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Romania, Poverty in rural areas

**Poor Infrastructure in Rural Romania**

If you visit Romania and travel through its urban and rural areas, you might think it is two completely different countries. Rural parts of Romania have the highest rates of poverty, a lack of infrastructure (i.e., roads and highway systems), and it is described to be stuck in the past. Urban parts of Romania have a thriving economy, and most of the workforce, and it is seen as a modern country. Romania is in stage five of the Demographic Transition Model, but despite that, poverty is still a prominent problem due to its poor infrastructure. Poverty in rural areas can be decreased by changing the agricultural practice in Romanian villages from subsistence to commercial agriculture which can happen from improved infrastructure.

Romania’s main food security issue is poverty. Many factors lead to poverty in Romania, but the biggest one is living in rural areas. Romania has a population of 18,326,327. Out of Romania’s population, 54.7% of them live in urban areas and 45.3% live in rural areas (“Romania”*).* People born in rural areas are three times more likely to struggle with poverty than in urban areas (Engels). Poverty is more prominent in rural areas due to the practice of traditional culture because of its lack of technology and education. Urban areas have started moving away from their traditional culture in favor of modernization. Urban Romanians surround themselves with Western culture and participate in European beliefs over traditional Romanian beliefs (Evanson). Traditional culture leads to poverty because women are less likely to gain an education and work so there is less money being made and because their traditional agricultural practices are less advanced. Due to the increase in modernization, urban areas have improved. However, because of the regional separation between rural and urban areas, rural areas are being left behind.

Romania is known for its traditional culture, which impacts the typical lifestyle of Romanian families. There are about four people in the average family due to the total fertility rate being 1.63 children per woman (“Romania”). Religion is very important in Romania and 85.3% of Romanians are Romanian Orthodox which encourages traditional gender roles like women taking care of the house and children while the men work and provide money (“Romania”). In rural areas, the most common job for parents to work in is agriculture and they mostly live off subsistence agriculture (Constanta). In urban areas, parents tend to work in industry or service sectors due to more job opportunities. In rural areas, 7% fewer kids are attending high school than in urban areas because of the far distance between schools and houses, and parents having no way to get their children to school. (Besliu).

Although traditional culture is still prominent across the country, poverty is higher in rural areas because people in urban areas are starting to break traditional gender roles and advance their technology, while folk culture still runs deep in rural Romania. In urban areas, 68% of women are choosing to get secondary education compared to only 42% of women in rural areas, so there are less educated people to work in rural schools and hospitals (“World”). 57.4% of women are employed in urban areas (“Labour”). 67.3% of women in rural areas are involved in agricultural jobs, however, they are not recognized due to ‘invisible labor,’ which means because they are women, they are seen as stay at home mothers instead of workers (“Urban-rural Europe – women”). 13.5% of children ranging from 7-14 years old were not enrolled in school in rural areas, compared to only 3.9% in urban areas, due to parents not being able to afford to send their kids to school or kids having to stay home to help with chores (Besliu). On small rural farms, Romanians still use horses and carts to transfer supplies (Williams). In urban areas, markets have started implementing a sustainable project to build greenhouses inside the markets with UV lights and a hydroponic system to make food grow faster (Kaufland). People in urban areas have easier access to healthcare with there being 488 hospitals in urban areas whereas there are only 55 in rural areas (“Analysis”).

Romania’s population is declining over time due to urbanization. People in rural areas tend to move to urban areas for better infrastructure, including better education and job opportunities. In 2020, 77,825 people migrated from a rural village to an urban city (“Number”). People emigrating out of Romania and to another country is also a challenge that impacts Romania. Working-aged people choose to immigrate to another country because of their jobs. 2.65 million working-age Romanians have emigrated out of Romania, which is 20.6% of the working population (“Romania Systematic”). Working Romanians who emigrate to other countries are usually skilled workers, so as they move away, there is a shortage of educated workers in Romania’s labor market. As of 2018, 26.6% of people with a higher education have emigrated out of Romania to pursue a better job or education (Evanson).

Many things impact the food security issue in Romania, including traditional culture and migration, but the main problem is living in rural areas. The reason poverty is such a big issue in rural areas is because of its poor infrastructure. The Romanian government has not invested enough money in the development of rural areas. The government has been spending most of its funds on things that aren’t as prominent as the problems poverty in rural areas originates from. Due to this, people in rural areas tend to go to urban areas to get the job, medical care, or education that they need. However, the lack of roads in rural areas and transportation systems connecting rural areas to urban areas causes very few rural Romanians to have the opportunity to get better resources. The poor infrastructure impacts rural Romanians because of its poor labor force, lack of medical facilities, and deficient education which impacts poverty.

