

ABSORPTION OF FUNDS ALLOCATED BY SUB-MEASURE 6.1, NATIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2014-2020, IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

Sub-measure 6.1 "Support for setting-up young farmers", within the NRDP 2014-2020, aimed to support the establishment for the first time of young farmers as sole heads / managers of an agricultural holding. At the same time, it stimulated young people and young families not to leave the rural area, and those from the urban area and the diaspora, who met the criteria, were attracted to establish an agricultural business in the rural area, to contribute to the development of the area's economy. The paper presents the amounts allocated by sub-measures NRDP 2014-2020 on 20.05.2021 and the distribution of the number of projects selected for funding under sub-measure 6.1, at the level of each county in Romania and regions. At national level, the absorption of funds related to sub-measure 6.1 was very good, being selected financing applications amounting to 438,120,000 Euro, out of the allocated amount of 466,754,112 Euro, which represents a degree of absorption of 93.87%. From the presented data it can be noticed that, in Dâmbovița county, most projects were selected for financing (863 projects), while in Neamț County only 8 projects were registered, for the period 2015-2020.

Key words: European funds, National Rural Development Programme, Romania, sub-measure 6.1, young farmers

INTRODUCTION

Approximately one third of the farms in the European Union are located in Romania, representing around 3.9 million holdings. The basic challenges of this sector are increasing competitiveness, accompanied by the restructuring process [3].

The structure of the farms is polarizing, the large and medium farms being in proportion of 7% of the total holdings, but they manage approximately 70% of the agricultural surface, having a clear competitive advantage. In contrast, 93% of holdings own less than 5 hectares, which are subsistence or semi-subsistence farms, which manage about 30% of the agricultural area. These farms are poorly equipped and do not have access to markets. They are also not involved in cooperatives or any other form of association, which would help them to better integrate at the market level.

The average size of the farm is considerably smaller than the European average, of 3.4 ha

in Romania, compared to 14.4 ha in the Union. For the entire agricultural sector, access to agricultural credit and insurance is difficult. This applies in particular to small farms.

The strategic objectives and measures for rural development result from the European Union's economic development policies and are based on the principles of subsidiarity and flexibility [6]. According to subsidiarity, member states are free to decide which criteria and programs will receive community support. Depending on the flexibility, priorities and needs must be taken into account in order to achieve the objectives.

Taking into account these objectives and challenges, the "National Rural Development Program" (NRDP) has been set up to implement CAP funding and actions regarding rural development.

Under the NRDP 2007-2013, a large part of the funds was allocated for renovations, village development, improvement of basic services to stimulate the economy, rural

population and rural heritage development, modernization of holdings and increasing the added value of agricultural products and forestry [13].

In the NRDP 2014-2020, the focus was on the modernization of agricultural holdings (sub-measure 4.1), investments in small-scale infrastructure (sub-measure 7.2) and support for setting-up young farmers (sub-measure 6.1).

Sub-measure 6.1 "Support for setting-up young farmers" within the NRDP 2014-2020 had the greatest impact in supporting young farmers. This continued Measure 112 "Setting-up for young farmers", within NRDP 2007-2013, with a larger amount of money and new eligibility criteria. Both measures were aimed at farmers under the age of 40, who wanted to take over or set up an agricultural holding.

This paper follows the distribution of the number of projects selected for funding under sub-measure 6.1, at the level of each county in Romania and at the Regions level.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The databases used for the study of the absorption of funds allocated to sub-measure 6.1 "Support for setting-up young farmers" at national level were those presented by AFIR, in the section "Reports and lists"/"Selection reports".

As the information required for the study was not available in an aggregated manner, those published by AFIR were used to compile an aggregate database with all projects selected for funding under sub-measure 6.1: monthly and final selection reports, erratum in the monthly and final reports, the appeal reports from which only the declared projects selected for funding were extracted, the individual reports with eligible projects whose evaluation was challenged in court and declared eligible following the court decisions.

