



POVERTY EVOLUTION AND SOCIAL SITUATION. 1990-2017¹

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Abstract: *The study shows the evolution of poverty in Romania in 1990-2017, within the European context, analysing statistics and local and international information. After the brief presentation of the basic concepts used to analyse the phenomenon, the two main stages of its dynamics in Romania are presented: 1990-2000 – when the scale of poverty increased continuously, and 2000-2017 – when the phenomenon gradually decreased, and became less intense, at least in terms of the severe and absolute poverty. Such performance is noteworthy, knowing that over the past century, much of the Romanian population could not afford a consumption of goods and services above the limits of the subsistence basket.*

Keywords: *incomes, minimal decent consumption, subsistence, inequalities, social protection*

Poverty in the '90s

As the Ceausescu era ended, the population of Romania hoped to return to a kind of normality with nothing in common with the frustrations experienced during the socialism. After 1990, however, as an effect of the mass crumbling of the national economy, the Romanian society was to experience a new period of economic and social drifting, on the social background highly traumatized, by the former regime, although in a different manner. Until 2000, in Romania, as in several other Central and East European societies in transition, there were two bursts of poverty at a high social scale. However, compared to other European countries in a similar situation, Romania had, in 1996-1999, the highest rate of poverty, second only to Albania.

Poverty rate. The first estimations performed by various social surveys of poverty dimensions in Romania, showed that the phenomenon already had acquired worrying

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proportions in 1993-1994, just three-four years after the process of economic dismantling started.

According to World Bank data, the population affected by poverty reached 22%, while according to the International Monetary Fund and The Research Institute for Quality of Life, it was 39.3% of the total population. UNDP's (1998) estimations indicated a poverty rate of 28% for 1996 and 44% for 2000 (Zamfir coord., 2001). Although the figures published by various, internal or external sources, are somehow different, the trend of the phenomenon was rather strong, showing for 1993-1994, and for 1997-1999, two stages of poverty worsening.

Table 1. Poverty rate in Romania. 1995-1999

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Poverty rate	25.27	19.85	30.81	33.82	41.2
Absolute poverty rate	7.96	5.97	9.53	11.7	16.6

Source: Testiuc et al., 2001, p.34

The World Bank showed that the evolution of poverty in Romania was inversely proportional to the general evolution of the economy. This situation occurred after several decades of economic egalitarianism in the former communist space. Romania started, in 1989, from a Gini coefficient of around 20, to reach 31 in 1999, which meant a substantial polarization of the incomes within a rather short interval. The crash of the economy has also diminished the standard of life, mainly by the erosion of the basic incomes and by the decrease of available places of work.

Wages and the minimal decent/subsistence consumption

The first category of population directly affected by poverty – the employees – appeared almost overnight, as the measures of national economic reorganisation started to be implemented.

The dramatic decrease of the number of employees was equivalent with a depressed standard of living for many households. In 2000, the number of employees (with working contract on determined or undetermined period) was 55% of the corresponding 1989 number.

Table 2. Number of employees. 1989-2000 (1989= 100)

Year	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Employees (thousands)	7997	8156	7547	6888	6672	6201	5707	5634	5125	5025	4616	4457
%	100	102.7	94.7	86.1	83.4	77.5	71.4	70.5	64.1	62.8	57.7	55.7

Source: CNS, Statistic Yearbook of Romania 1993- 1998, Statistic Bulletin CNS 1998- 2000

Table 3. Evolution of wages in some transition countries, compared to 1989 (1989=100%)

	1993	1996
Bulgaria ab)	77,6	49,8
Czech Republic ae)	78,8	100,4
Estonia ae)	46,3	55,2
Hungary f)	83,1	74,3
Latvia eg)	51,8	54,1
Lithuania ce)	28,4	34,8
Poland f)	71,2	77,9
Romania ce)	64,4	79,8
Slovakia cd)	69,2	81,9
Slovenia c)	70,4	83,1

Source: UNICEF 1998, Regional monitoring report no. 5

Note: a) based on gross wages; b) only the public sector; c) net wages; d) base, 1995 = 100; e) on the basis of the consumer price index BERD (1997); f) real net index calculated by the Bureau of Statistics; g) 1990-1993: gross wages, 1994-1996: net wages.

After a strong decrease until 1993-1994 (when the average wage decreased by 38% compared to 1989), there was a period of slight recovery until 1996, followed by a new crash, which set the average wage in 1997-2000 to 61.5% of 1989 value (Table 4).

Table 4. Evolution of real wages in Romania. 1990-2000 (1989= 100)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Net minimal wage	95.1	80.7	52.5	36.2	33.4	33.8	35.5	26.3	28.6	25.4	26.1
Net average wage	105.0	85.4	74.6	62.1	62.4	70.2	76.9	59.4	61.5	61.6	60.4

Source: The Research Institute for Quality of Life database

Table 5. Gross average wage (in US \$) for some East-European countries (1999)

Country	Slovenia	Poland	Czech Republic	Hungary	Romania
Gross average wage	953.1	450.9	365.8	325.7	127.7

Source: CESTAT no. 2/2000 and authors' calculation

Although the contribution of the wages had decreased considerably within the household budget, they formed a consistent part of the household income throughout the period of transition for much of the population.

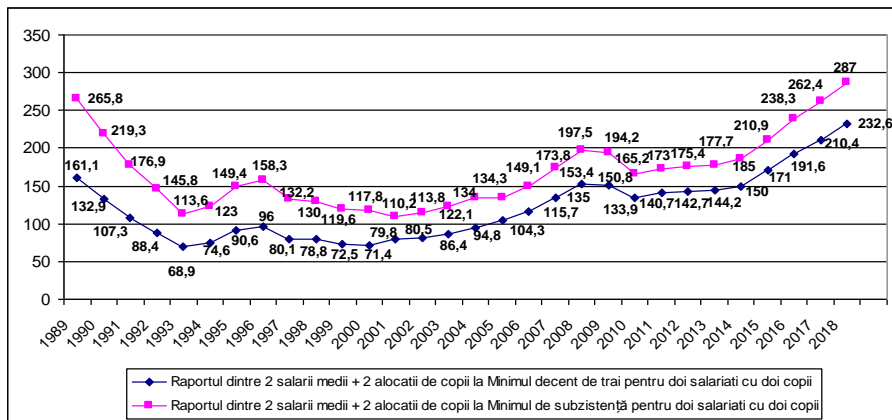
Table 6. Wage poverty in Central and Eastern Europe in 1996-1999 (PPP-purchasing power parity)

Country	Year	Rate of wage poverty		GDP 1998(\$ USA) /capita, ref. 1996 PPP
		2\$/PPP/day	4\$/PPP/day	
Romania	1998	6,8	44,5	5571
Bulgaria	1995	3,1	18,2	4683
Slovakia	1997	2,6	8,6	9624
Hungary	1997	1,3	15,4	9832
Poland	1998	1,2	18,4	7543
Czech Republic	1996	0,0	0,8	12197
Slovenia	1997/1998	0,0	0,7	14399
R. Moldova	1999	55,4	89,6	1995

Source: *** Transition Report 2000, European Bank for Reconstruction and development p. 107

In 1999, the average net wage was 101.4 US\$ compared to 150.7 US\$ in 1990. At the same time, the wages were much below the values from other East European countries in transition (Table 6).

