

## COUPLED SUPPORT CONTRIBUTION TO REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHEEP AND GOAT SECTOR IN ROMANIA

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### **Abstract**

*Coupled support is one of the main payment schemes from the “optional direct payments” category, introduced in the EU in the year 2015, funded by the Common Agricultural Policy from the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF). At EU-28 level, in 2019, 73.2% of the total coupled support budget was directed to the livestock sector, out of which 12.6% to the sheep and goat farming sector. In the same year, the sheep and goat sector from Romania benefited from 64.3 million euros, as against 50.2 million euros in the year 2018, i.e. 37.1% of total livestock sector. The results obtained following this regional analysis reveal that the impact of this payment scheme implementation has positively impacted the development of the sector, both in terms of meat production, slaughtering in specialised units and livestock herds.*

**Key words:** *coupled zootechnical support, sheep, goats*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Although the budget allocated to the Common Agricultural Policy represented 36.25% of the total budget of the European Union (2018), the EU citizens had a positive perception of the support provided to agriculture, as they consider agriculture to be particularly important not only in terms of producing safe and healthy foodstuffs, but also for reaching the rural development and environmental objectives [12]. But, at the same time, questions are raised about the value of direct payments support and its impact on production, on the environment respectively [12]. In the current Common Agricultural Policy (2014-2020), the value of direct payments is 291.3 billion euros, i.e. 71.3 % of the total budget allocated to CAP [8]. In the future CAP (2021-2027) proposal, these payments will continue to be the main part of support to farmers, but they will be moderately reduced and better targeted [5]. For the financial exercise 2014-2020, the allocations for Romania are about 19.43 billion euros current prices for direct payments and market related expenses (Pillar 1) and for rural development (Pillar 2) [7].

These direct payments have helped European farmers to meet market requirements, representing practically a “safety net” in an unsecure and unpredictable economic environment [8]. At the same time, they represent a stable income source, independently from the market fluctuations, which have significantly contributed to overall farm income [8]. In addition, direct payments strengthen farmers’ role in environmental protection and in sustainable economic development, contributing to the maintenance or creation of jobs in sectors based on agriculture, such as food industry or rural tourism [8]. Following the 2003 CAP Reform, as a general rule, the link between receiving a direct payment and producing a certain product has been phased out (decoupling) [8]. Yet, the member states can still condition (or couple) a limited volume of direct payments on certain products [8]. However, the capacity to provide coupled support has been limited to those sectors or regions of a member state in which certain farming types of agricultural sectors are particularly important out of economic, social or environmental reasons and are facing certain difficulties [13]. Coupled support is one of the main payment schemes in the

“direct payments” category introduced in the year 2015, funded from the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF). In the year 2019, the total budget allocated to coupled support in the European Union was 4.2 billion euros (about 10% of total direct payments), out of which 39.7 % beef, 20.9 % milk and dairy products, 12.6 % sheep and goats, 11.2 % protein crops, 4.3 % fruit and vegetables, 4.3% sugar beet and 7.1 % other products (cereals, olive oil, rice, legumes, potatoes, nuts, hops, hemp, oilseeds, silk worms) [9]. Almost all member states apply this payment scheme (coupled support), although the amount of funding and the sectors covered differ significantly across countries. Thus, this budgetary limit is 8+2%, up to 13+2%, and an increase of these ceilings may be possible only if it is needed and only with the approval of the European Commission [9]. As regards the coupled support for the sheep and goat sector, initially (in 2015), 22 EU member states decided to allocate this payment scheme, but since 2017 their number has decreased to 21[9]. The yearly amount available for this sector (the third in terms of support, next to the beef and milk sectors) permanently increased from 572.6 million euros in 2017 to 586.3 million euros in 2019 [10].

The number of animals for which this budget was allocated for the period 2017-2020 is 49.7 million heads (by 7 million more than in the period 2015-2016), resulting an average amount of 13 euros/head of animal [10]. In the next period as well (2021-2027), the Common Agricultural Policy will continue to support those sectors in difficulty, considered important out of economic, social and environmental reasons, so that they can improve their competitiveness, sustainability or quality, through additional support, known as coupled income support [11]. The eligible member states can allocate maximum 10% of direct payments to the coupled income support, and a 2% supplement can be used to support protein crops [11]. In the context of Covid-19 crisis, among the livestock raising sectors that had suffered the most from this crisis, the sheep and goat meat production sector stands out. As the coronavirus