ITI - Danube Delta selection reports were not taken into account because they represent a distinct allocation to the Danube Delta area and are not the subject of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The agricultural holding is a unitary system (territorial, technical, productive, legal, economic) whose main purpose is the capitalization of agricultural land or productive animals in terms of economic efficiency and good environmental conditions [8].

The member states of the European Union have an agricultural structure that varies according to geological, climatic and topographical factors, natural resources and regional activities, lifestyle and social habits.

At European level, our country ranks 6th depending on the agricultural area used, so that in recent years, due to its high agricultural potential, Romania has become an important player on the European agricultural market.

At the same time, Romania stands out in the European Union with a large number of very small farms, which have an economic size below 8,000 Standard Output (SO) and represent a percentage of 94.6% of total farms in Romania, namely 3,237,240 very small farms [5]. It should be mentioned that, at such a high percentage of very small farms in Romania, even the European average is high due to Romanian farms.

The percentage of very small farms at European level is 68.3%, respectively 55.81% without including the very small Romanian farms [5].

Regarding jobs in agriculture out of total jobs, also Romania, with a percentage of 22.8% is well above the European average of 4.5% in 2017 and 4.4% in 2018.

However, the percentage of young farmers in relation to the total number of farmers is below the Union average.

These two elements show that Romania has a large number of farmers, but their average age is high compared to the farmers in the Union. Therefore, the stimulation of young farmers in Romania is essential, not only for the competitiveness of the labour force in agriculture at European level but also for the rejuvenation of the labour force to ensure the agricultural future of Romania.

The percentage allocated to Romania at the level of 2019 was 5.2%.

NRDP 2014-2020 was adopted by the European Commission on May 15, 2015 and was subsequently amended several times, the last amendment before the elaboration of this paper, being from April 28, 2020. This involved a plan to use the € 9.44 billion of public money available for the 7-year period during which it took place. The budget was divided as follows:

- 8.1 billion € from the European Union budget, including 112.3 million € transferred from the CAP direct payments budget;
- 1.34 billion € co-financing from the state budget.

NRDP 2014-2020 focused on 3 priority areas:

- promoting competition and restructuring the agricultural sector;
- environmental protection and climate changes;
- stimulating economic development, creating jobs and improving the quality of life in rural areas.

The effective allocation of the funds related to NRDP 2014-2020, on 20.05.2021 according to the MARD report, was made according to Table 1.

Table 1. Allocation of NRDP 2014-2020 on 20.05.2021

Measure - Sub measure	Allocation 2014-2020 -Euro-	%
M01 - "Actions for knowledge transfer and information actions"		
<i>Sub-measure 1.1 "Support for vocational training and skills acquisition actions"</i>	5,910,092	0.06
Sub - measure 1.2 "Support for demonstration activities and information actions"	360,000	0.00
M02 - "Advisory services, farm management services and relief services" (Article 15)		
<i>Sub-measure 2.1 "Support to help benefiting from the use of advisory services"</i>	3,670,000	0.04
M03 - "Quality schemes for agriproducts and foodstuffs" (Article 16)		
Sub - measure 3.1 "Support for new participation in quality schemes"	500,000	0.01
<i>Sub-measure 3.2 "Support for information and promotion activities implemented by groups of producers in the internal market"</i>	5,581,232	0.06
M04 - "Investments in physical assets" (Article 17)		
Sub - measure 4.1 "Investments in agricultural holdings" including ITI Danube Delta	874,878,522	9.27
Sub-measure 4.1a "Investments in fruit-growing holdings" including ITI Danube Delta	301,680,886	3.20
<i>Sub-measure 4.2 "Support for investments in processing/marketing and/or development of agricultural products" including ITI</i>	393,348,167	4.17
Sub - measure 4.2 "GBER State aid scheme"	95,500,000	1.01
<i>Sub-measure 4.2 "De minimis aid scheme"</i>	5,500,000	0.06
<i>Sub-measure 4.2a "Investments in processing / marketing of products from the fruit-growing sector"</i>	35,429,439	0.38
<i>Sub-measure 4.3 "Investments in infrastructure related to development, modernisation or adaptation of agriculture and forestry - irrigations" including ITI Danube Delta</i>	440,978,719	4.67
Sub-measure 4.3 "Investments in infrastructure related to development, modernization or adaptation of agriculture and forestry - agricultural access infrastructure" including ITI Danube Delta	133,298,233	1.41
<i>Sub-measure 4.3 "Investments in infrastructure related to development, modernisation or adaptation of agriculture and forestry - forest infrastructure" including ITI Danube Delta</i>	100,971,119	1.07
M05 - "Restoring agricultural production potential affected by natural disasters and catastrophic events and the establishment of appropriate preventive measures" (Article 18)		
<i>Sub-measure 5.1 "Support for investments in preventive actions to reduce the consequences of natural disasters, adverse climatic events and catastrophies"</i>	24,775,003	0.26

