



ORIGINAL PAPER

Vulnerability and resilience in marginalized rural communities. Case study: projects for reduction of risk exclusion in Dolj County

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Abstract

In the post revolutionary Romania, the number of socially assisted people sums up a quarter of the demographically declining population. At the beginning of this year, the National Statistics Institute registered 409.869 people benefitting from the minimum granted income, with allocated amounts totalizing almost 16 million lei. The 1st place in the national top is occupied by Dolj County, with more than 12.000 persons of a total population of ca. 690.000 persons. At the level of South-West Oltenia region, the social exclusion risk rate was of 45.3% in 2017, almost 10 percent higher than the national rate of 35.7%, the main indicators according to which they were included in the category of the marginalized groups being education, occupancy and housing. Given that poverty is almost three times more acute in the rural environment than in the urban one and the severe material deprivation rate is more accentuated in the small communities where life conditions are harder, as a consequence of the obvious cleavages (school abandon, subsistence agriculture, few or non-existent workplaces, accentuated migration, low life expectancy, lack of consumer goods etc.). Under these circumstances, there is a strong need for projects aiming at sustaining and developing resilience, the necessity of mapping these groups and communities at a national level being transposed, in 2016, in an atlas of marginalized areas, based on which solutions for diminishing the effects and fighting the causes of poverty were build up, by means of projects dedicated to the human capital. Our article presents the analysis of the conjunction of the rural communities in Dolj County Vârtopeș-Plenița, carried out for the justification of the financial allocation necessary for reducing the rural-urban disparities, increasing life expectancy through the improvement of the housing indicator, stimulating school continuation and the reduction of school abandon, investing in the qualification of those people who have no profession and stimulating occupancy by means of employment or job creation /development of the entrepreneurial segment.

Keywords: *risk; vulnerability; exclusion; marginalized groups; resilience; project management.*

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Introduction

This article intends to make an analysis of the present situation rural marginalization in Romania and of the measures that can be taken not only to prevent its decline, but to create sustainable development. We shall focus the investigation lens on a specific rural community in Dolj County, highlighting its social problems and certain solutions that can be implemented in order to address these problems, on a long term.

One cannot understand the true dimension of marginalization in Romania, without going back several decades on the history track. Communism imprinted Romania, a slowly developing European country, with a very strong delay, compared to other European states' progress in addressing challenging economic, political and social issues. The communist propaganda depicted an idyllic and almost perfect country that made a field like social work useless; there apparently existed no unemployment, no disability, no poverty or social exclusion. Social benefits were applied generally and there apparently were no differences among people, as the Party made sure that people facing chronic social problems remained well hidden.

The revolution in December 1989, despite the feeling of freedom that it fed to the people, shed a terrifying and shocking light on the cruel reality of Romania. Thousands of disabled children were found kept like prisoners in former "care institutions" and the images and testimonies collected by foreign journalists horrified the entire Europe. The state withdrew itself almost entirely from the role it had in supporting family and child care.

The transition to the market economy was hard to bear for millions of citizens that saw their income reduced by a half and their savings made during the communist years become worthless. Tens of thousands of workers were fired and unemployment reached very high peaks during the 90's. The former industrial towns, inhabited predominantly by workers in mines or chemical plants became ghost-towns. Several millions of people migrated abroad, searching for a work-place and a better life. The villages were inhabited mainly by elderly people, left behind by their children that had massively migrated to the city until 1989.

In 2007, Romania finally accessed the European Union. It was a dream come true, but "solving Romania's economic and social problems simply through the European integration also turned out to be a dream. Europe is more complex than it had been supposed. [...] We are starting to understand that part of the problems with which Romania is confronted at present are also due to the confused policy during the process of European integration." (Zamfir, 2017:5) 30 years after the revolution and 13 years after the EU-integration.

Romania has not many reasons to be proud, when it comes to social assistance, social inequities being visible to anyone. Authorities seem to remember the people living on the minimum granted income only before elections, when a package of groceries often "buys" a vote. The insufficient number of social workers are unable to cover all problems to be discovered and addressed. Romania is among the first countries in Europe according to poverty rate and migration. Social assistance is still underfinanced and social policies - though in line with the European ones, on paper - lack proper and timely implementation.