pandemic started in the middle of the Easter holiday season, this caused the lamb market to collapse throughout Europe. The decreased domestic demand for lamb meat, in countries like Greece (with a well-known tradition in sheep raising and consumption), in France, Spain, Great Britain, as well as in extra-Community countries (New Zealand, Australia) led to a significant decrease in slaughtering [2]. For the optimization and management of certain specific agricultural activities, during the period when the member states are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, a series of normative acts adopted by the European Commission were published in the Official Journal of the European Union [1]. These regulations include those referring to market intervention by granting aid for the private storage of certain agri-food products, such as beef, goat and sheep meat, butter, milk powder and cheese. Thus, the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/595 of April 30, 2020 was issued, granting aid for private storage for sheep and goat meat and fixing the amount of the aid in advance [1]. The global crisis effects have been also felt by the sheep/goat farmers from Romania, who are trying to adapt and respond to the evolution of demand on the international markets, knowing that the export of live animals, of sheep in particular, is crucial for Romania. In the year 2018, Romania ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in the export of live animals in Europe, with a value of 357 million euros (out of which 47.7% sheep), down by 11% from the previous year, when record exports were reported in the last decade of over 424 million euros.

[14]. Sheep and lambs for slaughtering represent the greatest part of deliveries, while pure-bred sheep, for breeding, are less important, in terms of export value [4]. Given that the European Union announced that financial support is provided to cover the private storage costs for sheep and goat meat, it would have been a great opportunity for Romania to have sufficient slaughter houses to slaughter and process these types of meat. Moreover, the existence of slaughterhouses for sheep and goat slaughtering would make it possible to replace the export of live animals

(raw products) by the export of meat and carcasses (products with value added).

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

Our research work was based on a comprehensive quantitative analysis, including both a descriptive part of the post-accession sheep and goat farming sector and an explicit analysis of the impact of the payment scheme application – *coupled support* – on the sector, in territorial profile, in the period 2015-2018. The coupled support is granted to those sectors or regions from a member state where certain types of farming or certain agricultural sectors that are extremely important out of economic, social or environmental reasons are affected by certain difficulties [13]. Except for the protein crops sector, the coupled support can be granted only to the extent necessary to create an incentive to maintain current production levels in the sectors or regions concerned [13]. The coupled zootechnical support (CZS) for sheep raising in Romania is granted to active farmers who have minimum 150 and maximum 500 sheep heads (for the mountain area minimum 60 to maximum 500 heads; for goats, the support is granted to active farmers with minimum 50 and maximum 500 goat heads. The herds must be identified and registered in the National Register of Holdings (NRH) and entered in the Genealogical Registry of Breeds (GRB) and the Official Control of Production (OCP). The sheep breeds benefiting from coupled support are the following: *Țurcană, Țigaie, Merinos de Transilvania, Merinos de Palas, Merinos de Suseni, Ile de France, Lacaune, Karakul, Awassi, Cap Negru de Teleorman*. The necessary data for the purpose of this study resulted from the consultation of a large volume of literature (papers and articles, scientific treatises and other scientific materials published in the country and abroad by specialised organizations). The statistical information was supplied by national databases (Tempo Online, NIS, APIA, MARD), Community databases (Eurostat database, European Commission) or international databases (FAOSTAT), as well

as by specialised websites. Some data of interest were taken over from official press releases or from economic media.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Since 2015, in order to increase productivity, maintain productions and reduce the risk of abandoning livestock farming activities, a new direct payment scheme has been introduced in the European Union, funded by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF), namely the *Coupled Zootechnical Support (CZS)*. In Romania, from the perspective of the sector where the coupled support was granted, we can mention that the livestock sector benefitted from a total amount of 679.3 million euros in the period 2015-2019; the share of this amount increased in the total coupled support value (crops and livestock) from 52% in 2015, to 67% in 2019. In the same period, the sheep and goat farming sector was allocated an amount of 209.2 million euros, i.e. 30.8% of the coupled support value in the livestock sector. In dynamics, the allocation for the coupled support of this sector increased from 21.5 million euros, i.e. 21.3% in 2015, to 64.3 million euros, i.e. 37.1% in 2019 (Table 1).

Table 1. Evolution of total amount authorised for payment (Coupled Zootechnical Support) in the sheep and goat sector – million euros

Specificare	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	total
Total livestock sector, out of which	100.9	113.0	142.8	149.0	173.5	679.3
Sheep and goats	21.5	25.9	47.3	50.2	64.3	209.2
% sheep and goats	21.3	22.9	33.1	33.7	37.1	30.8

Source: author's calculations based on the Agency for Payments and Interventions in Agriculture data.