Measure - Sub measure	Allocation 2014-2020	%
<i>Sub-measure 5.2 "Support for investments to restore agricultural land and production potential damaged by natural disasters, adverse environmental conditions and catastrophies"</i>	3,677,431	0.04
M06 - "Farm and business development" (Article 19)		
Sub - measure 6.1 "Support for setting-up young farmers"	466,754,112	4.95
Sub - measure 6.1 "Support for setting-up young farmers" - ITI	10,000,000	0.11
<i>Sub-measure 6.2 "Support to the establishment of non-agricultural activities in rural areas"</i>	106,583,304	1.13
<i>Sub-measure 6.2 "Support to the establishment of non-agricultural activities in rural areas"- ITI</i>	5,000,000	0.05
Sub - measure 6.3 "Support for the development of small farms"	246,471,271	2.61
Sub - measure 6.3 "Support for the development of small farms" - ITI	5,000,000	0.05
<i>Sub-measure 6.4 "investments in creation and development of non-agricultural activities"</i>	156,503,969	1.66
<i>Sub-measure 6.4 "investments in creation and development of non-agricultural activities"- ITI</i>	10,000,000	0.11
Sub - measure 6.5 "Scheme for small farmers"	6,000	0.00
M07 - "Basic services and village renewal in rural areas" (Article 20)		
<i>Sub-measure 7.2 "Investments in the creation and modernization of small-scale infrastructure - water / wastewater infrastructure" including ITI Danube Delta</i>	1,108,947,145	11.75
<i>Sub-measure 7.2 "Investments in the creation and modernization of small-scale infrastructure - road infrastructure of local interest" including ITI Danube Delta</i>		
<i>Sub-measure 7.2 "Investments in the creation and modernization of small-scale infrastructure - educational and social infrastructure" including ITI Danube Delta</i>		
Sub - measure 7.6 "Investments associated with the protection of cultural heritage"	188,010,999	1.99
<i>Sub-measure 7.6 "Investments associated with the protection of cultural heritage" - ITI Danube Delta</i>	9,000,000	0.10
M08 - "Investments in forest area development and improvement of the viability of forests" (Articles 21-26)		
<i>Sub-measure 8.1 "Afforestation and creation of woodland"</i>	46,786,653	0.50
M09 - "Setting up of producer groups and organisations in agriculture and forestry" (Article 27)		
<i>Sub-measure 9.1 "Setting up of producer groups"</i>	16,836,313	0.18
<i>Sub-measure 9.1a "Setting up of producer groups in the fruit-growing sector"</i>	3,200,811	0.03
M10 - "Agri-environment and climate"	835,317,262	8.85
M11 - "Organic farming"	247,038,159	2.62
M13 - "Payments to areas facing natural or other specific constraints"	1,522,717,575	16.13
M14 - "Animal welfare"	792,480,077	8.40
M15 - "Forest-environmental, climate services and forest conservation" (Article 34)		
<i>Sub-measure 15.1 "Payment for forest-environmental and climate commitments"</i>	90,147,754	0.96
M16 - "Cooperation" (Article 35)		
<i>Sub-measure 16.1 "Support for establishment and operation of operational groups (GOs), for the development of pilot projects, new products"</i>	6,723,721	0.07
Sub-measure 16.1a "Support for the establishment and operation of operational groups, development of pilot projects, products and processes - fruit-growing sector"	5,819,040	0.06
<i>Sub-measure 16.4 "Support for horizontal and vertical cooperation between actors in the supply chain"</i>	12,385,582	0.13
<i>Sub-measure 16.4 "Support for horizontal and vertical cooperation between actors in the supply chain - fruit-growing sector"</i>	6,428,560	0.07
M17 - "Risk management" (Article 36)		
<i>Sub-measure 17.1 "Crop, animal and plant insurance premium"</i>	23,699,076	0.25