Chart 1. Ratio of 2 average wages plus the allocations for 2 children, and the basket for minimal subsistence/decent consumption (MS/MD), in 1989-2018



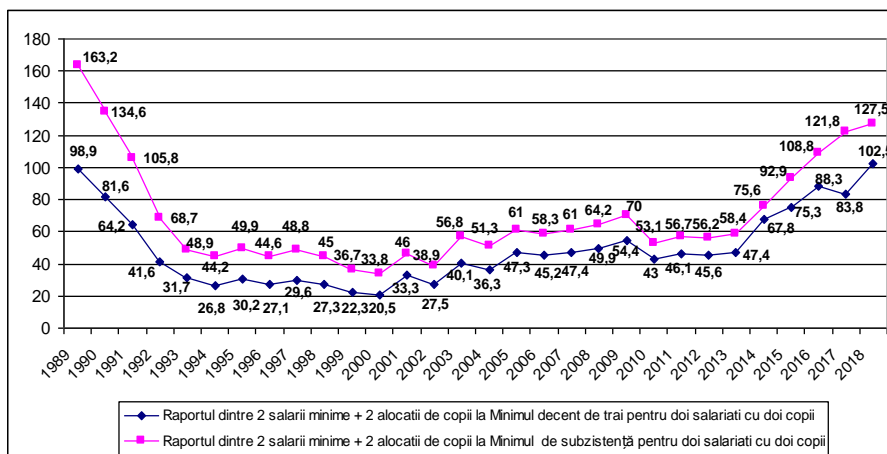
Sources: Statistic Yearbook of Romania 1990 - 2018, website Ministry of Labour and Social Justice.

Note: Value of the consumption basket calculated by Gh. Barbu in 1990-1999, then by A. Mihăilescu in 2000-2018. Index calculation and chart, Adina Mihăilescu.

A family of two persons, with two children, could not ensure the minimal basket for a decent consumption, composed according to The Research Institute for Quality of Life (RIQL) methodology, unless they had two average wages, starting with 1992, until 2005.

The economic situation was much more difficult for a family with two children who had two minimal wages. This type of family could not even provide for the subsistence basket, starting in 1992, up to 2015.

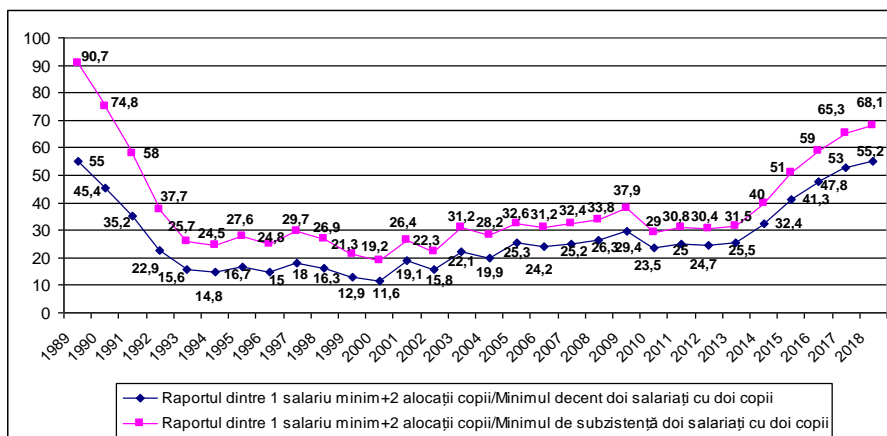
Chart 2. Ratio of 2 minimal wages plus the allocations for 2 children, and the basket for minimal subsistence/decent consumption, in 1989-2018



Sources: Statistic Yearbook of Romania 1990 - 2018, website Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and the Elder. Value of the consumption basket calculated by Gh. Barbu in 1990-1999, then by A. Mihăilescu in 2000-2018. Index calculation and chart, Adina Mihăilescu.

A particularly difficult situation was that of a family of two persons, having two children, when they only had one minimal wage.

Chart 3. Ratio of 1 minimal wage plus the allocations for 2 children, and the basket for minimal subsistence/decent consumption, in 1989-2018



Sources: Statistic Yearbook of Romania 1990 - 2018, website Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and the Elder. Value of the consumption basket calculated by Gh. Barbu in 1990-1999, then by A. Mihăilescu in 2000-2018. Index calculation and chart, Adina Mihăilescu.

Replacement incomes – social protection

The social protection institution was meant to replace partially the incomes from wage lost due to the economic reorganisation. The lost wages were replaced by various categories of incomes, substantially lower: pension, unemployment aid, support allocation, social aid. An effect of the fast contraction of the economic sector, in the 90s, was the shrinking taxation basis, which called for higher rates of social contributions for the financial support of social protection.

Table 7. Social contributions (%) in Romania - 2001 compared to 1989

Contribution	1989	2001
Budget of social insurances for pensions and other social rights	13 (A)	35-45 (A+S)
Unemployment fund	0	6 (A+S)
Fund for additional pension	2-3 (S)	0
Health insurances fund	0	14 (A+S)
Special fund for the people with disabilities	0	3 (A)
Special fund for education	0	2 (A)
Contributions for the chamber of labour	0	1 (A)
Total	15-16 13 (A); 2-3 (S)	61-71 41,3-51,3 (A); 19,6 (S)

Source: Văcărel, 2001; Note: A = employer contribution; S = employee contribution

Table 8. Social contributions (%) in some countries of the European Union, in 1998

Country	Employees	Employers	Total
Bulgaria - total, of which:	2.9	40.6-55.6	43.5- 58.5
pensions	2.0	37-52	39-54
Czech Republic-total, of which:	13.3	35.5	48.5
pensions	6.8	0.0	6.8
Hungary - total, of which:	11.5	48.2	59.7
pensions	6.0	24.5	30.5
France - total, of which:	24.3	37.8	62.1
pensions	6.6	8.2	14.8
Germany - total, of which:	19.7	19.7	39.3
pensions	9.3	9.3	18.6
Romania - total, of which:	19.6	40.3	59.9
pensions	11.6	23.3	34.9

Source: *** Financing social protection in Romania, 2017, Note: * Romania - 2001.

Also, during 1990-2000, in Romania, there was a clear preference for a higher taxation of the employee than of the employer. Paid work was higher taxed socially than in other

transition countries. The social taxation rate was 59.9%, close to some countries such as France (62.1%) or Hungary (59.7%), with the notification that in 1998, Hungary taxed its employees with just 11.5% (GDP - Hungary: 4510 USD/ capita), and Romania, with 19.6% (at a GDP of 1360 USD/capita). Furthermore, while the Romanian employee paid 11.6% of the wage for pension, the Hungarian employee paid just 6%. Hungary taxed its employees almost 6 times less than the Romanian employees.

