preoccupied with informing their members – as many as they are – and with promoting their financial interests. The most interest is directed to promoting the legislation useful for this kind of activities. We can talk about a manifestation of concern for the general interests, in case of directing the priority not only for the interests of CARS, but also for the population – easier credit condition, the possibility of granting credits/loans to other categories of people not just employees, etc.

Even if lately, they faced some problems – fact reflected in the data if this research – CARS have not disappeared and, contrary to predictions, neither will happen soon. Now, we can even talk about the revival of CARS.

Recession has led to lower incomes and layoffs which increased the number of ineligible persons for commercial banks. Commercial banks have tightened loans conditions, and no longer possibilities as “credit with ID card”. During the early 2000’s, a significant proportion of the population excessively indebted to commercial banks, also because that was a period of economic growth. In this situation, CARS becomes a safety option for those with financial disorders. For this reason CARS have a positive perspective for the future:

**Table 4**  
*Trends in 2011 (%)*

	<b>Will decrease</b>	<b>Will remain constant</b>	<b>Will increase</b>	<b>Do not know</b>	<b>No response</b>
Rate of turnover	19	49.2	13.3	3.6	14.9
Profit	19	49.2	11.8	3.1	16.9
Numbers of employees	8.7	66.2	6.2	3.6	15.4
Number of members	20.5	52.3	12.8	3.1	11.3

Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

CAR, compared to commercial banks, rely on a safety loan policy. In fact, the organizational and functional norms and rules are the same as CARS’s four decades ago. Each CAR can set its own lending rules, but the “rules of 5 c” is essential: debt retirement capacity, guarantee capacity, savings capacity, character, credit history.

Prudent policy that CARS practice is reflected in the dominant type of activity – the lending of its own members. By comparison with the other SE entities included in the research, less than a quarter also provide other services than lending: from the total of 195 CARS of the two development regions included in the present research, only 39 (20%) provides social services, 3 (1.5%) of these health services, 3 (1.5%) education and research services and 5 (2.6%) have human resource centre. In their future plans, are not many intentions of calling this type of services – especially the social ones – there are just a few (Table 5)

**Table 5**  
*Future intentions on social services development*

<b>Do you plan to develop such social services in the future?</b>	<b>%</b>
No response	77.4
Yes	5.6
No	16.9

Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

Positive evolution of the majority of CARS has determined some representatives to propose a significant change: in legislation or in services domain.

Currently, there are approximately 3,000 national CARS numbering thousands of members. Some of them are affiliated with unions or federations of CARS while others have preferred to remain independent. The evolution of CARS is being considered as favourable for medium and long term, but there are opinions that affirm the need to request to NBR<sup>1</sup> to supervise their work. This surveillance is necessary, according to some representatives of ECUs, and due to the fact that they have sufficient resources to enable these entities to diversify their financial activities.

Like any other initiative, this one has also positive and negative aspects. The biggest advantage of their supervision by the NBR is the possibility to give people higher loans on longer terms. The disadvantage is that the social role of CARS – for which it was created – would be significantly reduced. The option to choose one version or the other will depend on the socio-economic development of Romania on long term, but also on the target of each CAR.

### ***Populations perspective on Employees Mutual Aid Fund*** ██████████

The Credit Unions are necessary entities for society, and their numbers and intensity of their activity are evidence of country's economic prosperity, or on the contrary, its poverty. In Romania, at least currently, seems to be an evidence of the impoverishment of the population, rather than the increase of its welfare. CARSs, no matter whether it's for employees or retirees, have become the last salvation for a large number of individuals. The lower rates of interest charged by the Credit Unions and the credit requirements, more relaxed than other financial or non-banking institution, have led many Romanians to use the services of these entities, both CARP and CARS.

CARS have only won, also in the crisis – people turn to these entities because they have no alternative – either in terms of prosperity – increase the number of members and, therefore, the value of the social funds – the population is not always on the bright side. The employment status, the incomes, the area of residence, the level of education or the sex of a person, are criteria used for people's perception on CARS – especially in terms of their activity – it varies significantly.