Measure - Sub measure	Allocation 2014-2020	%
M19 - "Support for LEADER local development (CLLD - Community-led local development)" (Article 35 of Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013)		
Sub - measure 19.1 "Preparatory support for the development of local development strategies"	1,990,183	0.02
<i>Sub-measure 19.2 "Support for implementation of operations under the CLLD strategy"</i>	495,641,759	5.25
<i>Sub-measure 19.3 "Preparation and implementation of cooperation activities of the local action group" - Component A "Preparatory technical assistance for the cooperation projects of the LAGs" and Component B "Implementation of the cooperation activities of the selected LAGs"</i>	16,986,768	0.18
<i>Sub-measure 19.4 "Support for running costs and animation"</i>	123,013,164	1.30
Measure 20 "Technical assistance for Member States" (Articles 51-54)	176,692,820	1.87
Measure 21 "Specific measures to provide exceptional temporary support under EAFRD in response to the COVID-19 outbreak"	182,500,000	1.93
<i>Financial instruments under sub-measures 4.1, 4.1a, 4.2, 4.2a and 6.4</i>	93,973,930	1.00
Total	9,438,714,849	100.00

Source: Own calculation based on data provided by [9, 12].

The highest allocations at the level of measure/sub-measure were for M13 - 16.13%, followed by sub-measure 7.2 - 11.75% and sub-measure 4.1 - 9.27%. However, it should be noted that M13 did not have any projects submitted under the program, although it benefited from the largest allocation.

Regarding the allocation by Measure level, excluding M13, the measures that benefited from the highest allocations were:

1. M04 with a total of 25.23% of the amount allocated to the Program;
2. M07 - 13.84%;
3. M06 - 10.66%.

Thus, the investment measures M04 and M06 together totalled 35.89% of the entire amount allocated, the highest percentage allocation of the Program.

Sub-measure 6.1 was included in Measure 06, "Farm and business development" and was one of the measures that was part of the scope of intervention 2B "Facilitating the entry into the agricultural sector of properly qualified farmers and, in particular, the renewal of generations" and at the same time in the secondary domain ID 3A, according to the Regulation of the European Union no. 1305/2013, art. 5 [11]. The non-refundable support through sub-measure 6.1 "Support for setting-up young farmers" was non-refundable in proportion of 100% and its value was of maximum 50,000 euros.

It was granted in two instalments, namely:

- tranche 1 of 75% at the time of signing the contract with AFIR;

- tranche 2 of 25% at the time of its request, within a maximum of 3 years from the first instalment, when the applicant was fulfilling its commitments from the business plan.

The total public contribution for this sub-measure was supported from two sources:

- 85% of the funds are European contributions through the EAFRD;
- 15% of the funds are national contributions from the state budget [1].

Sub-measure 6.1 had a total allocation of 4.95% of the total Program and a percentage of 46.38% of Measure 06, representing the highest allocation within it.