Throughout the '90s, the social expenditure oscillated, as proportion of the GDP, between 15.2 % (in 1993) – of which 12.5% for social transfers and health - and 18.2 % (in 1999) (*Human Development Report, UNDP, 1999*).

Table 9. Evolution of the public social expenditure in Romania – 1990-2000

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Public social spending (1989 = 100)	104.2	80.4	65.4	62.0	67.9	80.5	86.0	76.8	76.4	74.6	72.6

Source: RIQL database; Note: The expenditure includes social transfers for social work, allocations, pensions, aids and indemnities, education, health care, other social spending, not including dwelling and lodging

The allocations for family and motherhood, as proportion of the overall budget spending, displayed a strongly decreasing trend, from 1990 to 1996, after which the proportion never reached the 1990 value. Therefore, in Romania it was a deliberate social policy to maintain the families with children in poverty.

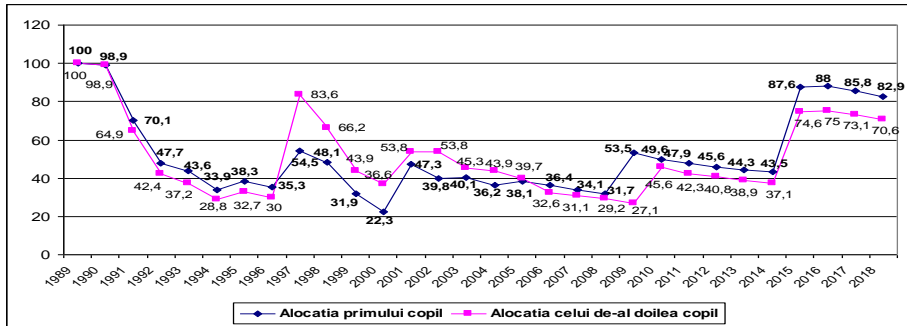
Table 10. Allocations for family and motherhood - % of total budget expenditure

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
	9.8	4.7	3.0	3.0	3.1	2.3	2.1	3.6	4.0

Source: Zamfir Elena, Ilie Bădescu, Cătălin Zamfir (coord.), Social state of the Romanian society after 10 years ..., 2000, pg. 25

Also, in 1990-2016, the allocations for children had an extremely critical evolution.

Chart 4. Evolution of the real allocation for the first and second child, in 1989-2018



Source: Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and the Elder. The allocation index, price index and real allocation index for the first and second child, compared to 1989 – calculated by A. Mihăilescu, RIQL

Not even after 29 years from the change of the political regime, this social benefit failed to reach its real value from 1989. This is one of the causes for the expanded poverty of the children in Romania.

The public spending for social assistance, as proportion of the GDP, maintained at a rather low level, although the burst of poverty in Romania would have called for much more balanced social policies.

Table 11. Public spending for social assistance, as % of the GDP

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
% of the GDP	0,03	0,4	0,2	0,2	0,1	0,3	0,3	0,2	0,3

Source: Zamfir Elena, Ilie Bădescu, Cătălin Zamfir (coord.), *Social state of the Romanian society after 10 years ..., 2000*, pg. 25

During the transition years, however, the politicians opted for an extremely residual intervention of the social work services. The use of minimal proportions of resources for social protection, from the GDP, singled out Romania among the group of transition countries, and within the EU. This did not change much after 2000, either, although the minimal guaranteed income was introduced.

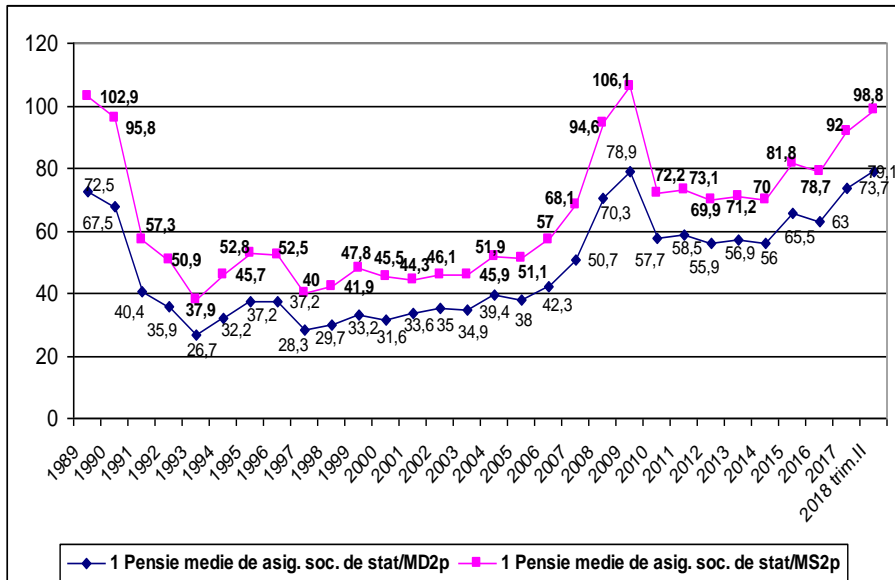
Table 12. Social aid amount, in 1994-1999 (ROL)

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Amount	45000	45000	51000	96750	134750	166500

Sources: Law 28/1994 of the social insurances budget, Law 67/1995 for social aid, and Law 416/2001 – Minimal guaranteed income

The urban families of pensioners, having an average social insurance pension, had a particularly difficult situation throughout the entire 1989-2018 period (Chart 7). Only in 2009 they could cover the expenditure for the subsistence basket, and never had access to the minimal decent consumption basket.

Chart 5. Evolution of the real net social insurance pension, related to the minimal basket of decent consumption, and the subsistence basket, for the family of two people, in urban, October 1989 – 2018 (1989=100%)

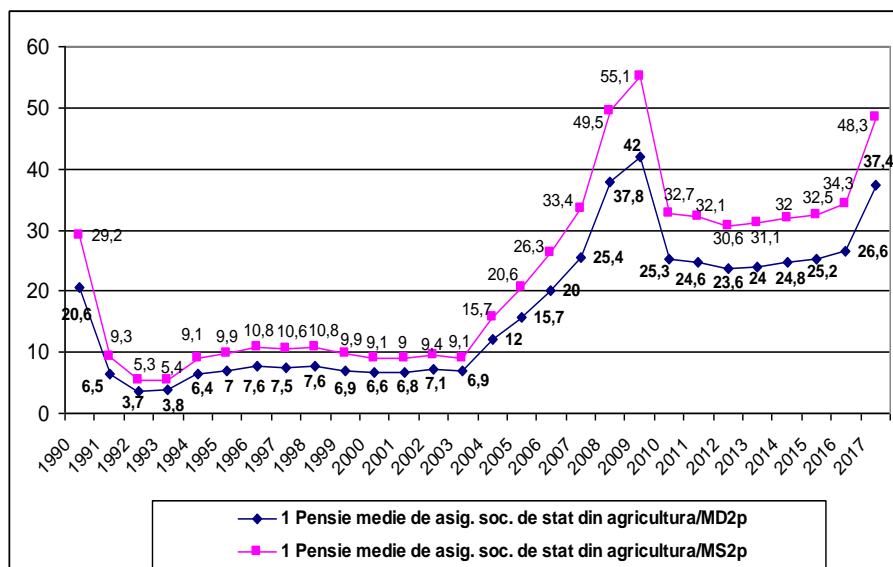


Source: Romania Statistical Yearbook, 1990-2018, INS. Value of the minimal consumption basket calculated by Gh. Barbu in 1990-1999, then, by A. Mihăilescu in 2000-2018. Index calculation and chart, Adina Mihăilescu

The rural families of pensioners having an average real pension from agriculture, were in an even worse situation. Such families were very far from the ideal of meeting the necessities included in the minimal basket for decent consumption, and even in the basket of subsistence (Chart 6).