"The most problems of the current Romanian society appear as being related to the life of some rural communities that the previous governments could not solve. Numerous villages, other times vivid and prosperous, became, over time, suppliers of

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under-development, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, demographic decline, through the progressive depopulation of some rural cores - because of the sudden decrease of natality, of the inhabitants' accentuated aging and the youth's exodus towards the cities or migration in other countries.”(Otovescu, C., Otovescu, D., 2019:9).

In this context, social projects for vulnerable groups proved to be a vital solution for the survival of marginalized communities, bringing significant change and hope for the rural population exposed to severe social risks.

Conceptual framework

When it comes to making a reliable analysis of the necessary intervention measures for supporting social development of disadvantaged communities, a few concepts need to be explained, especially because they are related and interdependent. Thus, the appearance of resilience depends on the levels of risk and vulnerability, vulnerability often triggers social exclusion and marginalization. At its turn, social work is more performant when it relies on efficient social projects aiming at addressing critical social problems.

Social work is “an ensemble of institutions, programs, measures, professional activities for the protection of persons, groups, communities with social problems, temporarily being submitted to difficulty, crisis and thus being vulnerable” (Zamfir, Vlăsceanu, 1998: 46). The Romanian law defines its objective as “the development of the individual, group or collective capacities in order to insure social needs, the increase of life quality and the promotion of the social inclusion and cohesion principles” (Romanian Parliament: 2011).

Social vulnerability is often defined in relation with natural or environmental risks, as “[...] the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard”(Wisner, Blaike, Cannon, Davis, 2004:11). But there also exist a multitude of other factors that are able to cause social vulnerability, like: poverty, race or ethnicity, religion, gender, age (e.g. elderly or children), disability, poor health, illiteracy, lack or limited access to information, knowledge or technology; lack or limited access to community services like transportation, power supply, water and sanitation etc.; lack of or limited social capital (Cutter, Boruff, Shirley, 2003: 242-261). The social capital “is a relational good, being placed within the inter-individual space, not in different individuals, despite the fact that the individuals are the ones creating it [...]. Social capital is, thus, a public good.”(Niță, 2009:88).

Some authors point out that a paradigm shift took place during the 90's, at European level, namely from “poverty” to “marginalization” - that relies on the antagonist concepts of *exclusion* and *inclusion*. Marginalization is a broad and multidimensional concept, based on the reports between individual groups within the society as a whole. (Engels, 2006: 109-117).

There is an intrinsic correlation and a proportional report between vulnerability and social exclusion; as it is acknowledged by official documents- all those groups, communities and individuals that are not able to participate in society in equal conditions with their peers, because of poverty and discrimination, are facing the risk of social exclusion.

As for the concept of resilience, borrowed by the specialists in the field of social and behavioural sciences from the field of physics and mechanics, it has become a valuable resource, that provides access to major social action topics, like community

development, cohesion and community building, in general. If psychologists operate with the concept of *individual* or *personal* resilience, sociologists are concerned about *group* or *collective* resilience: „collective resilience regards the capacity of resisting and recovery, revitalisation, rebirth of some groups/communities/societies, after the destabilizing or traumatizing action of certain natural and social factors, radical and explosive changes that concern the life of a human collectivity on the whole.” (Otovescu, C., Otovescu, A., Motoi, G., Otovescu, D., 2015:34). Researchers still have not agreed on an universal definition of resilience, applicable in all fields of interests, but, nevertheless, share a common opinion: it refers to a person, a group or a social system facing chronic adversity or a traumatizing event and proving a good coping ability; another key fact is that resilience is the result of an interaction between the subject and the living environment and can, therefore, be built and supported. Resilience “is a process linking a set of adaptive capacities to a positive trajectory of functioning and adaptation after a disturbance. [...] Community resilience emerges from four primary sets of adaptive capacities: Economic development, Social Capital, Information and Communication and Community Competence” (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, 2008).

If vulnerability is a risk factor for resilience, there is need for a reliable protection factor, at community and society level, that counterbalances the effects of identifiable risks. That is the major role of community development, “first of all operated within the disadvantaged areas or within those sections of population affected by exclusion or by harsh living conditions and submitted to deal with oppression and inequity. [...] Despite the fact that it may be applicable for different population groups, community development usually aims at the level of the communities impacted by poverty, by unprivileged and discriminated individuals.” (Pârvu, Niță, 2020: 57). Community development empowers disadvantaged groups to become united in promoting services for their own interest and to trigger political action to their benefit.