Not all the employees are members of CARS; however, the majority of employees from Romania have at least one credit to pay. Overall, CARS do not give long-term loans (two years), and the loan is relatively small, compared with the value of the ones offered by the Commercial Banks. The money borrowed from CARS cover urgent needs – paying tuition fees, costs of family events (marriages, funerals), repair or renovation of housing, etc. According to FEDCAR, the classic client of CARS is a low-

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<sup>1</sup> National Bank of Romania.

income person – with an average salary – a man around 40-50 years old. The classic profile of the customer does not correspond to a person from a vulnerable group.

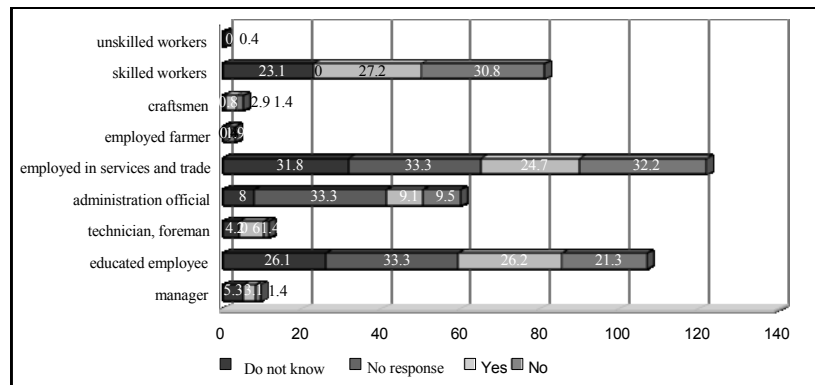
The number of members and clients of CARS increased significantly in recent years, but this is not equivalent to the increasing of the former role of this entity, but rather equivalent to the poverty of the population in Romania.

In the recent years, is spoken often about “the revival of CAR” for employees or retirees. This “revival” or re-launch has two major causes. On the one hand, the vast majority of population have excessive debts at the commercial banks or directly to retailers, and now more people are no longer able to cover these loans. The solution is represented by CARS: with the money borrowed from CARS, with low-interest, are covered the loans from commercial banks and other IFN. The second cause was created by the economical crisis from Romania. For unavailability of liquidity or due to tighter credit conditions, banks don't grant loans like in 2009. A significant part of population was ineligible to loan from commercial banks or other INF, but they are eligible to borrow from CARS. CARS also identified this opportunity to increase its client portfolio and to enhance financial activity, by providing financial consultancy for potential clients. In other words, if somebody apply for a loan but is unable to repay, they are not denied, they adopt a particular financial offer.

SE entities existence is not possible without population's support, for this reason is necessary to analyze the perspective of these on CARS, so the research was developed into the level of population from these two development regions.

To assess an institution, entity, activity, etc. is necessary to know the existence of these (Chart 7).

**Graphic 7**  
*The information level according to occupation (%)*



Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

According to occupation, skilled workers are the most informed (27.2% said that they know about the existence of this type of entities in their county), employees with high education (26.2%) and workers in services and trade sectors (24.7%).

The information is transmitted from one generation to another, from one person to another, but are often detained if are relevant to that person.

**Table 6**  
*The information level according to age (%)*

	18-24 years old	25-34 years old	35-44 years old	45-54 years old	55-64 years old	Over 65 years old
<b>Yes</b>	9.6	<b>19.2</b>	<b>23.6</b>	<b>16.4</b>	15.4	15.7
<b>No</b>	13	17.5	18.8	13.6	14.5	22.6
<b>DN</b>	15.6	19.3	17.5	10.2	13.7	23.7
<b>NA</b>	20	20	10.9	12.7	10.9	25.5

Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011 - Are there any CARS in your town?

Overall, we consider that all age groups are informed about the CARS. But the awareness is different: more information have the people aged between 35-44 years and those aged between 25 and 34 years, and less informed are, in terms of age, the extremes – those very young or those approaching old age. A higher information level of those aged between 25 and 44, compared with other age groups, is due to the natural priorities of age. Those very young enjoy the support of family, and elders have achieved most of their life goals, and the 24-44 age groups is on track to achieve them. For this, they need financial resources, and CARS represent an opportunity to resolve this problem.