The higher extreme poverty in the rural proved to be the most resistant component of the total poverty along the period of economic growth. This shows the need for interventions of the state with social policies transcending the invisible hand of the market economy, to alleviate the impact of the rural poverty.

Chart 6. Evolution of the real net pension from agriculture, related to minimal basket of decent consumption, and the subsistence basket, for the family of two people, in rural, October 1989 – 2018 (1989=100%)



Source: Romania Statistical Yearbook, 1990-2018, INS. Value of the minimal consumption basket calculated by Gb. Barbu in 1990-1999, then, by A. Mihăilescu in 2000-2018. Index calculation and chart Adina Mihăilescu.

Therefore, in the 90s, some categories of families, and even social groups, were systematically confronted with a severe poverty, having a high risk of becoming permanent.

Table 13. Poverty rate depending on the age and number of children – 1995 and 1998

	1995	1998
1. Poverty rate depending on the number of children		
- No children	16.4	23.5
- 1 child	24.6	35.0
- 2 children	30.1	43.6
- 3 children	52.8	64.6
- 4 children or more	71.1	83.6
2. Poverty rate depending on the age:		
- Under 7 years old	30.2	37.7
- 7- 15 years old	37.1	48.7
- 16- 25 years old	34.3	45.5
- 26- 35 years old	21.7	31.0

	1995	1998
- 36- 45 years old	26.0	36.1
- 46- 55 years old	23.7	32.3
- 56- 65 years old	14.5	21.0
- Above 65 years old	9.7	11.4

Source: Teșliuc, Pop, Peșliuc, 2001

The strongest predictor of poverty was the fact that people able to work remained, a long time, outside the labour market. The groups most affected by poverty were the children, young people and the families with many children, the families of pensioners, with just one pension and, particularly, the families having children, and with no other periodic incomes except the children allocations. Usually, a larger number of members increases the risk of poverty for that family. The birth of the first child in a household increases the risk of poverty by almost 50%, and the same is valid for the second, third or fourth child. The single parent families are highly vulnerable.

Main cause of poverty during the transition period

As shown in chapter 4.1 (particularly charts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6), the extremely low level of the basic incomes of most of the Romanian population was and still is an economic and social problem, even from the 90s; although it improved slightly in the recent 2-3 years, some social segments still persist. Romania ranked for decades, and still ranks on the (pen)ultimate position within EU in terms of employee income, amount of pensions and income polarization, and also in terms of the improper ratio between the proportion of the profit and the proportion of the cost of work within the net national income.

Table 14. Evolution of the number of poor persons. 2000-2011

Evolution of the no. of poor persons (thousands) in 2000-2011												
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Relative poverty	3836	3809	4053	3760	3880	3936	4015	3984	3914	3765	3683	3816
Absolute poverty	8054	6857	6471	5455	4078	3268	2980	2112	1226	943	1110	1078

Source: Pana, 2013, *Poverty – o radiography* (2)...

About 60% of the households whose head of family is unemployed, have a high level of economic vulnerability (Pop L, Voicu B, 2000). Also, in 1995, 51.9% of the households whose head of family is agricultural worker, were in poverty. In 1998, their proportion increased up to 57.4% (Teșliuc, Pop, Teșliuc, 2001).

Evolution of poverty after 2000

The economic growth of Romania decreased the number and proportion of the people living in poverty, from 35.9% to 28.9% of the total population (World Bank data) in 2000-2002.

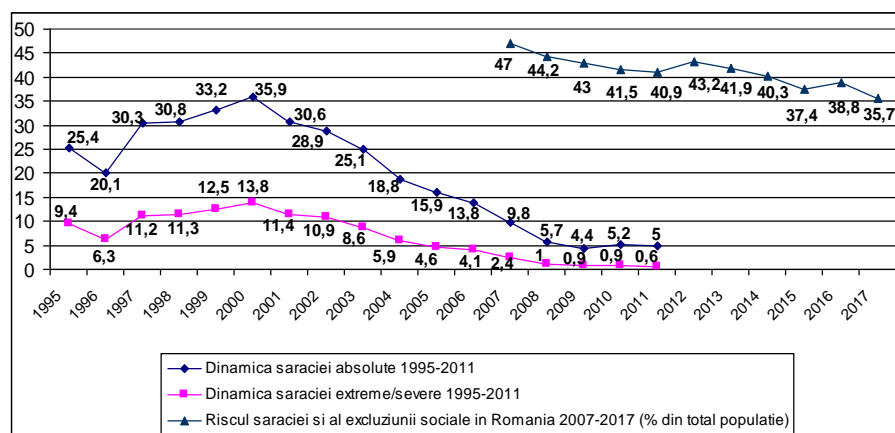
The data series that Eurostat provides as of 2007 (***) *People at risk of ...*, Eurostat, 2017), refer to the risk of poverty and social exclusion. The data show extremely high proportions of poverty and social exclusion (which include absolute poverty, extreme/severe poverty, or food poverty) particularly in 2007 (47%) and 2008 (44.3%) (Chart 7), decreasing to 35.7%, in 2017.

Table 15. Risk of poverty and social exclusion in Romania and EU28 average, in 2017, by categories of households and population, and for the total population (%)

	Total	Gender		Age		Households		Activity status	
		Female	Men	Under 15	65 +	No children	With children	Employed	Unemployed
Romania	35.7	36.5	34.9	41.7	33.2	33.4	37.5	26.8	67.0
EU 28	22.5	23.3	21.6	24.5	18.1	21.9	23.0	12.3	64.7

Source: *** *At risk of poverty or social exclusion in Romania, 2017*, Eurostat, 2018, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/news/themes-in-the-spotlight/poverty-day-2018>