The purposes of the sub-measure were:

- the installation of a young farmer for the first time in charge of an agricultural holding as head of the holding;

- improving management, increasing the competitiveness in the agricultural sector, complying with the requirements of environmental protection, hygiene and animal welfare and safety measures at work;

- the sub-measure provided an opportunity for young people with a minimum qualification in the agricultural field to set up as managers of a farm;

- increasing the number of young farmers who started to practice agriculture in Romania;

- encouraging young people to move to rural areas.

The condition of a young person under 40 years of age was fulfilled if the applicant was not yet 41 years old at the time of applying for funding. The objectives proposed by the business plan were divided into two types, mandatory and additional. From the last category at least 3 had to be met. All the objectives had to be met until the request for the second payment tranche was requested, except for the mandatory objective of changing the domicile, registered office or place of work.

The selection criteria established the tie-breaking score of the project, if projects with a total value higher than the amount of money allocated to the submission session were submitted. These were:

- PS1 "Priority sector principle" - max 30 points,
- PS2 "Principle of merging holdings" - max 15 points,
- PS3 „Principle of qualification level in the agricultural field” - max 35 points,
- PS4 "Principle of the agricultural potential of the area" - max 15 points,
- PS5 "Principle of native breeds/indigenous varieties" - max 5 points,

Also, based on the score, the quality threshold of the submission stage within a project submission session was established. This quality threshold defines a minimum score below which projects cannot be submitted at that stage. The score for each quality threshold and each stage is decreasing from one stage to another. This system allows the initial submission of projects with the highest score, and over time, projects with lower scores can also be submitted. The biggest advantages of this system are the postponement of project submissions over a longer period of time and the limitation of the submission of projects with low scores that could have been eligible but unfunded due to the lack of funds available up to that score.

For sub-measure 6.1 "Support for setting-up young farmers", 466 million euros were allocated out of the total public allocation of approximately 9.44 billion Euros (Table 1) [10]. This money was distributed annually during the project submission sessions and was allocated until the update of the report on

20.05.2021, in the amount of 438,120,000 Euro, totalling 10,674 selected funding applications. The projects were evaluated at county level, through OJFIR (County Office for Financing Rural Investments) for each county, these being immediately subordinated to CRFIR (Regional Center for Financing Rural Investments) for the 8 Regions in Romania [7] (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Map of Regions and related counties
 Source: [2].

According to Table 2, there are differences in performance between the counties with the most projects selected for funding and the counties with the fewest selected projects. In the best performing county, Dâmbovița (863 projects), more projects were selected for funding than the sum of the last 18 counties (801 projects), from position 24 downwards.

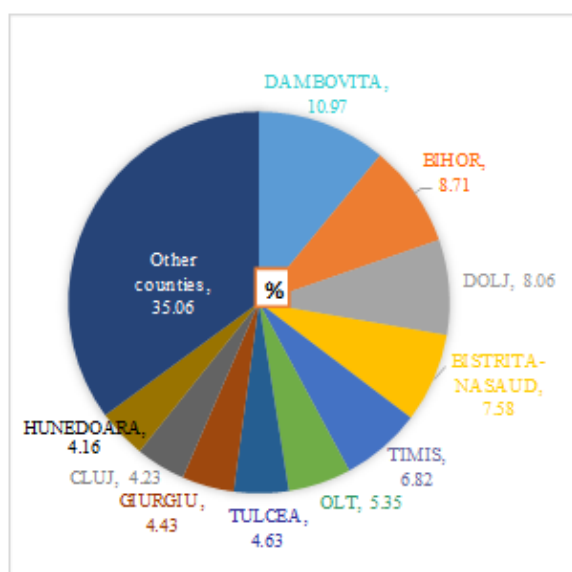


Fig. 2. Percentage distribution of projects for counties with a percentage of over 4% of the total (sub-measure 6.1)

Source: Own calculation based on data provided by [2]

