

## SPECIFIC FEATURES OF SOPHRD PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED IN ROMANIAN RURAL AREAS

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### **Abstract**

*Generally, rural development, as most known concept, is associated with Rural Development Program and its implication. However, in our opinion, the rural development can be stimulated through other types of EU funding as well. Currently, 46% of the Romania's population lives in rural areas and the majority of them are involved in subsistence or semi-subsistence agriculture associated with informal employment or unpaid family work, low productivity and poverty. For the rural areas, the human capital is a very important resource and in order to increase economic growth in these areas it is necessary to invest in the education and the development of the rural population. Development of the rural population can be stimulated through a set of supporting actions which implies changes and full support of the individuals or groups. Therefore, policies and programs designed especially for development of human resources can greatly help on educating and opening new opportunities for the rural population and in this way improving the quality of rural life. Through this paper we aim to analyze the Sectorial Operational Program Human Resources Development (SOP HRD) projects implemented in rural areas and for the rural area population and to highlight the importance of this type of projects for the development of the addressed areas.*

**Key words:** rural development, human capital, SOP HRD, rural areas

### **INTRODUCTION**

In Romania, rural area has substantial growth potential and a vital social role. According to data provided by National Institute for Statistics, rural surface sums up 207,522 km<sup>2</sup>, respectively 87.1% of the country surface and the population of this area, although it recorded a slight decrease in 2011-2016 period, is currently about 9.2 million people (46% of the population) (National Institute of Statistics) [5].

The rural labor force is involved, in a large proportion, in subsistence or semi-subsistence agriculture associated with informal employment or unpaid family work, low productivity and poverty, facing a variety of difficulties related to education, health, social inclusion, basic infrastructure, diversification of employment, emigration etc.

According to recent studies, modernization of the rural space involves a multifunctional development, meaning investments both in agricultural and non-agricultural activities,

which can create jobs and raise the population income and living standards. It is important to educate and encourage the young people to remain or to come back in the local communities, to set up farms or to develop their own businesses. There is a need to ensure a transparent and facile knowledge transfer, provide the necessary means for the access to research and development for the companies acting in rural regions, and to education, professional development and training for the labor force and for the entrepreneurs (Dan, 2016) [1].

The rural areas development requires a change in population behavior and mentality, more involvement of the decision makers both at national and local level to find the best solutions for stimulating the multifunctional development of the rural space (Popescu, 2013) [4].

As presented above, given the fact that complex development policies are promoted for rural areas where agriculture remains the mainstay, it is required the creation and

development of other activities that meet the transposition of the concept recalled. The main focus in the rural communities development is to diversify rural economic and demographic opportunities (Dona, 2010) [2].

In the development process human capital development need to be considered an indispensable component and it should include better education at all levels, generous on-the-job training and appropriation of new technologies and ideas. Acquiring better knowledge and skills through education and training benefits both individuals and the economy as a whole. Individuals benefit in the form of higher earnings and enhanced employment, while the economy benefits in the form of higher productivity which ultimately enhances socio-economic development (Enefiok, 2014) [3].

This type of development can be achieved through a set of supporting actions which stimulates changes and fully supports capable individuals or groups. Therefore, policies and programs designed especially for development of human resources can greatly help on educating and opening new opportunities for the rural population and in this way improving the quality of rural life.

This article aimed to analyze the SOP HRD projects implemented in rural areas in 2015 and for the rural area population from the perspective of the contribution type and value, number of partners, distribution by number of covered areas, targeted group dimensions, project distribution in terms of areas of intervention covered and coordinating structures. The main purpose is to highlight the importance of this type of projects for the development of the addressed areas and for the future, to create new ways to improve the rural human capital development trough EU

funds [6].