Policies for the prevention and fighting of marginalization and social exclusion in Romania

In the following, we will try to sketch the legislative framework regarding social protection, prevention of marginalization and social exclusion, reminding several of the most relevant legislative acts in the field, as well as other significant strategies and programmes adopted at national level.

- The first *Law of Social Assistance* in Romania (Law no. 292/2011) was promulgated no sooner than 2011 and included provisions regarding the support for persons with difficulties. To be underlined that Romania manages to provide the largest number of social benefits in the EU: 34 - translated in allocations, complementary budgets, pensions and other welfares. The state allocates, annually, almost 10 billion lei, the most part being directed towards mothers and children.
- *Law no. 116/2002 regarding the prevention and fighting of social marginalization* has, as main, objective, “granting the effective access, especially of the youth, to elementary and fundamental rights, such as: the right to a work place, a home, to medical assistance, to education, as well as enforcing measures for the prevention and fighting of social marginalization and mobilizing the responsible institutions in the field”

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(Law no. 116/2002, Art. 2). According to this law, social marginalization is caused by the absence of minimal living conditions.

- *Law no. 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of children's Rights*, the most recent transposition of the *UN Convention on the rights of the child*, is based on the principle of the superior interest of the child and on the principle of ensuring equal chances and non-discrimination for all children.
- *Law no. 448/2006 on the protection and promotion of the rights of disabled persons*
- *The European Disability Strategy 2010-2020* (European Commission, 2010), based on the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2008), targets the following action fields: accessibility, participation, equality, labour force occupation, education, social protection and inclusion in society, health, external action
- *The National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction for the period 2015-2020* (Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly) highlights the objective of the Romanian Government, namely that all citizen benefit from equal opportunities of participation in the society, that they appreciated, that their dignity, rights and differences are respected.
- *The Strategic action plan for the period 2015-2020* (Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly), adopted together with the above-mentioned strategy, establishes a set of specific objectives regarding the development of social services for vulnerable groups.
- *The National Package Against Poverty* was adopted by the Government of Romania in February 2016, including 47 measures for fighting poverty and targeting all age categories, but mainly on children, using functional good-practice models, already tested by non-governmental organizations.

Deficiencies and flaws in the enforcement of social inclusion policies in Romania

In Romania, the post-revolution period and the transition from communism to capitalism changed the structure of the economy and installed an institutional system, inspired by the developed states. Although the new frameworks that defined the economic and political systems were similar, the differences emerged within the social structure, where the system was completely different than the one in the established capitalist countries. (Zamfir, 2011:13).

The same author (Zamfir, 2019) points out the fact that Romania still does not have a *social development agenda* or a "Country Project". In his opinion, the Romanian State represented the interests of his people to a very small extent during the transition period, its functions remained at an unsatisfying level; the unwanted consequence of this behaviour was *social polarization*. If, at the beginning of the 90's, it seemed acceptable that 40% of the population were affected by poverty, it is not so easily understandable why the current national poverty rate is still close to 30%, 30 years after the revolution, no significant progress being made. During this whole period, social services, education, health and social assistance remained underfinanced, at a level far below that of other European countries.

Despite of the significant funds from the budget that the government allocates for financing social inclusion in Romania, the efficiency of these interventions is still low. Moreover, the providers of social economy initiatives tend to concentrate their activities in the more developed areas of Romania, meaning that the poorest localities benefit from a small range of social services, provided mainly by NGOs. Although the legislative framework that allows NGOs to apply for EU-funding in order to elaborate social assistance projects was implemented, this does not include stimulants or specific requirements that they target mainly disadvantaged areas.

Mapping of marginalized rural areas in Romania

In the framework of a project co-financed from the Sectorial Operational Programme for the Development of Human Resources 2007-2013, with the aim of preparing a National Strategy Project and of an Action Plan regarding social inclusion and poverty reduction for the period 2015-2020, a board of authors contracted by the the Human Development Unit of the World Bank drew up an *Atlas of the Marginalized Rural Areas and of the Local Human Development in Romania* (The World Bank, 2013). The Atlas represents the key initiative no. #6 from a package of 9 key initiatives that accompany the Strategy Project and the Action plan.