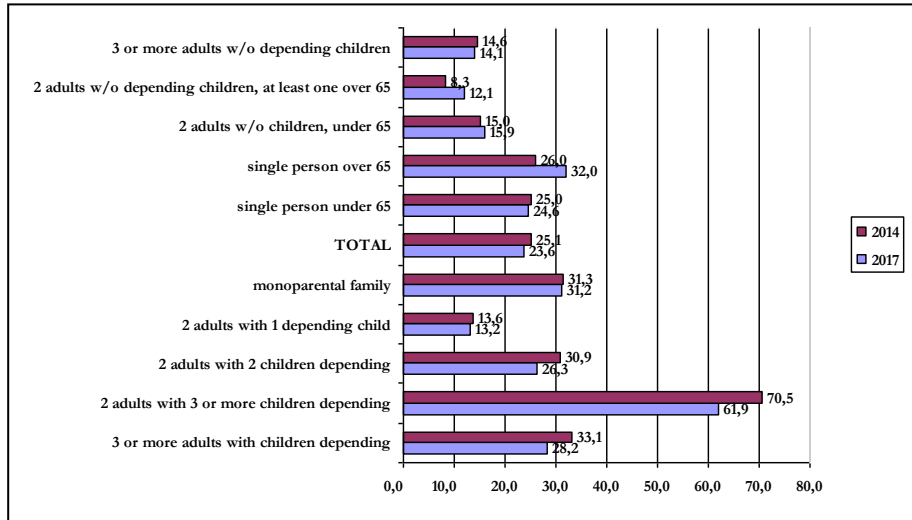
Chart 7. Evolution of absolute poverty and of extreme/severe poverty in Romania, in 1995-2011. Risk of poverty and social exclusion, in 2007-2017 (% of total population)



Sources: for 1995-2002: *** *Romania: Poverty evaluation*, World Bank, 2003; for 2002-2011, Pana Marin, 2013, *Poverty – o radiography (1)*: Official threshold, close to the minimal national wage; *Governing Course*, 20.11; for the risk of poverty and social exclusion 2007-2016: *** *People at risk of ...*, Eurostat, 2017; 2017 data: *** *At risk of poverty or social exclusion in Romania, 2017*, Eurostat, 2018

Unlike Eurostat data, which evaluated the risk of poverty and social exclusion to 35.7% of the total population, a study of INS Bucharest (Iagăr, coord., 2018) shows that in 2017, in Romania "poverty was very deep" and affected some 4.6 million people, which gives a poverty rate of 23.5%.

Chart 8. Poverty rate by type of household, 2014, 2017



Source: Iagăr, coordinator, INS, 2018

The highest incidence of poverty was among the children and young people up to the age of 18, one third of them living below the poverty threshold.

Poverty affected unequally the different regions of the country. In 2017, the highest rates of poverty were in North-East and South-West Oltenia regions of development (33.4%) and in South-East, while the lowest poverty rate was in Bucharest-Ilfov (6.1%).

In terms of gender, higher differences appear at the age group 65+, where in 2017, the poverty rate for women was 11.3% higher than the poverty rate for men. The men aged 50-64 were more affected by poverty than the women (by 2.1%). One unemployed person of two was poor, the unemployed having the worst situation (more than half of the men were poor, compared to almost two fifth of the women).

In 2015, after two and a half decades of capitalism, Romania still was on the top position in EU statistics in terms of the poverty risk after social transfers (25.4%), and second after Bulgaria, in terms of the persons with severe material deprivation (32.7%) (Eurostat, 2017).

In 2014, the Romanian population had a standard of living representing 52% of the average EU28 level, with a gap of 10% – 20% even to the former socialist countries

that joined the EU. Romania was on the top position in Europe in terms of poverty of the families with children (Pana, 2014).

Table 16. Thresholds of relative/absolute poverty between 2002-2011 (lei/month/equivalent adult)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Relative poverty threshold	138,7	174,0	226,0	263,2	299,7	358,5	459,3	512,5	503,5	530,4
Absolute poverty threshold	153,6	167,9	191,5	208,1	218,3	232,6	247,2	258,9	279,6	288,4
Severe poverty threshold	106,1	116,0	132,3	143,8	150,8	160,7	170,8	178,9	193,1	199,2
Nutrition poverty threshold	87,5	95,6	109,1	118,6	124,3	132,5	140,8	147,5	159,3	164,3

Source: Pana Marin, 2013, *Poverty – a radiography (1): Official threshold, in ...*

Note: All thresholds take in consideration prices in December of each year, apart of relative poverty, which are taking in consideration January prices

Table 17. Equivalent mean annual income (EURO) in the states that recently joined EU, 2007-2016

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU mean	13898	14607	14815	14958	15082	15577	15562	15921	16269	...
Bulgaria	1479	2180	2828	3017	2911	2859	2924	3320	3332	3147
Czech R.	5423	6068	7295	7058	7451	7791	7694	7622	7423	...
Estonia	4447	5541	6209	5727	5603	5985	6583	7219	7882	...
Latvia	3363	4727	5355	4488	4195	4459	4463	5210	5840	6374
Lithuania	3273	4110	4715	4026	3857	4337	4698	4821	5180	...
Hungary	3936	4400	4739	4241	4493	4696	4449	4512	4567	4772
Poland	3502	4154	5090	4402	5032	5057	5174	5339	5560	
Romania	1604	1954	2172	2036	2089	2049	2018	2158	2315	2448

Source: ***Mean and median income by household type ...

In 2015, the equivalent net median income in Romania was more than seven times lower (in euro) than the EU28 mean.

Effect of the measures of austerity taken by the Government of Romania in 2010

By the 25% cut of the public wages and by the lower social protection of the categories of population with economic and social vulnerability, the purchasing power of the Romanians decreased by more than 9%, from March 2010 to March 2011. During this interval, increases of the real wage were only in the tobacco industry, in oil processing and in the video and TV production. The national average net wage decreased by 16 lei in March 2011, compared to March 2010, from 1,493 to 1,477 lei (INS, 2011). Despite the rather low level of the income for most of the Romanian population, when the incomes decrease in the EU member countries, these decreases are stronger in Romania. For instance, in 2012, when the mean European incomes decreased by 0.9%, compared to 2011, in Romania the decrease was 4.3% in 2011, compared to 2010, that is, even before the European trend. Such trends contributed to the long-term maintenance of 5% or higher gap between Romanian and European mean poverty rate.

The incomes of the population were quite different according to the residential profile

In 2015, the average income in the urban households were 31.5% higher than those of the rural households. These incomes came in a proportion of 65.6% from wages, 22.5% from social services and 6.5% incomes in kind. In the rural, the main source of incomes was the agricultural production – 27.5% (the bulk of it, 20.4% of the total incomes – being the value of self-consumption). The monetary incomes from agriculture represented just 7% of the rural households' income. The balance came from wages (38.5%) and social services (26.4%) (Pisica et al., 2016, p. 36-37)

Inequalities in population's income

Romania has one of the strongest polarizations of incomes within the EU. As known, where the polarization of incomes is strong, the national poverty rates remain high on the long term.