**Table 7**  
*The information level according to area of residence (%)*

	RURAL	URBAN
<b>YES</b>	18.9	81.1
<b>NO</b>	67.5	32.5
<b>DN</b>	29.1	70.9
<b>NA</b>	36.4	63.6

Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011 – Are there any CARS in your town?

The development of several business units to which the CARS were founded, occurred in urban areas. The differences according to area of residence remain in Romania after 1990: the development level of rural region is much lower compared with urban areas. In these circumstances it is natural to have a higher level of information in urban area (81.1%) and more than modest in rural areas – 18.9%. On

the other hand, the main condition imposed by CARS to provide a loan, is to be employed, and in our case we confront with lower number of employees in rural areas, so the information level of these people can be justified, also by the minor importance which they attaches to this kind of information.

**Table 8**  
*The level of information by regions (%)*

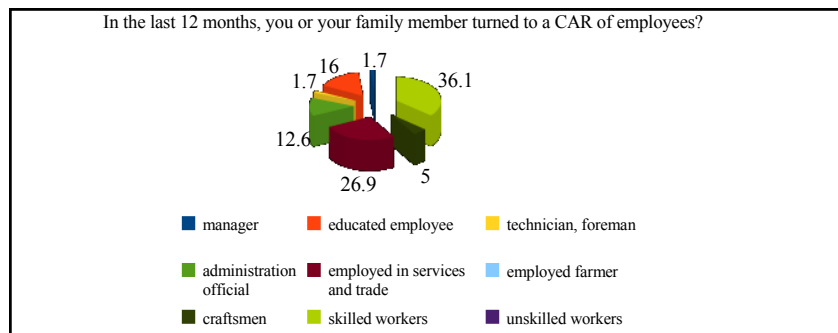
	Bucharest-Ilfov region	South-East region
<b>YES</b>	37.4	42.4
<b>NO</b>	16.9	52.4
<b>DO NOT KNOW</b>	38.5	40
<b>NO RESPONSE</b>	40	34,5

Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

As we have seen in developing regions distribution of CARS – a larger number of those in S-E Region than in Bucharest-Ilfov Region – and the awareness has the same type of distribution: the population from S-E counties is more informed about this type of SE entities, than the population from Bucharest-Ilfov.

If a person is better informed, the decisions are more accurate and better for her and her family. Our research has shown that the level of information of the population differs from a region to another, from one age to other, etc. The usage of a type of service – in these case CARS’s services – can be determined by the level of information, but also according to socio-professional characteristics. To analyze this case we selected from our database only affirmative responses, i.e. people who claimed to have used the services of CARS in the last year.

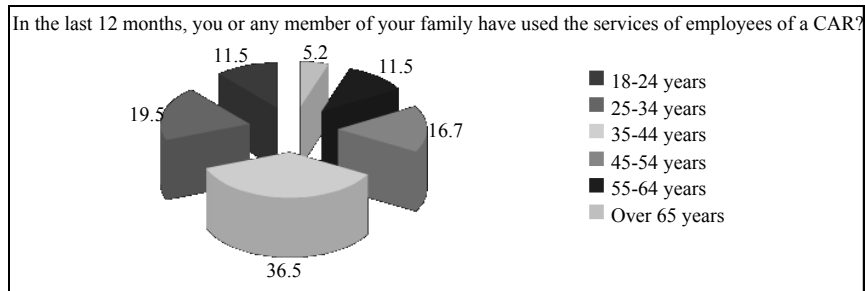
**Graphic 8**  
*Usage of CARS activities according to occupation (%)*



Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

Regarding the type of occupation, and taking into account the level of awareness, we can say that the best informed are those who have used services of SE services: skilled workers and employees with high education (see Chart 17)