The Atlas provides a detailed spectrum on the following aspects: which are the marginalized areas in Romania; who lives in these areas; where are these areas located in Romania. It is also intended as “an instrument for targeting certain areas, monitoring and assessing the interventions for poverty reduction and promotion of social inclusion”, the authors pointing out that “a targeting instrument becomes effective only when followed by actions (a response under the form of policies)” (The World Bank, 2016: 8). Given that marginalization is not only defined using the low income criteria, but also considering the human capital, the Atlas can also be used in order to assess different social intervention programmes and projects for addressing risks and vulnerabilities like: school abandon, domestic violence, poor health care, ethnic discrimination etc.

The definition of the *marginalized rural areas* in Romania was based mainly on the data collected, at national level, through the population census in 2011, according to three criteria: human capital, labour force occupancy and housing. It resulted that, at the level of the communes in Romania, 2.244 of the 46.547 census sectors assessed in 2011, inhabited by over 564.000 people, fulfilled the criteria in order to be considered marginalized rural areas.

Characteristics of the marginalized rural areas in Romania

According to the study performed by the World Bank, at national level, 6.2% of the rural population, 5.3% of all households and 5.2% percent of all houses are in marginalized rural areas. The rural areas with the highest poverty rate at national level are organized in 2.861 communes (administrative units) that include 12.373 villages. (The World Bank, 2016:6). The findings concerning the main traits of the marginalized rural areas are included in the table below:

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Table 1: Comparison between marginalized and non-marginalized rural areas in Romania

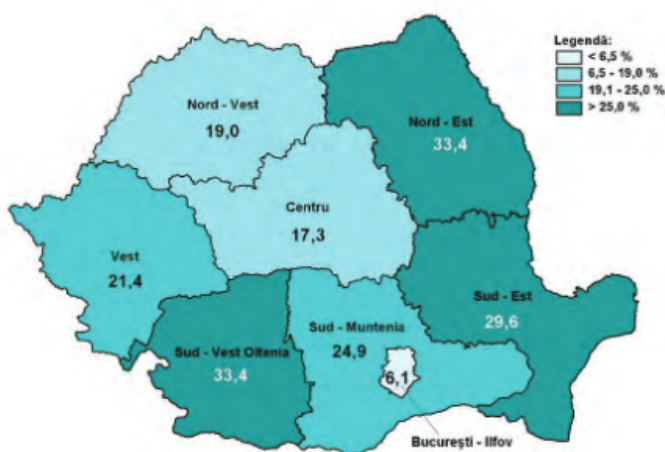
Main characteristics	Marginalized rural areas	Non-marginalized rural areas
Children (0-17 years) in total population	34%	22%
Elderly (over 65 years) in total population	13%	19%
Households with more than 5 members	25%	15%
Families with 3 children	16%	5%
Teenage mothers (13-17 years)	4.6%	1.3%
Adults that graduated from max. 8 classes	80%	45%
Youth (15-19) not employed and not enrolled in any form of education	51%	23%
Adults (20-64) not employed and not enrolled in any form of education or qualification	88% (*95% among roma women)	64%
Roma population in total population	42%	-

Source: The World Bank, 2016: 25-26.

Dimensions of social exclusion in Dolj County

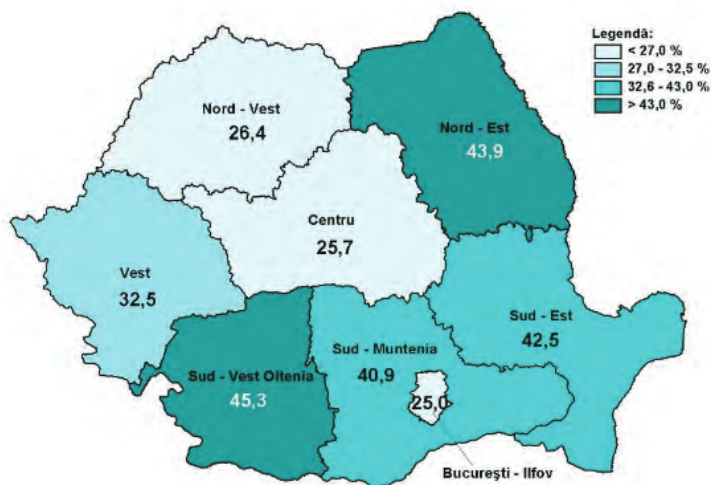
At the level of the year 2018, the Eurostat statistics for EU-27 estimated an at-risk-of-poverty rate of 23.5% for Romania, on the 3rd place in the EU after Serbia and Montenegro, almost 7 % higher than the average European rate of 16.8%. The figures below presents the distribution of the poverty rate and of the share of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2017, according to development regions.