The analysis by regions of the absorption of funds for coupled support in the sheep and goat sector, in the period 2015-2018, reveals that the region Nord-Vest (Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Maramureș, Sălaj, Satu-Mare) absorbed the largest amount per total period (44,091 thousand euros), respectively 30.4%. The region Centru ranks second, with 27,656 thousand euros (19.1% of total). On the last positions (except for the region București-Ilfov) in terms of this payment scheme absorption, we find the regions Sud-Muntenia

with 4.8% and Sud-Vest Oltenia with 5.1% (Table 2).

Table 2. Evolution of Coupled Zootechnical Support (CZS), by regions, in the sheep and goat sector (thousand euros)

Region	2015	2016	2017	2018	total
Nord-Est	2,170	2,360	3,720	4,010	12,260
Sud-Est	3,527	3,470	7,093	7,865	21,955
Sud Muntenia	1,281	747	2,124	2,756	6,908
Sud Vest Oltenia	1,169	1,350	2,073	2,821	7,413
Vest	3,648	4,632	8,239	7,983	24,502
Nord Vest	4,347	9,820	14,948	14,976	44,091
Centru	5,361	3,500	9,086	9,708	27,656
Bucuresti Ilfov	7	13	14	84	119
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,510</b>	<b>25,892</b>	<b>47,298</b>	<b>50,202</b>	<b>144,902</b>

Source: author's calculations based on the Agency for Payments and Interventions in Agriculture data

The coupled support per head of animal increased proportionally in all the regions of the country compared to the year 2015 (Table 3).

Table 3. Evolution of coupled support in the sheep and goat sector (euros/head)

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Nord-Est	4.5	30.2	24.2	15.6
Sud-Est	4.6	30.2	24.3	15.7
Sud Muntenia	4.6	30.2	24.3	15.6
Sud Vest Oltenia	4.6	29.9	24.1	15.7
Vest	4.6	30.9	24.4	15.7
Nord Vest	4.6	30.5	24.4	15.7
Centru	4.6	30.5	24.4	15.7
Bucuresti Ilfov	4.6	30.9	24.7	15.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>24.4</b>	<b>15.7</b>

Source: author's calculations based on the Agency for Payments and Interventions in Agriculture data.

The explanation for the small amount of only 4.6 euros per animal head (2015 average) is that, in that year, compared to the next years, the largest number of animals authorised for payment (4.7 million heads) and the largest number of farmers authorised for payment (77.7% of total authorised livestock farmers) were recorded. The largest average amount was in the year 2016 (30.5 euros/animal head), to decrease in the next period, so that in 2018 the national average was only 15.7 euros/animal head.

Sheep are raised traditionally in the mountain areas of Romania [15]. The total number of

sheep and goats increased by 2.0% nationwide, in 2018 compared to previous year, Romania ranking 4<sup>th</sup> in the European Union in terms of the number of herds, with 11.7 million heads, next to Great Britain, Spain and Greece (NIS). Overall, in the investigated period (2015-2018) when coupled support was granted to the sector, an increase of herds could be noticed by 367 thousand heads (+3.7%) in sheep and by 99 thousand heads (+6.9%) in goats (Table 4 and 5).

Table 4. Evolution of sheep herds by regions

Region	2015	2016	2017	2018	2018/2015	%
Nord-Est	1,396	1,403	1,396	1,431	35	2.5
Sud-Est	1,509	1,485	1,494	1,537	29	1.9
Sud Muntenia	936	934	960	974	38	4.1
Sud Vest Oltenia	679	686	669	687	7	1.1
Vest	1,493	1,515	1,462	1,497	4	0.3
Nord Vest	1,649	1,669	1,680	1,710	61	3.7
Centru	2,118	2,152	2,292	2,316	198	9.4
Bucuresti Ilfov	30	31	30	24	-6	-20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,810</b>	<b>9,875</b>	<b>9,982</b>	<b>10,176</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>3.7</b>

Source: Tempo online, National Institute of Statistics.

Table 5. Evolution of goat herds by regions

Rediunea	2015	2016	2017	2018	2018/2015	%
Nord-Est	224	230	231	236	11	5.1
Sud-Est	368	372	378	390	23	6.1
Sud Muntenia	257	261	261	270	13	5.1
Sud Vest Oltenia	270	284	286	289	19	7.0
Vest	71	76	79	82	11	15.6
Nord Vest	107	113	115	118	11	9.9
Centru	131	135	139	142	11	8.5
Bucuresti Ilfov	12	14	14	12	0	1.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,440</b>	<b>1,483</b>	<b>1,503</b>	<b>1,539</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>6.9</b>

Source: Tempo online, National Institute of Statistics.