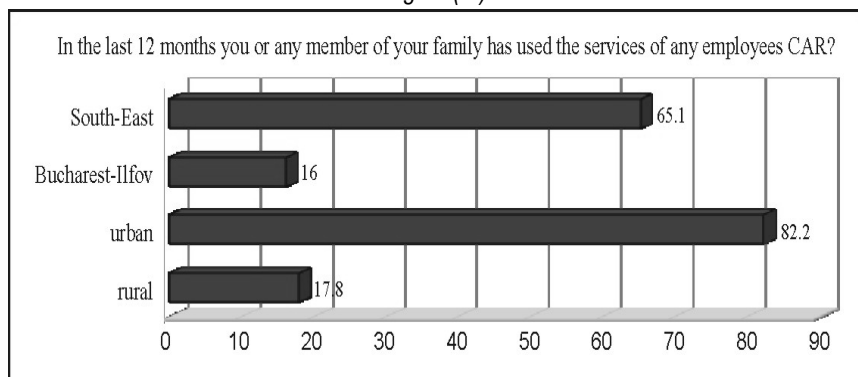
**Graphic 9**  
*The usage of CARS's services according to age (%)*



Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

In terms of age, the relation between information and usage is straightforward: the best informed are those who have used the services of CARSs, i.e. 35-44 years and 45-54 years groups (Chart 9).

**Graphic 10**  
*The usage of CARS services according to area of residences and development region (%)*



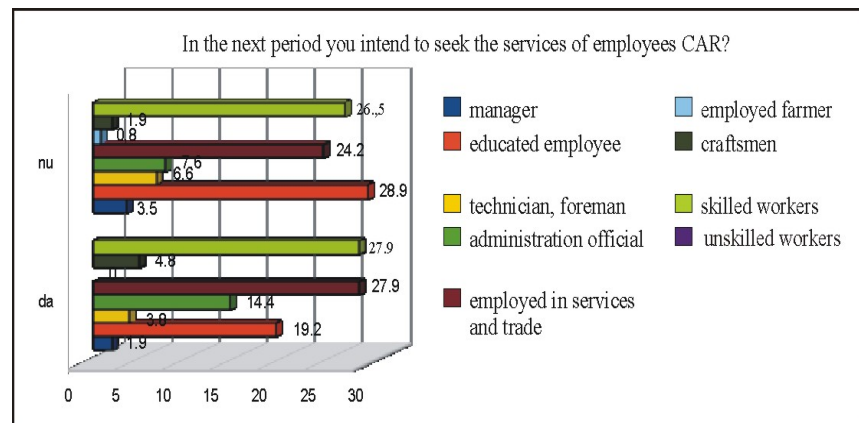
Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

The usage of CARS activities, was most common in the development region S-E that in Bucharest-Ifov and more often in urban areas than in rural areas (Chart 10).

The research data show that between the information level and the usage is a direct relation: those better informed overlap those who used frequently the services of CARS. Is difficult to determine if an informed individual can be found among users, rather the one less informed, or if these services requires more information. According to Integrated Research, most people who have used the services of CARS declared themselves satisfied or very satisfied, by the loan conditions or the repayment of the loan. The high level of satisfaction is specific to all categories of population regardless of age, occupation, residence area or development area.

If the population is informed, but especially satisfied by the services of CARS, we expect to use these services in the future (Chart 11).

**Graphic 11**  
*Intention to use CARS's services according to occupation (%)*

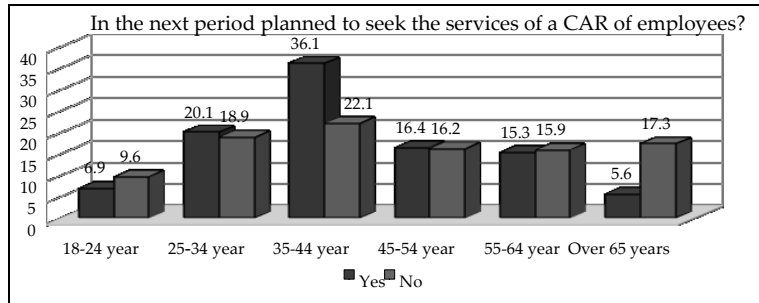


Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

Most of those who use the services of CARS, maintain their intention in the future, but are also some categories of people that, although they loan before, their future plans do not include these services: employees with high education, although some used these services, in terms of future intentions, they represent the largest proportion (28.9%) of those who don't want to use the services in the future (see Chart 11).