Figure 1: Poverty rate in Romania, according to development regions (2017)



Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2018:15

Figure 2: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion according to development regions (2017)



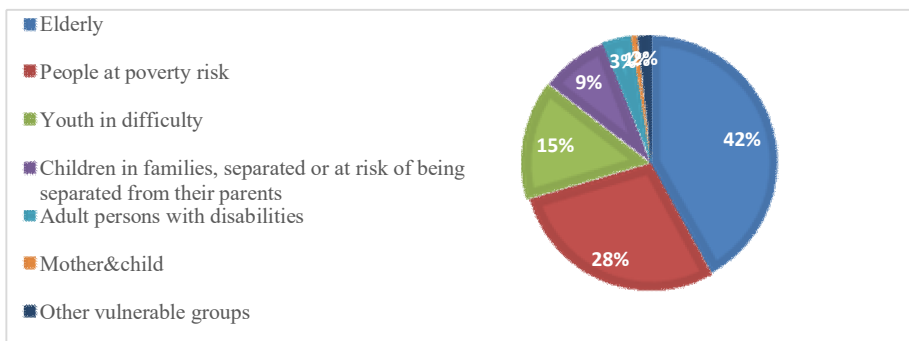
Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2018:38

Statistics concerning South-West Oltenia Region and Dolj County

As it can be noticed in the figures presented above, the South-West Oltenia region has a relative poverty rate of 33.4%, the highest in the country and equal with the North-East region, almost 10% higher than the national average poverty rate. It also has the highest rate of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion (45.3%) in the country.

The most vulnerable population groups identified in the South-West Oltenia region are:

Figure 3: The most vulnerable groups in the South-West Oltenia Region (%)



Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, 2018:20

At the level of Dolj County, the social marginalization statistics reveal a troubling reality. For example, in January 2020, out of the total population of the

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country, of 689.410 persons, 11.168 were beneficiaries of the minimum granted income (a financial support provided for families or persons whose incomes are below the minimum granted income established by law, but also for homeless persons). The number of beneficiaries decreased, compared to the same month of the previous year (12.257), but maintains Dolj County on the first place in the country. (Romanian Government, 2020). According to a study performed during 2016-2018, Dolj County has the following characteristics:

Table 2: Characteristics of Dolj County

County	GDP/inhabitant (Euro)	Employees in total population (%)	Employees in working population (%)	Relative poverty rate (%)	Working poverty rate (%)
DOLJ	6628	17.00	50.64	26.7	21.4

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, 2018: 115

In January 2020, the number of unemployed population in Dolj County was of 18.067 persons, 15.837 of which were unpaid. The unemployment rate at county level was 6.79%, compared to the national unemployment rate of 2.98% (Ministry of Labour, 2020). The statistics for the year 2019 concerning the number of marginalized persons, according to counties, revealed that, in Dolj County, there were 13.439 marginalized persons (of 245.809 at national level) - 1st place in the country, of which: 896 persons without property or use of a home; 756 persons living in inadequate conditions; 6.479 persons with one or more children or being part of a family with several children; 355 elderly persons, without a legal caregiver; 317 disabled persons; 210 persons caring for a disabled person; 246 family members, aged up to 35 years, with children, confronted with marginalization etc. (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, 2019, Annex 3: 2). In 2015, the flow of people from Dolj County that had migrated abroad for work was estimated at more than 6.000 people, being among the first 5 places in the country regarding the migration rate. (National Institute of Statistics, 2016: 7). At the beginning of 2018, according to the statistics of the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection, almost 2.000 children in Dolj County had one or both parents working abroad, thus being deprived of proper parental care.