Table 2. Distribution of the number of projects at the level of each county in Romania (sub-measure 6.1)

Position	County	Non-Mountain			Mountain			Mixed		Total
		2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017	2018	2020	
1	DAMBOVITA	112	466	154	4	19	15	13	80	863
2	BIHOR	109	201	46	30	74	125	52	48	685
3	DOLJ	184	288	83	0	0	0	39	40	634
4	BISTRITA-NASAUD	18	19	2	88	229	206	3	31	596
5	TIMIS	118	247	77	0	3	2	35	54	536
6	OLT	110	225	68	0	0	0	7	11	421
7	TULCEA	143	156	45	0	0	0	4	16	364
8	GIURGIU	76	181	73	0	0	0	8	10	348
9	CLUJ	43	47	6	37	63	74	25	38	333
10	HUNEDOARA	18	15	6	38	128	116	3	3	327
11	CARAS-SEVERIN	30	30	5	50	74	77	10	13	289
12	GALATI	47	109	35	0	0	0	4	8	203
13	VRANCEA	64	99	10	1	3	5	2	6	190
14	CONSTANTA	59	70	12	0	0	0	2	12	155
15	MEHEDINTI	45	74	10	5	6	8	0	1	149
16	IALOMITA	39	63	15	0	0	0	12	10	139
17	GORJ	24	15	0	34	28	24	0	7	132
18	SATU-MARE	22	68	28	0	0	0	1	10	129
19	ARAD	13	44	11	3	10	10	12	19	122
20	BRAILA	29	67	14	0	0	0	1	7	118
21	COVASNA	9	10	7	17	22	45	7	0	117
22	ALBA	17	4	0	17	21	25	0	25	109
23	ARGES	23	29	5	10	22	12	0	3	104
24	MARAMURES	3	6	3	7	21	49	2	8	99
25	BUZĂU	24	42	8	2	4	5	1	3	89
26	IASI	24	30	6	0	0	0	4	13	77
27	BOTOSANI	10	47	2	0	0	0	7	10	76
28	SALAJ	14	40	9	0	0	1	2	8	74
29	VASLUI	10	29	10	0	0	0	3	7	59
30	SUCEAVA	4	13	2	0	10	6	4	6	45
31	TELEORMAN	11	17	5	0	0	0	3	9	45
32	VALCEA	6	14	2	9	8	3	0	3	45
33	BRASOV	1	4	0	11	12	13	0	2	43
34	BACAU	7	11	1	4	5	7	0	2	37
35	CALARASI	10	16	6	0	0	0	1	1	34
36	MURES	0	3	1	0	0	3	0	13	20
37	ILFOV	7	7	1	0	0	0	1	1	17
38	SIBIU	1	3	1	1	3	1	1	4	15
39	PRAHOVA	2	7	0	0	0	1	0	0	10
40	HARGHITA	0	0	0	0	2	3	0	3	8
41	NEAMT	1	3	0	0	1	2	0	1	8

Source: Own calculation based on data provided by [2].

As can be seen from Figure 2, the top 10 counties in the ranking hold 64.94% of all projects selected for funding at national level. The top 10 counties are: Dâmbovița-10.97%, Bihor-8.71%, Dolj-8.06%, Bistrița-Năsăud-7.58%, Timiș-6.82%, Olt-5.35%, Tulcea-4.63%, Giurgiu-4.43%, Cluj-4.23% and Hunedoara-4.16%.

The other counties together make up a percentage of 35.06%.

The number of projects selected for funding in the 2018 and 2020 sessions (Mixed projects) is substantially lower than the number of projects selected in previous years, 2015 - 2017 (Mountain and Non-mountain projects), as shown in Figure 3, according to Table 2.