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

We have conducted our research based on combining various sources of information, quantitative and qualitative, such as national and international statistical data, reports and analysis made by the Romanian National Institute of Statistics and existing publications on the investigated topic. In the same time, we selected a sample of 112 finalized SOPHRD projects implemented in the rural areas in 2015 and we have made an analysis over them regarding the following indicators: contribution type (minimum, average and maximum value per each type), characteristic of the target group (minimum, average and maximum value) and project distribution by number of partners involved, covered regions, area of intervention and coordinating structures. The analysis was performed in order to highlight and characterize these projects and the impact it have on the region where were implemented. The analyzed data were processed using tables and charts, with the analysis program Microsoft Excel.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As we can see in the table below, for the selected projects, the beneficiary contribution was between 2,139,165.36 and 5,553.45 Ron with an average of 209,862.04 Ron. The public RO contribution was between 2,892,579.66 and 127,753.08 Ron and for 3 projects from the sample the public RO contribution was 0. In terms of public EU contribution, the maximum value was 13,725,136.05 and the minimum value was 780,874.81.

Table 1. Contribution type

Contribution Type	Maximum Value (Ron)	Minimum Value (Ron)	Average Value (Ron)
Beneficiary	2,139,165.36	5,553.45	209,862.04
Public RO	2,892,579.66	0	707,697.54
Public EU	13,725,136.05	780,874.81	4,419,871.02
Public Total	15,970,602.81	908,627.89	5,128,500.41
Total project value	16,296,533.48	961,511.00	5,337,740.88

The highest total value of a project was 16,296,533.48 and the minimum value was 961,511.00 Ron.

Regarding the **project typology**, from the total sample of 112 selected projects, 59.8% were strategic projects and the rest of 40.2% were grants.

In terms of partners number, the majority of the projects had 1, 2 or 3 partners and the maximum partners number was 9, for one single sampled project, as it can be seen in the chart below.

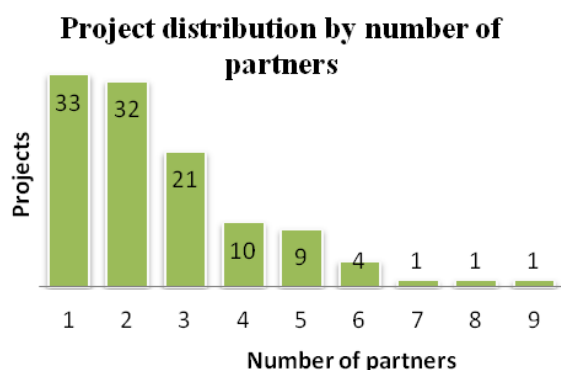


Fig. 1. Project distribution by number of partners involved in the project

### Project distribution by number of covered regions

As we can see in the Fig. 2, the majority of the projects (45%) have only covered rural population from one region, 22% from the selected projects addressed the rural population from 3 regions, 20 % of the projects covered 2 regions and just a 3% of the selected projects addressed the rural population from all the regions.

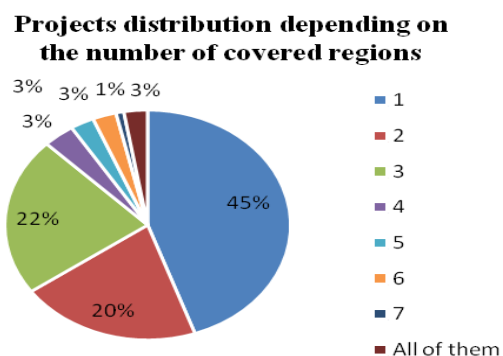


Fig. 2. Project distribution by number of covered regions

If we talk about numbers, the most targeted region was Central region, addressed by 45

projects out of 112, followed by South - Muntenia region with 36 projects out of 112 and by Bucharest-Ilfov region with 30 projects. At the opposite side was found North - West Region, addressed only by 27 projects. The targeted groups for the analyzed projects ranged in size between 24 persons (the minimum value) and 1,876 persons (maximum value).

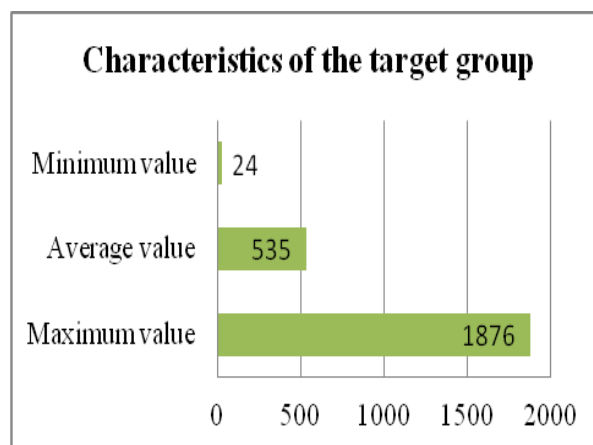


Fig. 3. Characteristics of the target group

Regarding the areas of intervention for which the selected projects were submitted, the most important (in terms of projects submitted) were: **5.2. Promoting long-term sustainability of rural areas in terms of human resources development and employment** with 88% followed by **6.1 Social economy development** with 5%. Areas like 6.2, 1.1, 1.3, 5.1 and 5.3 were also involved but to a lesser extent.