Table 18. Evolution of incomes inequality in Romania and in other EU 28 countries

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
EU 28	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	4.9	5.0	5.0	5.0
EU 27	...	...	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.9	4.9	5.0	4.9	5.0
Bulgaria	...	...	...	5.1	7.0	6.5	5.9	5.9	6.5	6.1	6.6
Czech R.	...	...	3.7	3.5	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.4
Poland	...	...	6.6	5.6	5.3	5.1	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.9	4.9
Romania	4.6	4.8	4.9	5.3	7.8	7.0	6.7	6.0	6.2	6.3	6.6
Germany	...	...	...	4.1	4.9	4.8	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.6
Hungary	3.3	...	4.0	5.5	3.7	3.6	3.5	3.4	3.9	4.0	4.2

Source: *** 2015, *Inequality of income distribution, Eurostat*

In 2015, there was a gap of $\frac{1}{4.2}$ between the average incomes per decile (1/3.8 in 2014). The ratio between the average incomes of the people from the households from the first and last decile were 1/8 in 2015 (1/7.6 in 2014). The households from the first decile had, in 2015, 4.76% of the total incomes, while those from the last decile, 19.83%. The first three deciles had 17.45% of the total incomes. Therefore, the population from decile 10 (7.61% of the total population) had higher incomes than the population from the first three deciles (36.21% of the total population) (Pisică et al., 2016, p. 36-37).

Table 19. The Gini coefficient in Romania, compared with the European average

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU average	...	...	...	30.5	30.8	30.5	30.5	30.9	31.0	...
Romania	38.3	35.9	34.5	33.5	33.5	34.0	34.6	35.0	37.4	34.7 ^p

Source: *** Gini coefficient of equalised disposable income - EU-SILC survey, ... Note: ... data not available: *p* - provisional data

Compared to other European countries such as Hungary, Poland, Germany (except Bulgaria), in Romania, the incomes of the population were (particularly in 2006-2010), much more polarized. According to Eurostat, for years in a row, the inequality of incomes increased in Romania, from 33.5% to 37.4%, which puts Romania, next to Bulgaria and the Baltic states, among the poorest countries, and with the highest inequalities, in Europe.

Despite the occasional raise of wages or pensions, and of the social protection interventions, on the background of the regulations addressing the business environment, Romania supported some economic policies that were singular in Europe (for instance, maximization of enterprise profits above the statistical level, to the detriment of maintaining at low levels the incomes of the population, not to mention the irresponsible management of the natural resources of the country, massively sold over the past 29 years to foreign citizens or institutions). Therefore, in an economy which seems to have good results compared to the recent dynamics of the European countries, the phenomenon of poverty deepened, being persistent and expanding on the long term. The average standard of living of the population remained much lower, not just compared to the Western Europe, but also with the Central and East-European countries, even during the periods of highest economic growth.

Inefficiency of the social protection in Romania

The main instrument for the accomplishment of the social solidarity in Europe is the social protection. In 2006, the EU member countries were using about 27% of EU GDP for social protection. Social protection usually decreases the average poverty by 38%. In Romania, the proportion of social expenditure within the total public

expenditure was 37.3% in 2008, which put Romania on the penultimate position in the EU, before Latvia (32.5 %).

In 2008, the European average social expenditure was 56.2 % of the public expenditure.

Table 20. Poverty rate after social transfers according to the criterion of the most frequent occupational status, in 2015 (%)

	Total population	Employed population	Unemployed population	Unemployed people	Pensioners	Other inactive persons
EU 28 average	16.3	9.5	23.8	47.5	13.2	29.0
Bulgaria	21.5	7.7	35.0	53.3	30.0	29.1
Czech R.	8.6	4.0	14.3	48.7	7.4	14.0
Estonia	22.0	10.0	39.1	54.8	40.1	33.6
Latvia	22.2	9.2	37.9	55.0	36.7	31.9
Lithuania	20.7	9.9	33.6	62.3	27.6	30.1
Hungary	13.1	9.3	17.0	54.4	5.0	24.5
Poland	16.4	11.2	22.2	46.7	11.1	28.1
Romania	22.4	18.8	26.4	55.5	15.8	42.1

Source: ***At-risk-of-poverty rate after social transfers by ..., Eurostat, 2017

Of the old EU15 member states, the United Kingdom had the lowest proportion of social expenditure within the total public expenditure – 50%, while the highest proportion was in Germany – 63.4% (Zamfir (coord.), 2011).

Depending on the function ascribed to the social protection, the reduction of poverty varied from country to country, ranging from less than 10% (Romania) and 60 %.

The National Strategy for social inclusion and reduction of poverty for the period 2015-2020 (Government of Romania), acknowledges the following categories of people as exposed to the risk of poverty or social exclusions: the people at risk of poverty after social transfers, the people with severe material deprivation and the people from households with low intensity of work. Other former socialist states allocated much more to the social sector than Romania: Bulgaria – 41 %, Slovakia – 45.8 %, Hungary – 46.5 %. In Romania, the social protection expenditure gained, after 1990, negative connotation, being considered, in corpore, a kind of social assistance.

Severe material deprivation

In 2007, for some 42 European residents (17 % of EU population), the material conditions of living were severely affected by the lack of staples. The proportions of the affected population were different in different EU areas: less than 1 in 10 people in states such as the Northern states, the Netherlands and Luxemburg, a third of the population in countries such as Hungary and Poland, half of the population in Romania and

Latvia, and almost three quarters of the population in Bulgaria. In 2007, the level of deprivation was comparable in Romania with that from Bulgaria, although the latter had a better situation than Romania at some indicators.

Table 21. Poor population in EU countries, in 2007 (%)

Country	Lacking				Capacity		
	Phone	Colour TV	Washing machine	Car	Of paying the instalment (rent) for the dwelling	Of heating in winter	To cope with unexpected expenditures
EU-27	6	2	7	22	7	21	57
Romania	43	9	55	75	0	44	69
Bulgaria	39	20	55	67	5	17	96
Lithuania	10	5	19	47	4	42	89
Hungary	10	2	8	42	10	24	88
Czech R.	6	3	2	43	14	18	82
Poland	6	2	2	33	2	39	81
Slovakia	6	3	4	48	13	14	76
Spain	1	0	1	10	4	15	49

Source: *** *Combating poverty and social exclusion, A statistical portrait of the EU, Eurostat, 2010*

Note: Eurostat survey in Romania did not identify, among the poor population, families with housing loans (the proof of incomes above the average national wage, is a condition for housing bank loans). A similar explanation goes for the tenants.

Romania was on the penultimate position in EU in terms of the proportion of people suffering of severe material deprivation in 2015, with 28.7%, quite far from the EU average of 11.5%.

Table 22. Young and old poors' weight in Romania against EU average

	Group	EU average	Romania	Rank in UE
Poverty	0-17	28%	52,2%	27
Privations	0-17	13,5%	34,4%	26
Poverty	+65	21,7%	35,7%	25
Privations	+65	9,5%	27,6%	26

Source: Schraad-Tischler, Schiller, 2016

The worst situation was that of the young people at risk of poverty and social exclusion. More than half of the young people below the age of 18 were in this situation.

People living in households with very low work intensity. In EU 28, in 2015, about 10.5% of the population aged 0-59 was living in households with very low work intensity, the highest proportions being in Greece (16.8%) and Spain (14.9%), and the lowest, in Sweden (5.8%) and Luxemburg (5.7%)(*** *Proportion of population aged less..., Eurostat, 2017*).