The analysis by regions, in 2018, reveals that although the region Nord-Vest benefitted from the largest amount for coupled support, i.e. 29.8% of total (with the largest number of animals authorised for payment), in terms of total number of sheep by regions, region Center stands out, with 22.8% of total herds, while in goats the region Sud-Est ranks first, with 25.4% of total.

Yet, in the context of crisis generated by COVID-19 pandemic, started in early 2020, the sheep/goat meat market is facing great

problems, namely the decrease of procurement prices, restrictions to the transport of animals to processors/direct sale on the market, HoReCa, decrease of live animals export. At the same time, due to movement restrictions imposed by the situation created by COVID-19, the sheep/goat raising sector suffered from significant financial losses, which led to the diminution of the number of animals and to disturbances in the supply chains. Thus, according to MARD data, the total sheep herds diminished from 16.0 million heads in April 2019 to 15.5 million heads in April 2020, (-3.4 %), and the number of ewes decreased from 9.3 million heads in April 2019 to 8.8 million in April 2020 (-5.57 %) [6]. The goat herds slightly increased in April 2020 as against April 2019 (from 2.48 million heads in 2019 to 2.49 million heads in 2020), by 0.5 %, yet the number of breeding goats decreased from 1.37 million heads in 2019 to 1.33 million heads in April 2020, by 2.4 % [6]. Meat production (live weight of animals slaughtered for consumption), at national level, increased by 6,212 tons (+5.7%) in the period 2015-2018; the region that contributed with the highest share to this production, in the year 2018, was Sud-Est with 24.5% of total (Table 6).

Table 6. Evolution of total sheep and goat meat (tons live weight)

Rediunea	2015	2016	2017	2018	2018/2015	%
Nord-Est	13,129	12,067	12,559	13,450	321	2.4
Sud-Est	28,853	33,387	29,251	28,331	-522	-1.8
Sud Muntenia	14,850	16,154	19,273	17,505	2,655	17.9
Sud Vest Oltenia	8,355	8,142	7,522	7,325	-1,030	-12.3
Vest	11,254	11,355	13,938	12,915	1,661	14.8
Nord Vest	12,707	12,992	12,420	14,256	1,549	12.2
Centru	20,011	19,354	20,625	21,551	1540	7.7
Bucuresti Ilfov	448	399	413	486	38	8.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>109,607</b>	<b>113,850</b>	<b>116,001</b>	<b>115,819</b>	<b>6,212</b>	<b>5.7</b>

Source: Tempo online, National Institute of Statistics.

As regards the evolution of meat production in the investigated period, it increased in general in Sud-Muntenia (+17.9%), Vest (+14.8%), but production decreases were also noticed in Sud-Vest Oltenia (-12.3%) and Sud-Est (-1.8%). We must also signal out a

positive aspect, as in the period 2015-2018, meat production obtained in specialised units (slaughterhouses) had an upward trend, up from 20.6 thousand tons live weight to 26.9 thousand tons (+30.8%). At the same time, its share in total production to be slaughtered for human consumption increased from 18.8% in 2015 to 23.2% in 2018, and the average slaughter weight reached 31.8 kg in 2018, as against 28.3 kg in 2015 (Table 7).

Table 7. Sheep and goat slaughtered in industrial units (slaughterhouses)

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of slaughtered heads	726,023	637,338	780,847	846,504
Live weight (tons)	20,557	18,622	24,011	26,893
Average weight (kg live weight)	28.3	29.2	30.7	31.8
Carcass weight (tons)	9,256	8,477	10,699	12,449

Source: National Institute of Statistics

In the structure of total meat production (animals for slaughtering for consumption, live weight), sheep and goat meat slightly increased in share from 7.7% in 2015, to 7.8% in 2018 (Figure 1).

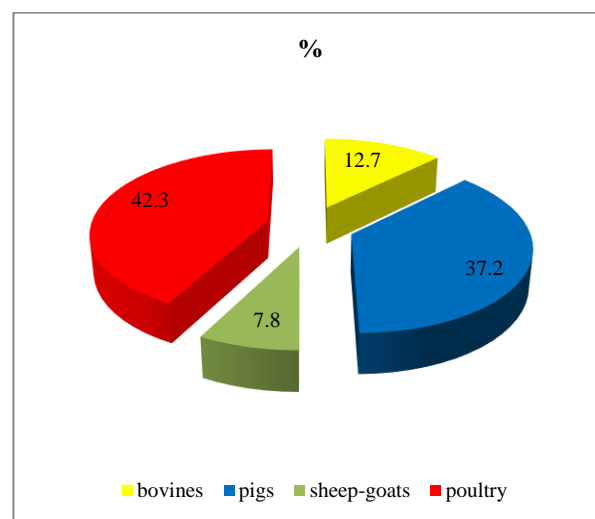


Fig. 1. Structure of meat production, live weight, in the year 2018 (%).