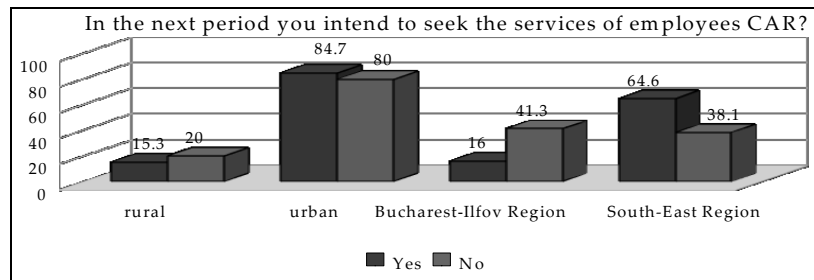
**Graphic 12**  
*Intention to use the services of CARS according to age (%)*



Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

CARS will remain favourites of 25-44 years age group, because, as we can see in the chart above, these people keep their intentions to use in the future services of financial institutions. Analyze of population intentions, shows that CARS can win supporters among the very young people.

**Graphic 13**  
*Intention to use the services of CARS according to resident area and development area (%)*



Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

According to the region of residence or development, we observe a particular note: although the rural population rarely used these services, in the future they intend to include in their options. Bucharest-Ilfov region offers many opportunities for lending, and therefore the number of those who intend to use the services of CARS is lower the number of those from S-E region (Chart 13).

In a partial conclusion, CARS are ones of the favourite entities in Romania, in terms of information, usage of services, satisfaction vis-à-vis to the quality, but also the future intentions of Romanians. This can only confirm the optimism expressed by the representatives of CARS, on the positive development of their work.

### ***Employees Credit Unions and Credit Unions for Vulnerable Groups***

Currently, CARs assess certain condition to all their applicants. Although these conditions are more relaxed than the ones assess by a financial institutions – not impose a minimum income, complicated documentation are not required, are acceptable also as guarantors persons other than the applicant's family members, etc – it still necessary to be an employee.

Unfortunately, not all the members of society have the chance to have a job to ensure their family income. Usually, people who do not have a job and an income to ensure a decent standard of living, are most often found in the category of vulnerable groups. In the last years, due to the constant deepening of inequalities between different social groups, but as a result of the economic crisis that has spread also in our society, the number of people from the vulnerable groups has increased.

According to laws and to all studies and researches, there are many definitions for „*vulnerable group*”. In general terms, *vulnerable group* are those groups of people who have limited access to resources - material, financial, political, educational, health, etc. – those who are in a situation of inequality of relation with the majority of population, those who face discriminatory attitudes and behaviour – rejection, marginalization – other citizens attitudes on grounds of ethnic, religions, gender, age, etc. (Cace and al, 2010). In Romania, in the category of vulnerable groups are usually children from large families, Roma minority, elders, people with various forms of disability, young people who left de institutional system. Our research focused on two categories of people often found among vulnerable groups: Roma minority and women. To analyze the relation between these two categories of population, CARs required a presentation of causes for which Romani and women are in vulnerable groups.

The studies and researches made in Romania that have focused on analyzing the situation of Roma minority, shows that: Romani have lower education level compared with the majority population, live in poor conditions, have poor health, don't have identity documents (birth certificate, ID card), live mostly in outskirts, don't have access to public transport, etc. Lack of education and professional development is the reason why Romani find it difficult to obtain a job and a stable income. Even when they manage to integrate professional, interfere other difficulties – the large number of family members(families with dependent children, extended families), long distance from home to work, and the lack of public transport – determine them to give up work, and thus remain without a monthly income.

The Romanian society is modern, democratic, but unfortunately women are treated differently: even if they have the same level of education and professional training, in the workplace don't have the same responsibilities as men, and receive lower incomes. When women are in prenatal, postpartum or maternity leave, are the ones who receive very low incomes. The chances to integrate professionally in the future are much lower for women than for men (Cace, Tomescu, 2011).

One of the priorities for which the SE entities were created, is supporting the vulnerable groups from a society. We note that the vulnerable groups cannot get direct support from these entities, but indirectly by those family members who can access a credit and can prove its ability to pay.