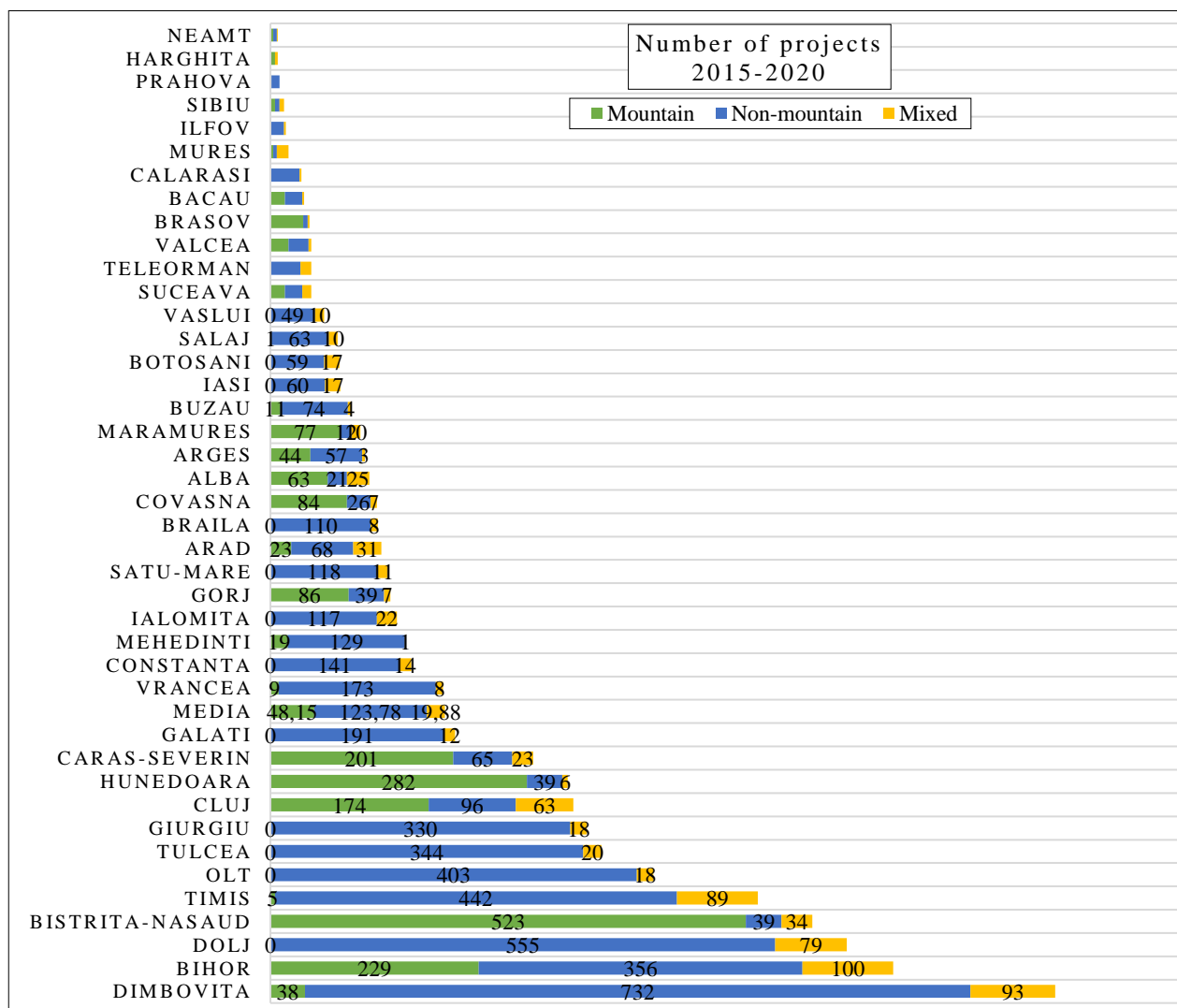


Fig. 3. Number of projects selected for each county (sub-measure 6.1)

Source: Own calculation based on data provided by [2].

This is mainly due to the small amount of money allocated out of the total of 466,754,111 Euro, namely:

- 11,000,000 Euro allocation in 2018;
- 23,022,207 Euro allocation in 2020.