Source: Own calculation.

As regards the delivery of lambs to the market, in April 2020 2.72 million lamb heads were delivered, down by 10.8% compared to the same month of the year 2019 (3.05 million heads) [6].

The trade balance in live sheep and goats in the period 2015-2018 was positive due to the permanent increase in exports, from 151.4 million euros (2015), to 170.4 million euros (2018). In the first period of the year 2020, in the context of coronavirus pandemic, we specify that the export of sheep and goats decreased in March 2020 by 11.5 % compared to March 2019, from 7.9 thousand tons in March 2019 to 7 thousand tons in the same month of the year 2020 [6]. The sheep carcass average price in the EU increased from 530.4 euros/100 kg (March 2019) to 579.9 euros/100 kg (March 2020), the same as in Romania, where the average price increased from 238.2 euros/100 kg (March 2019), to 273.1 euros/100 kg (March 2020). It results that the average sheep carcass price in Romania increased by about 15%, but this represents only 50% of the average price of carcass in the EU [6]. Yet the above-mentioned price increase at national level cannot compensate the income losses of sheep/goat farmers, in the conditions of meat production decrease in the first part of the year 2020, compared to the same period of the year 2019. This adds to difficulties in supplying the market (transport restrictions, insufficient staff, etc.) caused by the SARS COV 2 (COVID – 19) pandemic.

Taking into account the difficulties in the livestock farming sector and the numerous requests of the sheep and goat farmers and to compensate the losses caused by the COVID 19 pandemic, the *state aid* scheme was established to support the activity of sheep/goat farmers. The state aid amounting to 40 million euros is granted on a flat-rate basis, namely [3]:

From 50 to 100 sheep – 500 euros/farm

From 101 to 200 sheep – 800 euros/farm

From 201 to 300 sheep – 1,300 euros/farm

From 301 to 400 sheep – 1,700 euros/farm

From 401 to 500 sheep – 2,100 euros/farm

Over 500 sheep heads – 2,500 euros/farm

The European Commission Regulation has specified that these allocations will have to be made by April 2021.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the period 2015-2018, in Romania:

- the amount authorised for payment by total livestock sector increased by 47.7%, the highest increase being recorded in the sheep and goat sector (133.4%), and the lowest in beef cattle (13.3%);
- the sheep and goat farming sector benefitted from 144.9 billion euros in the period 2015-2018, which represents 28.7% of the total coupled zootechnical support;
- in evolution, the allocation for the coupled support related to the sector increased from 21.5 million euro, i.e. 21.3% in 2015, to 50.2 million euro in 2018 (33.7%) and to 64.3 million euro, i.e. 37.1% in 2019;
- the number of sheep and goat farmers who applied for coupled support decreased by 6,261 (34.5%);
- by regions, throughout the period 2015-2018, it can be noticed that the region Nord-Vest (Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Maramureș, Sălaj, Satu-Mare) absorbed the largest amount per total period (44091 thousand euros), i.e. 30.4%, and the region Centru ranked second, with 27,656 thousand euros (19.1% of total).
- in the investigated period, both the total sheep herds and the goat herds increased by 367 thousand heads (+3.7%) and by 99 thousand heads respectively (+6.9%);
- in the evolution of herds by regions, it can be noticed that the region Centru had the greatest increase of sheep herds (+9.4%), while the region Vest had the greatest increase of goat herds (+15.6%);
- both meat production at national level (sheep and goats destined to slaughtering for human consumption, live weight), and the production obtained in specialised units had a positive evolution in the period 2015 – 2018;
- in the year 2018, more than half of meat production (58.2%) was obtained in three regions: Sud-Est with 24.5%, Centru with 18.6% and Sud-Muntenia with 15.1%;
- although the total number of sheep farms decreased from 355,342 in 2015 to 287,864 in 2018 (-67,478), the highest share was held by the small farms (with less than 10 heads), representing 63% of total farms;

This lowers the sector's performance, as these small farms lack capital, on the one hand, and on the other hand farmers are not well trained to manage their farms in a proper manner, which results in low incomes from their activity. Consequently, subsistence farmers do not have the motivation and the ability to meet the EU standards, including those referring to environment quality, animal welfare and food safety.

Another extremely important aspect is that in general animal diseases appear on these small holdings, and the impact may be felt at the level of the competitiveness of the entire sector.

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