Work intensity is evaluated by the ratio of the number of months in which the household members of active age (18-59, who are not students, 18-24), worked in the year of the reference incomes, to the total number of months in which, theoretically, the members of the particular household could have worked. The people living in households with very low work intensity, are those whose adults worked 20% or less than of the potential working time, in the preceding months.

Source: *** *Proportion of population aged less..., Eurostat, 2017*.

Table 23. Proportion of the population under 60 living in households with very low working intensity, by type of household, in some EU countries, in 2015 (%)

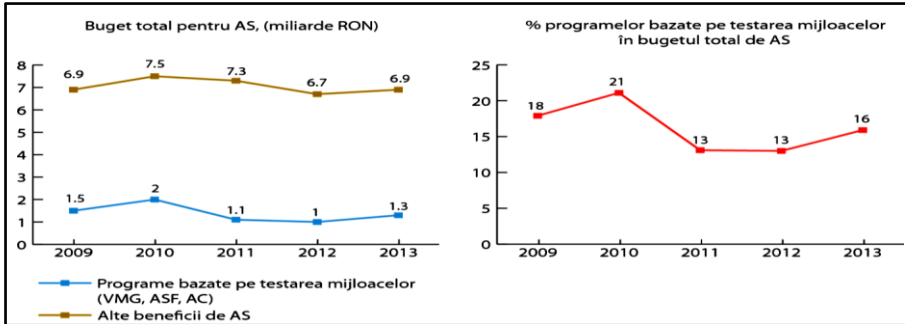
	Single people	Single people with depending children	Two adult people with one depending child	Two adult people with three or more depending children	Two or more adult people without depending children
EU 28*	23.5	27.1	5.4	8.3	12.0
Bulgaria	17.7	23.4	4.3	38.5	10.5
Czech R.	18.7	26.2	3.3	13.1	6.5
Germany	25.1	21.5	4.4	4.8	9.1
Estonia	17.2	13.6	2.9	8.1	7.8
Greece	27.9	27.3	9.8	10.8	24.3
Spain	24.1	24.8	9.5	13.2	20.0
Italy	15.4	19.5	7.3	9.7	17.8
Latvia	16.6	15.2	5.9	5.9	9.6
Lithuania	28.9	24.3	4.4	4.0	10.0
Hungary	22.4	28.3	3.5	10.3	8.7
Poland	24.1	24.3	2.7	6.7	11.0
Romania	21.3	16.5	3.2	13.8	9.6

Source: *** *Proportion of population aged less than 60 living in households..., Eurostat, 2017*

In 2015, within EU 28, the households most affected by low working intensity were those consisting of single people with depending children (27.1%), and those of single people (23.5%).

Social work always intervened extremely residually to alleviate the phenomenon of poverty in Romania. In 2011, the social work budget for programs based on the evaluation of the means of living, decreased very much compared to the budget for the general, categorical programs, and the situation did not improve in the following years either.

Chart 9. Total budget for social work and percentage allocated for the programs based on the evaluation of the means of living



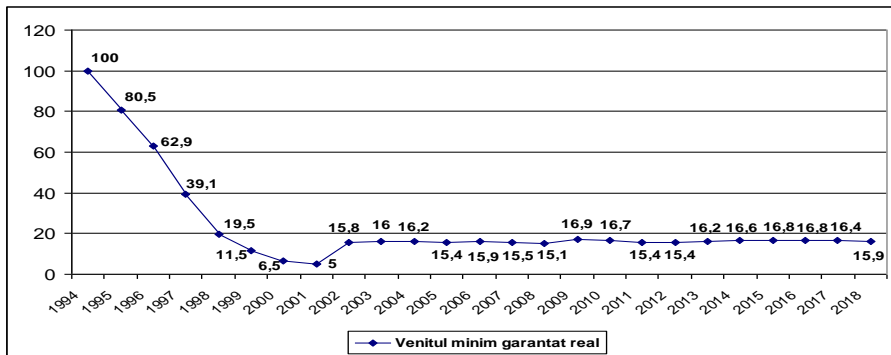
Source: National Strategy for Social Inclusion and Poverty Alleviation in 2015-2020, Government of Romania, calculations done by the World Bank, using administrative data for the minimal guaranteed income, allocation for family support, home heating aid, state allocation for the children, indemnity and stimulant for child rearing, school grants and indemnities for the people with disabilities.

Note: Budget expressed in nominal prices.

In 2014, it represented just 17% of the total budget allocated for social work. When the minimal guaranteed income program (VMG) was introduced in 1994, the budget allocated for the testing of the means of living increased from 1.2 billion lei in 1994 to 2.2 billion lei in 2016 and then to 2.5 billion lei in 2017, and it will be maintained at this level, in real terms.

After 1995, however, the real value of VMG became almost insignificant economically (decreasing, in real terms, to 16.9% of the 1994 value) (Chart 10).

Chart 10. Evolution of the real minimal guaranteed income, from establishment, in 1994, until 2018



Source: Absolute values of the minimal guaranteed income (VMG) according to Law 28/1994, Law 67/1995 and Law 416/2001 of the minimal guaranteed income. Calculation of indices and chart, Adina Mihăilescu.

The standard of living of the population from Romania still is, after 29 years of economic transformations, one of the most critical domains of the quality of life. The deliberate, long-term maintenance of a very low level of incomes for most of the population is the key factor of this situation. Therefore, the capacity of the population to pay in due time the current expenditures (home maintenance, dwelling utilities, instalments, etc.) was and still is rather low, speaking itself of the economic precariousness of many Romanian households.

Table 24. Situation of the households in Romania which could not pay in time the current payments, in 2015 (%)

Household size	Households that paid all current expenditures	Households that could not pay in due time some expenditures	of which:			
			Home maintenance (water, gas, heating, etc.)	Electric power, radio subscription	Phone subscription	Loan instalments (other than loan to buy a house)
TOTAL	67.8	67.8	32.2	53.2	54.6	34.1
1 person	67.3	67.3	32.7	55.5	59.7	29.8
2 persons	69.9	69.9	30.1	55.9	50.7	35.3
3 persons	70.5	70.5	29.5	51.9	49.9	32.8
4 persons	67.2	67.2	32.8	52.2	48.8	35.0
5 persons	63.4	63.4	36.6	35.2	56.5	38.6
6+ persons	57.3	57.3	42.7	62.1	71.2	44.6

Source: Iagăr Elena Mihaela (ed. coord.), 2015, *Conditions of living ...*, INS, Bucharest.

In 2015, about a third of the households (32.2%) repeatedly had outstanding bills because of the improper financial situation (Iagăr, 2015). The most frequent outstanding bills were those for electric power, radio subscription (54.6% of the households with outstanding bills), home utilities (53.2%) and phone subscription (34.1%). The households with unemployed members usually have the most difficult economic situation, with 49.3% of such households having outstanding bills. This phenomenon was more frequent in the families with children, particularly in the single parent families (48.8%), but also in the families with three or more children (46.0%) (Iagăr, 2015).