Table 9  
*The involvement of CARS to support vulnerable groups*

<b>Offers your organization any forms of aid for people in need?</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes, currently	29.2
Yes, in the past	9.7
No, never	61

Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

The researches data shows that less than a quarter of CARS are involved in carrying out these types of social services. The main form of support offered by CARS is preferential loans – more than half of CARS showed this form of support. However, if we cater for applying for a loan, regardless of value, whether is preferential or ordinary one, paying interest, calculated on the basis of credit amount and duration, it is quite difficult to consider this a form of welfare. It is rather a form of conditional support or with modest cost.

CARS still operate by the principles of a bank: they make profit, and often this profit is derived from the loans allowed to its members.

Table 10  
*The benefits obtained by CARS*

<b>Has your organization benefited support mechanism or funding sources, from the local/central or international institutions? (%)</b>	
YES	3.1
NO	91.3
NO RESPONSE	5.6

Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

CARS have the character of „closed organization”: provides no help, receive no help; only their members can get credit.

Although, the vulnerable groups are not among those who accede easily to the support of CARS – in this case we refer only to woman and Roma people – we expect to have at least some information about these entities.

The majority population and Romani are aware of the existence of CARS in their county or locality, even if in different proportions: Romanians are better informed than Romani (Table 11). The information levels according to gender are not very different, as we expected, men are more informed than women.

**Table 11**  
*Level of information according to ethnicity and gender*

	<b>Romanians</b>	<b>Romani</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
YES	50.9	44	51	49.8
NO	23.1	29.4	25.3	21.3
DO NOT KNOW	24.6	26.6	22.6	27.2
NO RESPONSE	1.4	0	1.1	1.7

Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

People are not born socially vulnerable. The vulnerability appears sooner or later, depending on the socio-familial, cultural, economical, etc., circumstances, where a person lives. For this reason, we believe that a person, although now is classified as vulnerable due to circumstances – job loss, health problems, family problems, etc. – it is likely that in the past haven't been in this category, and it's very likely in the future to overcome or solve these problems. From this point of view, we analyze the relationship between CARS and women and Romani: usage of services, satisfaction level and future intentions.

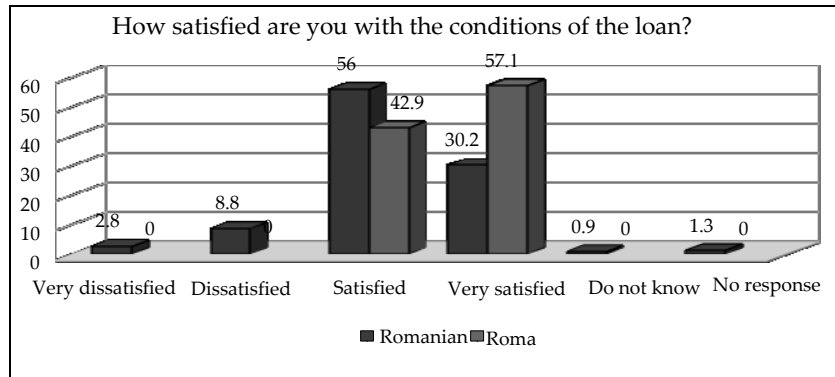
**Table 12**  
*Use of services according to gender*

<b>Have you or your family members, ever used the services of CARS in the last 12 months?</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Romanians</b>	<b>Romani</b>
YES	7.6	7.1	7.2	14.6
NO	80.1	84.1	82.2	77.1
DO NOT KNOW	10.5	6.8	8.6	8.3
NO RESPONSE	1.8	2	2	0

Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

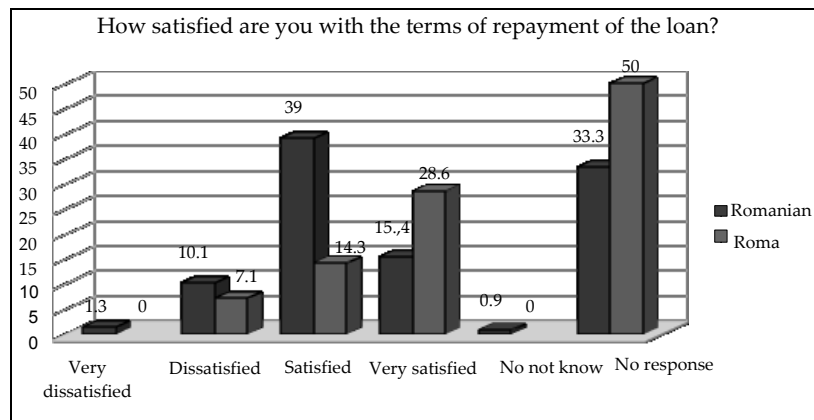
The usage of services provided but CARS is more common among men than women, and twice as common among Roma minority comparing to majority (Table 12).