The workforce in Romania is one part of the infrastructure that leads to poverty. The unemployment rate across the country is 5.7% (“Romania Unemployment Rate”). In urban areas, 2.5% of the population is unemployed (“Romania Unemployment Rate: Urban”). In rural areas, 8.8% of the population is unemployed (“Romania Unemployment Rate: Rural”). Why is the percentage of unemployed higher in rural areas than in urban areas? It’s because there’s limited job opportunities in rural areas. When it comes to jobs in Romania, the rural population either works in agriculture or is unemployed. Romania has one of the highest agricultural workers in EU countries with about 23% or one out of every 4 people (Melenciuc). Most rural Romanians live off subsistence agriculture where all the food they produce goes to their family (De Rosa and Soo Kim). There are very few job opportunities in rural Romania, but non-agricultural workers like doctors or teachers do not make good money. The average monthly salary in urban areas is between 8,000 to 10,000 RON versus in rural areas where it can range between 3,000 and 6,500 RON (Farré).

Another way the infrastructure impacts poverty in rural Romania is its healthcare. There is a lack of doctors in rural areas because the doctors are underpaid and do not have enough adequate resources to provide proper healthcare in rural areas (Degner). Rural Romanians often struggle to find the transportation necessary to get to nearby healthcare centers because there are so few hospitals in rural areas. Romanians in urban areas do not have to worry about not living near a medical center because most medical buildings are in urban areas. 90.9% of the hospital establishments are in urban areas, and most medical staff are in these areas (“Analysis”). The Romanian government underfunds the healthcare system, and most doctors are emigrating out of Romania for better job opportunities. This is affecting rural areas the most because the lack of doctors, funding, and healthcare in rural areas is causing these people to get sick more often and not have the resources to cure these sicknesses. “Only 9% of physicians work in rural areas compared to 91% that work in urban areas” (Liliana Dumitrache).

The final thing that causes poverty in rural Romania is the underdeveloped education system. Romania had to decrease the funding for rural area’s education system due to an economic problem and because of that, 400,000 children are not attending school (Degner). Most teachers are not licensed to teach (Besliu). In urban areas, 40% of people have tertiary education compared to rural areas where about 5% of people have that education (Urban-rural Europe - education and training ). A lot of families in rural areas, especially people of Romani descent, cannot afford to send their children to school. The schools usually lack access to healthcare, running water, and heating. Most kids cannot afford resources for school, and the materials that are provided for them by the school are broken. The distance from a child’s house to the school is so far that most parents choose to keep their children home since they do not have the resources necessary to provide transportation to schools (Besliu). There is a lack of teachers in rural Romania due to low salaries and unqualified education to teach.

Ending rural poverty can only happen if Romania improves its infrastructure. The Romanian government is already taking measures to change the infrastructure across the country; however, they are mostly investing their money into creating more transportation routes in urban areas instead of providing resources to rural areas. The solution to decreasing poverty in rural areas is by changing agricultural practices from subsistence agriculture to commercial agriculture and including rural farmers in the urban markets. They can achieve that by creating transportation systems that connect rural villages to urban cities to end the spatial gap between the two areas.

Switching to commercial agriculture is the best solution because it is a huge business that will give money to rural farmers, open an abundance of job opportunities for the unemployed population, and improve rural development. The workforce is one of the biggest reasons rural Romania is so underdeveloped because most of the population is unemployed or they work in agriculture, but they do not make enough profit due to using subsistence agriculture. People in urban Romania buy their food from markets and food sold in markets is imported from outside countries, not farmers in rural areas. If the markets start buying food from farmers instead of getting imports, rural farmers can start making money. Commercial agriculture will also create jobs for the unemployed rural population because the farmers will need to hire more workers to help plant, care for, and harvest crops on the farm.

The government would need to step up and play a big role in implementing this change in agricultural practice. They can do this by creating government policies to fund urban markets so they can sell rural farmers crops, award Romanian citizens with money who buy products from rural farmers and provide money to rural farmers so they can make a profit. The people who own farms in rural areas and the people who own markets in urban areas would also need to make plans to work together and enforce this business change.

