

# ISOLATED RURAL COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL SERVICES FOR THE ELDERLY

I o n I o n e s c u \*

**Abstract:** The Department of Sociology and Social Work of the University *Alexandru Ioan Cuza* Iasi has conducted research in a project called "*Isolated rural communities in the North-East region of Romania and innovative social services*". Much of the Romanian population is at risk of poverty and social exclusion (especially in rural areas). There are many inter-regional disparities, not to mention large offsets comparing to the regions from developed European countries. In many rural areas there is no kindergarten, primary school and children have to travel long distances in order to get to such units.

For many families, the lack of transport infrastructure, the roads sometimes impassable etc. make it difficult for them to enroll their children in some form of education. There are many old people left alone at home. Through this project we sought to identify services than can contribute in preventing and reducing specific problems for isolated rural areas. We have conducted a diagnostic survey to identify social service needs and community safety in these rural communities. We have identified the social problems, the causes of problems, existing social services, the necessary social services, and the implementation projects. We have also identified community safety issues and measures to be taken. In order to achieve the objectives we have used questionnaires (representative sample at regional level), comprehensive interviews (with county authorities) and focus groups (in each county of the region, with resource people). After the collection and interpretation of the data, we realized syntheses for local information at county level and at national level (current state of social services and safety in rural communities, required services, categories of beneficiaries etc.). We have disseminated the results to optimize programs and social assistance policies targeting isolated rural communities.

**Keywords:** *Isolated rural communities, vulnerable groups, social services, diagnostic survey, social policies.*

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**Resumé.** Le Département de Sociologie et Travail social de l'Université *Alexandru Ioan Cuza* Iași a fait la recherche dans un projet intitulé « Communautés rurales isolées dans la Région Nord-Est de la Roumanie et services sociaux innovants ». Une bonne partie de la population roumaine est en risque de pauvreté et d'exclusion sociale (surtout dans le milieu rural). Sont de disparités inter-régionales, sans parler des grandes décalages par rapport aux régions des pays développés d'Europe. Dans nombreuses localités rurales il n'y a pas école maternelle, école primaire et les enfants doivent parcourir de longues distances jusqu'aux unités de ce type. Pour de nombreuses familles, le manque d'infrastructures de transport, les routes parfois impraticables etc. font impossible l'inscription des enfants dans une certaine forme d'éducation. Sont nombreuses les personnes âgées seules à la maison. Grâce à ce projet nous avons cherché à identifier les services pour prévenir et réduire les problèmes spécifiques aux zones rurales isolées. Nous avons mené une enquête-diagnostic pour identifier les besoins de services sociaux et de sécurité communautaire dans ces communautés rurales. Nous avons identifié les problèmes sociaux, les causes des problèmes, les services sociaux existants, les services sociaux nécessaires, les projets en œuvre. Nous avons identifié aussi les questions de sécurité communautaire et les mesures qui doivent être prises. Pour atteindre les objectifs nous avons utilisé les questionnaires (échantillon représentatif au niveau régional), les interviews comprehensifs (avec les autorités des comtés), les focus-groupes (dans chaque comté de la région, avec des personnes ressources). Après la collecte et l'interprétation des données, nous avons réalisé des synthèses pour l'information locale, au niveau du comté et au niveau national (sur l'état actuel des services sociaux et de sécurité dans les communautés rurales, les services nécessaires, les catégories de bénéficiaires etc.), nous avons disseminé les résultats afin d'optimiser les programmes et les politiques d'assistance sociale ciblant les communautés rurales isolées.

**Mots-clé.** *Communautés rurales isolées, groupes vulnérables, services sociaux, enquête-diagnostic, politiques sociales*

**Rezumat.** Departamentul de Sociologie și Asistență Socială a Universității *Alexandru Ioan Cuza* din Iași a făcut cercetări în cadrul unui proiect numit "comunități rurale izolate din Regiunea de Nord-Est din România și servicii sociale inovatoare pentru persoanele în vârstă". O mare parte a acestei populații sătești este în pericol de sărăcie și excluziune socială (în special în zonele izolate). Există disparități inter-regionale, să nu mai vorbim de de subdezvoltarea în raport cu regiunile din țările europene dezvoltate. În multe zone rurale nu există nici o grădiniță, școală primară și copiii trebuie să călătorească pe distanțe lungi pentru a afla astfel de unități. Pentru multe familii, lipsa infrastructurii de transport, drumurile impraticabile etc. fac imposibilă înscrierea copiilor într-o formă de învățământ. Există numeroase persoane în vârstă singure acasă. Prin acest proiect am căutat să identificăm serviciile necesare și existente pentru a preveni și reduce problemele specifice acestor persoane din zonele rurale îndepărtate. Mai exact, am realizat un studiu de diagnostic pentru a identifica nevoile de servicii sociale și de siguranță în aceste comunități rurale. Am identificat problemele sociale, cauze ale problemelor, servicii sociale existente, serviciile sociale necesare,