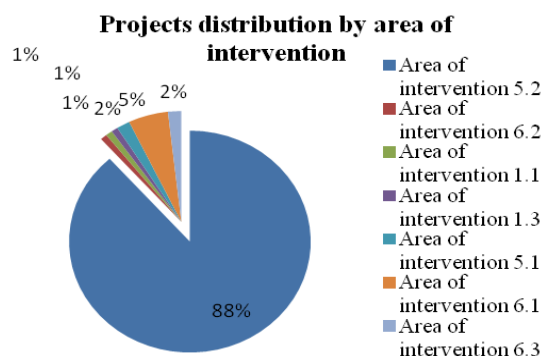


Fig. 4. Projects distribution by the area of intervention

In terms of coordinating structures, majority of 31 sampled projects were coordinated by the OIR NE, 17 by the OIR CENTRU and the rest by all the remaining structures as

presented in the chart below (Fig. 5).

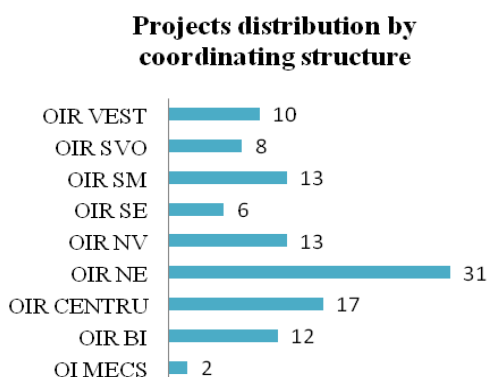


Fig. 5. Projects distribution by coordinating structure

## CONCLUSIONS

As a result of our research, we observed that from more than 4,000 projects financed through SOP HDR program in 2015, just 112 were addressed specifically to rural areas population.

The aim of these projects refers to the inclusion of inactive people or those who earn their living in subsistence farming from rural areas, in the labor market, according special attention to young people, women, small entrepreneurs and future entrepreneurs (which can generate local development and employment opportunities), promoting of the social economy in the rural areas, implementation of activities such as informing and professional counseling, career planning and searching for a job assistance, job clubs, professional training, local employment programs etc.

In analyzing the sampled projects data, were highlighted aspects such as:

**-Project typology.** More than 50% of them were strategic projects, meaning a value greater than 500,000 euros and multi-regional implementation;

**-Covered regions:** 45% of the sampled projects have only covered rural population from one region, 22% addressed the rural population from 3 regions and just a 3% of the selected projects addressed the rural population from all the regions. The most targeted region was Central region, addressed by 45 projects of 112, followed by South -

Muntenia region with 36 projects out of 112 and by Bucharest-Ilfov region with 30 projects. At the opposite side was found North - West Region, addressed only by 27 projects;

**-Targeted group:** ranged in size between 24 persons (the minimum value) and 1,876 persons (maximum value);

**-Areas of intervention:** the most important (in terms of projects submitted) were: **5.2. Promoting long-term sustainability of rural areas in terms of human resources development and employment** with 88% followed by **6.1 Social economy development** with 5%. Areas like 6.2, 1.1, 1.3, 5.1 and 5.3 were also involved but to a lesser extent.

**-Number of partners:** the majority of the projects had one partner, followed by those with 2 or 3 partners;

**-Coordinating structure:** majority of 31 sampled projects were coordinated by the OIR NE;

In conclusion, the rural population who is in need for more knowledge, encouragements and a change of mentality should be considered an important factor in rural development and the focus should be on educating and showing to these people all the opportunities that can be harnessed with the resources provided by the rural areas.

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