After the 2011 population census, it resulted that 7.9 percent of the rural areas in Dolj County were marginalized areas; among these, 4.5% are roma communities, 1.2% are communities of mixed ethnicity and 2.4% are non-roma communities (The World Bank, 2016: 273). Out of a total of 104 communes mapped according to their marginalization rate, there are: 10 communes with an average marginalization rate (6.1 - <12%), 14 communes with a marginalization rate above average (12-<24%) and 13 communes with a severe marginalization rate, above 24% (Ibidem: 349-352).

Nevertheless, in 2019, according to Annex 1 of the statistic report of the Ministry of Labour concerning marginalization (summarizing the feedback from the territory regarding the measures adopted at local level for fighting marginalization), 110 out of 111 local councils in Dolj County transmitted that the locality has no marginalized persons - although the list also includes most of the communes recognized as severe marginalized or marginalized above the average, according to the *Atlas* of the World Bank! (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, 2019, Annex 1: 134).

Case study: Analysis of the marginalized rural community Vârtop-Plenița in Dolj County

In 2016, a team of researchers and specialists in the fields of sociology and social work, with a broad experience in the field of specialized studies, performed an analysis of the marginalized rural community Vârtop-Plenița in Dolj County (Niță, Ilie, Diaconu & Buligă, 2016), in order to justify the application for a financial allocation necessary for reducing poverty and social exclusion for the two marginalized communes, through increasing life expectancy through the improvement of the housing indicator, stimulating school continuation and the reduction of school abandon, investing in the qualification of those people who have no profession and stimulating occupancy by means of employment or job creation /development of the entrepreneurial segment.

Both communes are mapped by the *Atlas of Marginalized Rural Areas and of Human Development in Romania* (The World Bank, 2016), in the framework of the agreement for the elaboration of a Project of National Strategy and of an Action Plan regarding social inclusion and poverty reduction (2014-2020).

The sociological study was based on a qualitative research combining several specific methods, such as the structured interview, the focus-group and observation, with the aim of proving the existence of the minimal requirements of the classification of the two rural areas as marginalized communities. Its main objectives were: 1. to identify the population groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion, based on the indicators regarding their occupational status, education level, abilities, housing conditions, access to public utilities and community relations in the communes Vârtop and Plenița; 2. to draw up the necessity analysis and to identify the problems of the marginalized communities; 3. to assess viable solutions and to identify development opportunities for the marginalized areas Vârtop and Plenița (Niță et al., 2016).

In performing the analysis, the researchers used the data provided by the *Atlas of Marginalized Rural Areas in Romania*, as well as statistical data provided by the population census in 2011 and by the reports of the public institutions (communal local councils, Directorate for Statistics of Dolj County, the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection Dolj etc.).

Thus, the main population characteristics of the two rural areas are, as follows:

- Plenița commune: 3.855 inhabitants, of which 257-418 are living in marginalized areas and over 20% roma population in marginalized areas;
- Vârtop commune: 1.658 inhabitants, of which 1-169 persons are living in marginalized areas and under 20% roma population in marginalized areas.

Based on the collected data, the authors of the study drew up a chart of the marginalized area Vârtop – Plenița that is summarized in the table below:

Table 3: Data chart of the marginalized area rural area Vârtop – Plenița

Criteria/ Dimension	Key-indicators
Human capital	Share of persons aged 15 -64 years that graduated from maximum 8 classes (secondary school): 55%→ 65% Vârtop and 45% Plenița
	Share of disabled persons, chronic illnesses or other conditions that limit their daily activities: 2,35%→ 1,7% Vârtop and 3% Plenița
	Share of children and youth (0-17 years) of the total population:31% → 21% Vârtop and 41% Plenița

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Labour force occupancy	Share of the persons aged 16-64 years that are not employed on the formal labour market (employees with a labour contract or officially self-employed, with or without employees - firm manager or administrator, authorized natural person, family association, individual enterprise, freelancer) and are not enrolled in any education form: 81%→ 88% Vârtop and 74% Plenița
Housing	Share of overcrowded homes (< 15,33 m ² per person): 31% →30% Vârtop and 32% Plenița
	Housing uncertainty: share of homes that are not owned as a personal property: 61%→ 80% Vârtop and 42% - Plenița

Source: Niță et al., 2016

The results and conclusions of the analysis of the marginalized rural community Vârtop-Plenița, as well as the solutions proposed by the specialists were structured according to intervention fields; we have summarized them in the table below:

Table 4: Results of the analysis and proposed solutions, according to intervention fields