proiecte implementate. Pentru realizarea obiectivelor am folosit chestionare (eșantion reprezentativ la nivel regional), interviuri (cu autoritățile județene), focus grupuri (în fiecare județ al regiunii, cu persoane resursă). După colectarea și interpretarea datelor, am realizat sinteze de informații locale, la nivel județean și la nivel național (starea actuală a serviciilor sociale și de siguranță în comunitățile rurale, serviciile necesare, categoriile de beneficiari), am diseminat rezultatele pentru a optimiza programe și politici de asistență socială care vizează comunitățile rurale izolate.

**Cuvinte cheie.** *Comunități izolate din mediul rural, grupuri vulnerabile, servicii sociale, studiu-diagnostic, politici sociale*

### **Introduction**

One of my recent studies (April 2014-April 2015) made with my colleagues from the Department of Sociology and Social Work involved the quality of rural life in isolated villages of the North-East Region of Romania and social services for elderly people<sup>1</sup>. The objectives were: to diagnose the "state of affairs" in the rural areas of the Region; to identify existing services in the villages; to identify the necessary social services (referring to the actors involved: social workers, police officers, institutions of directors); to identify a set of possible measures to reduce the offsets with the EU member countries.

### **Methodological Elements**

*At institutional and political level:*

1. Analysis of social policies for people living in isolated villages (in the EU and at national level). We have used:

- a) comparative analysis of social policies at European and national level;
- b) analysis of the specialized literature.

2. Analysis of social welfare institutions in rural areas. Used techniques:

- a) document analysis;
- b) qualitative research based on semi-structured interview (with social workers);
- c) focus groups together with the representatives of institutions providing social services in rural areas;
- d) quantitative research through questionnaire<sup>2</sup> (applied to social workers and police officers near the villages of the region) in order to identify the needs of social services for vulnerable groups.

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<sup>1</sup> A Part of this article appeared in the research report diagnostic study *The social services and community security in the country side of North-East*, FDSC, 2015

<sup>2</sup> Questionnaire on a representative sample for the North-East region of Romania - rural area (exhaustive sampling n= N = 506), because we have followed a consistency between the collected data through the secondary analysis and field data; in the

*At individual level:*

- a) qualitative research (grounded-theory type) through sympathetic interview (for rural inhabitants);
- b) qualitative research based on six focus groups (in each department of the North-East region of Romania) with representatives of public institutions<sup>3</sup>, good social networking experts and community safety services.

### **„The state of affairs” in the communities**

In order to understand the situation of the Romanian rural areas we must remember in what community and society we live in. We live in communities where there is:

- "decline of the idea of society",
- outline of a new class positions (*the children of our masters are the masters of our children*)
- disorder of the rural community life,
- increase in the number of migrants,
- integration mechanisms of excluded people who have failed,
- individuals placed daily at risk, psychic tension (they do not know what is better: *to retire? to attack? to make pressure? to manipulate?* since it is more difficult for them to be themselves, to set achievable goals and to feel like individuals who can achieve goals worthy of human beings ...),
- confidence is taken in consideration again,
- citizenship and social cohesion has to be rethought, rebuilding the minimum regional authorities, so that they achieve sustainable development,
- the social bond is in crisis,

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documentation phase we have gathered data for all municipalities of the region; the final volume was N = 419 (representing 82.81% of the total of recording units). The questionnaire had the following structure: 1. Identification elements and specific data from the records of the village (total population at 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2014, the total area of the village, distance from the nearest urban area, quality of the road to the nearest town, the number of retired people at 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2014, the total of beneficiaries of social assistance from 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2014, the number of permanent teachers from 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2014, the number of substitute teachers from 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2014, dropout rates, the number of police officers in the village, the number of offenses against the individual etc.). 2. Existing psycho-social and educational institutions for: a) the elderly; b) children; c) people with disabilities; d) victims of trafficking, violence; d) immigrants; e) the homeless; f) other people in difficulty etc. 3. Necessary social services.