**Graphic 14**  
Satisfaction at CARS's services according to ethnicity



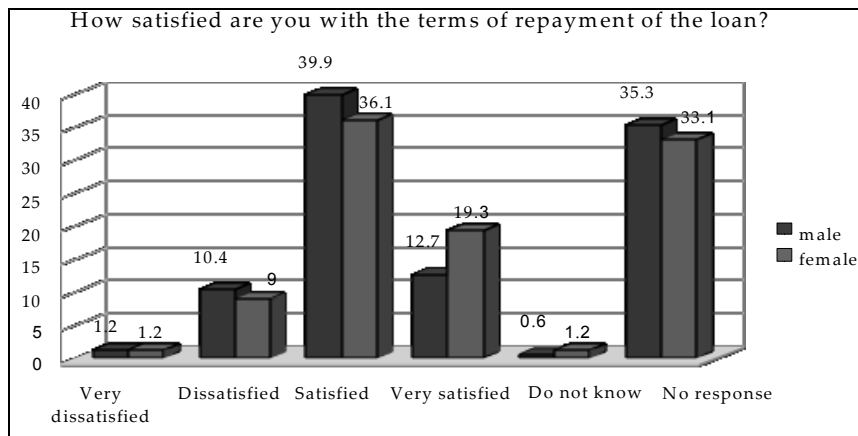
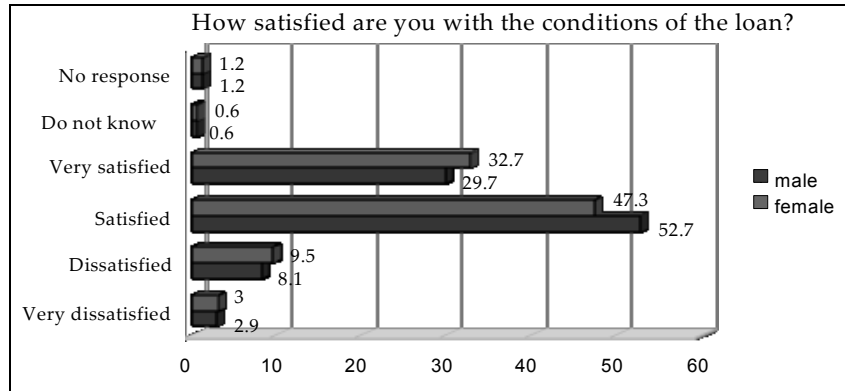
Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

**Graphic 15**  
Satisfaction at CARS's services according to ethnicity



Regarding the condition for granting and repayment of the loan according to ethnicity, the Romani are more satisfied than Romanians (Chart 14 and Chart 15).

**Graphic 16**  
**Satisfaction at CARS's services according to gender**



Source: Database INTEGRAT (ICCV), 2011.

The analysis of satisfaction with CARS's services according to gender, shows that female respondents show a greater satisfaction in terms of loan repayment, but are less satisfied than men when it comes to condition for granting a loan (Chart 25).

The analysis of people's perceptions on CARS regardless of the perspective from which we approached it, the conclusion is that these entities are necessary for the society and, moreover, are really appreciated for the support it provides for population.

One of the oldest SE entities from Romania, CARS proves that are useful for society: they support the population in times of economic relaxation or in times of crisis, not only for those categories of people who have a decent standard of living, but also for vulnerable groups. Their work has a high intensity, supported also by the knowledge and appreciation of the population, enjoyed by CARS, but important is also the frequency with which people access the services provided by these entities and the intention of including these services in their future plans.

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