Because of the long-term precariousness of incomes of most of the population, in 2015 rather few households (just 9%) took bank loans to solve issues such buying a car or electronic appliances in instalments (43.6%) or house renovation (41.6%). The loans for other purposes are fewer: (4.9%) for healthcare, (4.2%) for some investments, (3.4%) for children education. The urban households took loans more frequently (11.9%) than the rural ones (5.4%), and the households led by men (10.4%) compared to those led by women (5.8%) (Iagăr, 2015).

Nevertheless, after 2000, the poverty trend started to decrease in Romania, irrespective of the employed methods of evaluation

Therefore, after 2010-2011, the general interest to evaluate the absolute poverty, the severe/extreme poverty and the food poverty decreased strongly in Europe, and in Romania, and another indicator, closer to the relative poverty, was monitored, the risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Conclusions

The strong depression of extreme and severe poverty. The European Union was, and is, a privileged space, from the global perspective on the phenomenon of poverty. However, under the expression of relative poverty, the phenomenon of poverty still exists in all EU 28 member states. The groups with the highest poverty risk in the EU member states were: farmers and other categories of rural people, the unemployed, the self-employed in non-agricultural sectors, the people with little education (particularly those who graduated the middle school, at most), the households with five or more members, the households with 2-3 or more children, much of the Roma population. Monetary poverty was and still is the most frequent form of poverty in the EU, being perceived especially as a problem of income distribution. The European poverty is not so much sensitive to the general improvement of the incomes, as it is to a more equitable distribution of the incomes, by decreasing the gap between the rich and the poor (Eurostat, 2014, Europe 2020 indicators). Income distribution inequality within the EU member states was rather stable throughout the past decade, particularly in 2008-2014. The average Gini coefficient stabilised at 30.5, the median incomes of the richest 20% Europeans, being 5 times higher than those of the poorest 20% Europeans, although there are countries where income polarization exceeds the value of 6 (7.1 in Romania).

The former socialist countries who accessed the EU in 1990-2017, also reported a strong depression of the poverty, although with great differences from one another. The main factors which cause poverty, in the former socialist countries, Romania included, materialised on the background of accumulation of development gaps in the previous periods and of the changes caused by the transition to market economy, essentially through the level of education (conditions occupation) and through occupation (conditions the level of incomes).

Rate of poverty decrease/increase. In 2007-2014, there was an increasing trend of the income median throughout European Union.

Table 25. Rate of poverty decrease function of the factor of median income multiplication in some European countries, in 2007 and 2014 (PPS)

	Factor of median income multiplication	Available incomes /person, 2007		Available incomes /person, 2014	
		Median	Poverty threshold	Median	Poverty threshold
Greece	0.8	11 455	6 873	8 610	5 166
Portugal	1.1	8 915	5 349	10 125	6 075
Czech R.	1.3	8 841	5 305	11 091	6 654
Estonia	1.4	6 492	3 895	9 241	5 545
Hungary	1.2	6 490	3 894	7 645	4 587
Lithuania	1.3	5 714	3 428	7 595	4 557
Poland	1.6	5 609	3 365	9 560	5 736
Slovakia	1.7	5 608	3 365	9 806	5 883
Latvia	1.3	5 587	3 352	7 320	4 392
Bulgaria	2.0	3 299	1 979	6 754	4 052
Romania	1.4	2 877	1 726	4 065	2 439

Source: Factor of median income multiplication calculated by Stanciu Mariana, using data from *din: *** Population and social conditions, Living conditions and welfare, Eurostat, 2016* Note: Median – median value of a VD/P (the median of an increasing or decreasing string of variables is that value which divides the number of terms in half); Poverty threshold (60% of the median VD/P)

The factor of median income multiplication shows rate of poverty decreasing (when it is higher than the unit)/increasing (when it is smaller than the unit). Table 30 shows that Bulgaria had the highest rate of poverty decrease (the income per person doubled), followed by Slovakia and Poland. Romania was somewhere in the middle, if we consider the lower performance of Portugal of Hungary.

The poverty rate evolution in Romania shows the decline of population welfare in 1990-2000, after which the economic situation started to improve. A basic cause of the persistent high risk of poverty and social exclusion in Romania was the long-term preservation of an extremely low level of population income due to the regulations monitoring most sources of income. Romania perpetuated, for more than three decades, a deficient system of work payment, to the advantage of the profit cashed by the entrepreneurs, foreign ones most times, who transfer the profits to their mother country.

The relative poverty is a problem in Romania too, even though our country remained the poorest in EU 28. The relative poverty can, and must be reduced, even though there will always be people with lower income than other people. However, the absolute poverty in Romania, being related to a fixed level which determines the cost of a minimal basket of goods and services meeting the necessities of a person or family in Romania, must be kept permanently under observation by the policy makers, in order to be eradicated. In 2013, in real terms, about 4.3% of the Romanian population still lived in absolute poverty.

From the complex of demographic factors, occupational factors, income factors, expenditure factors, dwelling factors, patrimony and property factors, educational factors, health factors, social networks factors and community factors, the occupational

factors and the educational factors are the strongest determinants of the poverty phenomenon.

The households of unemployed and those of agricultural workers, irrespectively whether urban or rural, have comparable consumptions of goods and services. Therefore, at least from the perspective of consumption, keeping half of the population occupied in agriculture is equivalent with keeping half of the population unemployed, without considering the urban unemployment rate. The poverty risk runs both from the rural-urban differences by categories of occupations, and from the fact that the occupations with higher poverty risk are overrepresented in the rural. (Paraschiv, 2008).

Social protection had very low performances throughout 1990-2018 interval. However, the benefits it provided were indispensable for the poor households and sustained the subsistence consumption. The social transfers, no matter how small the only income in some households were, becoming thus vital, particularly in the rural.

The employees and the pensioners had lower poverty risk than the other social categories. Some studies (CEROPE, 2004) show that, while unemployment (including the hidden and the long-term one) generate poverty particularly in the urban, under-occupation and the high proportion of people deterred to seek employment, are more frequent in the rural.

The index of social justice (3.99) in 2017 puts Romania on the penultimate position among the 28 EU member states, in terms of social inclusion.

Table 26. Index of social justice in EU 28 in 2017

Nr. crt.	Country	Index of social justice
1.	Denmark	7.39
...	EU 28 average	5.85
26.	Bulgaria	4.19
27.	Romania	3.99
28.	Greece	3.70

Source: Schraad-Tischer Daniel & Christof Schiller. Social Justice in the EU - Index Report 2017

Romania is before Greece only, where poverty expanded, being outranked by all the other European countries. The value of 3.99 for Romania resulted from the very low performance in poverty prevention, from the poor health state on the population and from the values, closer to the European average, for education, access to the labour market, social cohesion, non-discrimination and intergenerational equity (Schraad-Tischler. Schiller. 2017). The most affected categories were the children and the young people. At this chapter, Romania ranks 28, within the EU 28 member countries, with an index of 3.69.a

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