<sup>3</sup> Represented Institutions: General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection; Agency for payments and social inspection; Minister of Public Health; County Council; Nongovernmental organizations; Department of Police; County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance; Inspection of Emergency Situations; Education Inspectorate.

- the sense of belonging to a group is diluted and people feel that they are alone and treated as "pawns"

- the poor, the unemployed struggle to find jobs, but they fight only for themselves, they do not fight for all unemployed people, in order to change society...

We must reflect on the education of children in order to (re) learn to live on this continent, in this Europe, in this country, in this community, where we must save resources, water, and prevent corruption etc.

We dream of a participatory democracy, but this is not a gift that individuals and Romanian communities receive. After 50 years of communism and "original democracy", we must change the social, moral and political life by changing the values and policies, with honest, well-informed people, who understand what is happening in the country and can organize things locally.

But it is difficult to implement this type of democracy...

Our *religious traditions* (Orthodox) often ask people to flee this "world" ("look at the birds that neither sow, nor reap, nor gather anything and our heavenly Father feeds them"). All the "barometers" post 1989 show that Romanians have complete trust in the Orthodox Church.

Our *philosophical traditions* cherish the contemplative man, the "philosopher" who is seeking for the ideal city and is not busy with the affairs "of this world" but with "eternal realities".

In our country, after 1945, communist propaganda and the Communist regime have:

- abandoned national interests (in obedience to the USSR)
- established the dictatorship of the proletariat (in fact, of a caste of profiteers)
- destroyed the rule of law and pluralism (by fraud)
- destroyed social categories in the name of "class struggle" (through assassinations, deportations, imprisonment, forced labor, marginalization)
- arrested, deported, killed peasants who did not want collectivization
- repressed labor movements,
- exterminated anticommunist resistance,
- rejected Western culture etc.

During the communist regime, "the illegality of abortion" was proclaimed, fact that led to an increased number of births (the former baby boom, now means a large number of elderly people - great burden for social protection and health system!). We must not forget *the famine of the population* (on the pretext of "rational feeding"), *lack of heat and hot water during the winter, the rationalization of gas* (30 l per month), masses of peasants who were moved into the grey / black communist blocks, in poor conditions, in the suburbs where poverty has generated the loss of self-esteem, self-confidence and spirit of solidarity. The communist regime has restricted *the role of private ownership* to

increase dependence on public resources (collectivization made farmers dependent, industrialization – the workers) to alleviate the feeling of responsibility ...

After 1990 the "private sector" was born (which meant in fact, maintaining the monopoly of socialist enterprises, followed by their customary privatization, bankruptcy and destruction as scrap metal ...). Without subsidies or modern technology, farmers collapsed because of massive imports of agricultural products.

We lived an unprecedented polarization in the history of Romania (the most visible indicator of *corruption*). *The exploitation of the paternalistic mentality* of Romanians continues. *The media offers them all the gossip* (Latin American soap operas "telenovelas", political circus, contradictory ideas, non-values, vulgarity, false personalities, superficiality, infantilism ...).

We have paid all this with underdeveloped communities!

*The benefits of capitalism have been postulated* and those who have not seen them "*implemented*", first of all active people from villages and towns, have depopulated the country by immigrating. During peacetime, in twenty-five years, four million people have left the country...

#### **„The state of affairs” in the rural areas of the Northeastern region**

In the NE Region of the country, 2.2 million people live in 506 municipalities. The birth rate is 10.43 ‰, the infant mortality rate is 0.11 ‰. Marriage rates (4.06 ‰) and divorce rates (0.99 ‰) are the result of a context, but also of a set of specific values; in an more vulnerable economic, political climate, etc., we can expect a high number of emigrants, weddings and divorces).

**Fig. 1. Romania in the European Union**



Fig. 2. The Regions of Romania



Some appreciate the North-East region (six counties: Suceava, Botosani, Neamt, Iasi, Bacau, Vaslui) as *a region of isolated villages*.