Also, the difference between the best performing counties and the other counties is highlighted again, here, with an average of 191.81 projects being situated between position 12 and position 13. Thus, all counties

under position 12 are below the national average in terms of the number of projects on sub-measure 6.1 selected for funding.

Figure 4 shows the distribution by Region of the projects selected for funding. Here can be seen the grouping of Regions into high-performing regions and low-performing regions.

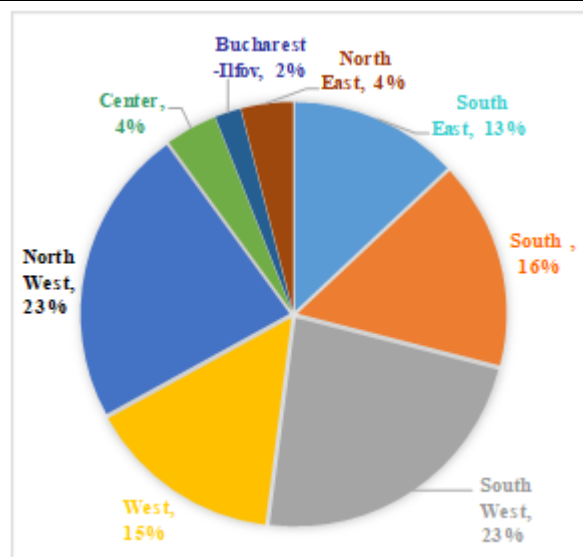


Fig. 4. Distribution of projects selected for funding at national level by Regions (sub-measure 6.1)
 Source: Own calculation based on data provided by [2].

The best performing regions, North West with 23% of projects and South West also with 23% of projects, bring together the best performing counties.

Thus, Region 6, North West, brings together the following counties, with the corresponding position in the national top: Bihor - 2, Bistrița – Năsăud - 4, Cluj - 9, Satu-Mare - 18, Maramureș - 24, Sălaj - 28.

Region 4, South West, brings together the following counties with their position in the national ranking:

Dolj - 3, Olt - 4, Mehedinti - 15, Gorj - 17, Vâlcea - 32.

The county with the most projects, Dâmbovița, is part of the South Region and together with Giurgiu County hold the absolute majority of the projects selected for funding in this Region.

Among the Regions with the fewest projects, the Bucharest-Ilfov Region is led by Ialomița with 139 selected projects. The city of Bucharest has no project because it is entirely an urban area, without access to rural areas, being surrounded on all sides by Ilfov County. The two Regions 7, Center, and 1, North East, are highlighted by the smallest number of selected projects.

In addition, the project submission session for the Diaspora was also opened on the budget of this program, which will lead to the allocation

of even more funds and consequently the increase of the current absorption percentage. Thus, under sub-measure 6.1, despite absorption discrepancies between counties or regions, the allocation of funds at national level was a success.

At national level, it is critical that in the period 2014-2020 in the agricultural field (as well as in other areas) the measures taken will help eliminate discrepancies with other countries, especially in the context of the changes that will follow [4].

CONCLUSIONS

The funds allocated to sub-measure 6.1 of the EAFRD contribution and the State Budget had a positive impact on encouraging young farmers to set up on an agricultural holding.

More than anything, there were 10,523 young people involved in agriculture, 438,120,000 Euros attracted to the national economy, thousands of jobs created and thousands of young people stimulated to qualify in agriculture.

They also meant commitments from the beneficiaries to market their own production of at least 65,178,000 Euro (20% of the first tranche of support, which represents 75% of the total amount attracted).

Although at county level, the discrepancies between the counties at the top of the ranking and those that were in the last places, was as high as possible, at national level the degree of absorption of 93.87% was good.

The field study is recommended, in order to see what are the obstacles that the counties at the bottom of the ranking face, as well as what are the good practices that the leading counties have managed to perform.

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