Intervention field	Problems	Solutions
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school abandon rate: 3.5% → low education level → unemployment → criminality → social marginalization • difficult access to school (long distances, lack of public transport) • simultaneous learning • lack of cooperation between family and school • lack of elementary goods (clothing, learning materials etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • after-school programmes and centres • counselling activities for children and parents • improvement of school infrastructure, better hygiene conditions • free transport • support for poor families
Labour force occupancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of economy diversification • major dependency on subsistence agriculture • major dependency on social benefits • high unemployment rates • lack of work places at local level • lack of skills and qualifications, due to illiteracy or insufficient skills and qualifications • immigration abroad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • training and qualification activities • career counselling activities • entrepreneurial building • identification and implementation of specialized and specific economic activities (added value for the community) • identification of potential employers • subventions for potential employers • financial support for new

		businesses
Social/ medical/ socio- medical services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 54 persons with physical/ mental disabilities not receiving optimal treatment • insufficient parental knowledge about the child's nutrition and health • high rate of children and youth smoking and drinking alcohol • insufficient knowledge about hygiene norms and healthy nutrition • only 1 medical emergency centre and 1 dispensary in the community, lacking specialized staff and materials • poor prevention education • high rate of transmittable diseases • lack of information on family planning and sexual education • children and women victims of domestic abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishment of an Integrated Community Health Centre→ general access to medical services • counselling of citizen about the importance of regular health checks • counselling on family planning • counselling on substance abuse • rehabilitation of medical centres • parental counselling on the child's health • awareness raising campaigns on prevention
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more than 50% of the house owners do not have property documents • the houses are old and severely deteriorated • overcrowded homes • improvised homes • lack of proper furniture • heating on wood or gas stoves • poor hygiene conditions→ poor health • limited access to drinkable water • poor nutrition • only 13.9% of all homes have a bathroom • sewerage connection only in Plenita • 985 out of the total of 3260 homes have water supply 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reparation of minimum 20 severely deteriorated homes • improvement of housing conditions • financial support for poor families

Source: Niță et al., 2016

Based on the results and conclusions of the analysis, the community Vârtoș-Plenița was validated as marginalized, as it simultaneously meets the three necessary

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conditions for validation: it has a low level of human capital; it has a low level of occupation in the labour sector; it has poor housing conditions.

The proposed solutions were forwarded as potential activities within the project for the combatting of social exclusion and marginalization of the investigated community.

Conclusions

Our article made an overview in the framework of the investigation area of the phenomenon of marginalization and social exclusion in Romania, starting with a presentation of the most relevant concepts that play a role in its understanding and exploration. We made a short presentation of the legal and strategic documents on the topic of social protection and the prevention of social exclusion in Romania, pointing out a few of the difficulties encountered in the implementation process of the specific policies and measures. We also presented the key-findings of the *Atlas of Marginalized Rural Areas and of Human Development in Romania* (The World Bank, 2016), one of the most important mapping instruments and data providers in planning appropriate actions, projects and measures for community development in the rural environment. Based on the data provided by the Atlas, but also on other public statistic data, we created an image on the marginalization level of Dolj County and of its rural areas, in comparison with the national marginalization status. Finally, we presented a case study consisting on a sociological analysis that we consider to be relevant and eloquent in assimilating the situation of a marginalized community in Dolj County (mapped in the Atlas and validated through the study) to the situation at national level, given that, as we have already shown, the marginalization indicators and conditions are similar for every concerned community in the country.

This analysis proves that marginalization can be fought by implementing reasonable and adapted initiatives and projects for building resilience in the rural community. It is obvious that risks and vulnerabilities trigger social exclusion, but the implementation of the right community building, social assistance and social protection measure triggers the resilience at the level of the community, by empowering its individuals to claim their rights, by educating them and raising awareness about their and their children's future. The analysis of the marginalized rural community Vârtop-Plenița turned out to be useful and reliable not only for the applicant of the project, but also for understanding and assessing the potential to stimulate and create resilience, human and community development, even at the level of the most marginalized, apparently hopeless rural communities in Romania. Financing is made available through official national and European programmes and it is time both for the competent governmental authorities and for the civil society to take more action, because change is a long process, and the lessons of the past should fuel a more engaged and responsible approach.

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