For this solution to succeed, the government would need to make many changes to its infrastructure. More transportation routes would need to be created for quicker access between urban and rural areas. Transportation is a big cause of many problems in rural Romania. One of the main reasons kids do not go to school or that there are so many sick people in rural areas is because there is not adequate transportation from a person’s home to the buildings they need to go to. The EU has provided 17 billion Euros as a budget for the Romanian government to invest in improving its infrastructure (“How”). The government has already used this money to build multiple railways throughout Romania. Since urban and rural areas are so separated both in their development and spatial relationship, building transportation systems to connect the two areas would allow easier business and trade of resources between the areas. If roads or other transportation systems are built, that will provide more jobs to unemployed rural Romanians because they can drive the trucks with resources from rural areas to urban areas.

There would also need to be many changes made to the agricultural yield. The CAP Strategic Plan is an organization that is trying to change the agricultural sector in EU countries. It recently issued a proposal to improve Romania’s economic development in rural areas. 60.7% of Romania’s land is used for agriculture (“Romania”). However, 90% of the farms are less than 5 hectares (“Romania – Cap”). Since most rural farms are only used for subsistence agriculture, they do not need big farms. However, if they want to increase production to provide enough food for everyone in urban areas daily, the land will need to be larger to make enough food to provide for the entire country. The population in rural areas is more dispersed than in urban areas, so instead of using small subsistence farms for their families, farmers should make larger commercial farms so that there is more space to grow enough crops that will sustain the whole country.

Another thing that affects the low agricultural yield is the lack of technology. In rural areas, they transport supplies from one area to another with horses and carriages. The government providing money to improve the technology in rural areas can increase production. The Romanian government is not poor; however, the leaders do not plan out their infrastructure projects well which causes a lot of money to go to waste for things that do not help the economy. With the money received from the EU to fund the CAP Strategic Plan and agricultural development in rural areas, the government can use this money to buy more advanced agricultural technology like farming machines. Another solution would be to invest in fertilizers and pesticides to grow crops faster. Vehicles like commercial trucks and cars would also need to be provided since a lot of people in rural areas do not have access to transportation systems.

There are a lot of downsides to these changes. One disadvantage is that rural areas are very behind when it comes to technology so it would be hard for them to learn how to properly use agricultural machines to increase food production. To solve this, the government could provide classes that help teach rural farmers how to use the technology the correct way. Another disadvantage is that Romania already deals with high amounts of climate change due to power plants. Climate change is causing soil erosion, desertification, and pollution. If the government provides the wrong machines or chemicals to rural areas, the supplies could cause even more environment-related issues. The government would need to provide environmentally safe machines and chemicals to make sure the farmers are preventing worse damage to arable land.

If this solution succeeds, it could cause the rest of rural Romania to improve as well. Rural Romania is underdeveloped because it does not have the money or resources to afford to change the rest of its infrastructure. If rural farmers adopt commercial agriculture and sell their products to urban markets, more people will have to be employed to help the farmers and since the farmers will be making a profit off their crops, workers will finally be paid. They can use this money to advance the rest of their infrastructure.

There are other causes of rural Romania’s underdeveloped infrastructure, like its poor education system and lacking healthcare. Many children do not go to school because they would have to walk there. A lot of people do not get the medical attention they need because they don’t have transportation to hospitals. The roads that will be created and the vehicles provided for the transportation of crops from rural to urban areas will allow the rural population to use these roads to go to their schools, hospitals, or jobs. More people will have jobs because they can provide transportation like a similar program to Uber, school buses, and metro buses. This will increase the number of people who get an education. With more children graduating high school, they can get a college education and will have the resources needed to drive there.

If education in rural areas increases, there will be more educated people to work in rural schools or hospitals to provide rural areas with the resources they need to improve their way of life. People with college degrees can also open businesses in rural areas that could supply more resources to those areas and create more job opportunities for the unemployed. All these advancements could help grow rural Romania’s infrastructure and give the rural population the chance to overcome poverty and have a thriving community. The only disadvantage to this is that the first people who choose to help the rural population will have to use their own money. There’s also a chance they would want to stay in developed urban areas.

If rural Romania changes their agricultural practice from subsistence agriculture to commercial agriculture, it could cause a chain reaction to end poverty throughout rural areas. Commercial agriculture is the best solution because most employed people in rural Romania are farmers, and they can finally make the money they need to grow their business which could create other jobs for the unemployed population. Along with growing the farming business, it would provide the resources needed to improve the rest of the infrastructure, including the education system, technology, and transportation systems. This solution won’t get rid of all poverty in Romania; however, this solution will allow the rural population to develop its economy.

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