Fig. 3. The Northeastern Region



The criteria underlying to the definition of an isolated village are:

- more than 25 km away from the nearest urban settlement;
- more than 20 km away from roads (railways, highways);
- lack of basic institutions for the functioning of a community (hospital, schools, food market, court, notary etc.);
- lack or insufficiency of certain types of social services and community safety (viewed as normal in a civilized environment);
- lack of easy ways of spatial mobility (transportation that respects a schedule), fixed telephony, internet, cable;
- lack of economic, financial, touristic attractiveness etc. for investors, tourists etc.

The isolation level of villages in the region is higher, especially as the terrain is rugged, the roads are bad etc.

Fig.4. Isolated rural communities





The subjective level of isolation increases to the extent that the quality of roads and transport facilities are inadequate and this causes many social and security problems.

But the isolation phenomenon is much more complex. Isolation is not only physical but also mental, cultural and professional.

There is a depopulation of scattered villages, accompanied by an increased perception of isolation of those who stay ... Especially the elderly feel the lack of communication, supply difficulties, access to health care etc. and all of these cause uncertainty, fear, mental disorders, neuroses, but also other "malfunctions": celibacy (more common in these areas), alcohol abuse, even suicide...

*Cultural isolation* takes the form of marginalization feeling, people feel they belong to a world with values that are amortized comparing with the "dominant" values of society ... *Professional isolation* occurs for people who exercise a profession and do not update their knowledge, skills and they are considered archaic (for example, the farrier, who make coats from sheepskin, traditional shoes etc.).

Isolation has sociological and psychological consequences more or less deeply felt, especially during special moments (Easter, Christmas), especially among women, the elderly (most susceptible to loneliness).

*More serious is the decline of the rural community capacity to solve problems and improve its independence.* Traditional rural Romanian society had a certain autarky and people recognized themselves in their own values. The isolation wasn't negative, but "belonged to the system". People assured their food and energy autonomy for the winter, prepared their holiday, family ties, community, social ties were repaired by social and cultural events. People knew that they must make provisions for winter, for bad weather (food, medicine). Now, many are those who wait for aids, social workers, televisions...

### **What problems and social needs are there in the isolated rural areas?**

- fragmented land ownership (people do not want to associate on a legal basis; they have bad memories of the *kolhoz* ...);
- many farmers work in agriculture using the hoe, the horse ...;
- it is not possible to make a profit from agricultural products (because of "intermediaries");
- rural population is feminized and aging;
- lack of infrastructure (bad roads...);
- "proverbial" peasant poverty;
- local budget that do not cover all administration costs, education, social assistance, investments etc.;

- mutual acquaintance and mutual assistance still exist, but many residents are used to rely on social assistance ...;
- lack of non-farm employment;
- lack of entrepreneurial culture (many villagers left and are still leaving the country and when they return with money, in general, they invest in productive activities...)
- lack of social services for the elderly;
- the non-integration (or shallow integration of Gypsies), etc.

### **What are the causes, patterns, contributing factors?**

- apathy, inertia, inactive people, communities, society;
- legislative framework in continuous change;
- vicious circle of poverty;
- excessive alcohol consumption;
- lack of investment for job creation;
- very dense and restrictive guidelines for financing projects;
- belonging to dysfunctional families (children often have the tendency to follow the deviant behavior of the parents);
- some villagers are "beneficiaries by profession";
- social aid does not always reach where it is really needed;
- lack of specialists in social fields (social workers, psychologists etc.).

### **Countermeasures, reactions**

- the existence of communities where people get involved;
- multiplication of the situation where the villagers with money build new houses, buy agricultural machinery, make productive investments;
- EU funds for the social sector (fewer since the time when Romania entered the EU);
- more consistent use of subsidies;
- financed projects;
- some strategies regarding the vulnerable people;
- the establishment of guaranteed minimum income (which sometimes encourages not having a job ...);
- families who work to prevent child abandonment, school dropouts etc.;
- social support, (social) services etc.

### **Development of communities and social services**

*Development* means the elimination, reduction of poverty, isolation (and to the same extent, of tyranny, corruption ...). Economists say that *development represents material progress*, linked to economic growth and wealth of the inhabitants. Sociologists consider the development as a change in a constructivist direction. International active agencies in the "third world" sustain the

development of social services is a separate action in the direction of development.

Some speak of *modernization* (a less developed country may reduce the offsets by imitating the developed countries) as a gradual transition to a market economy, (foreign) investment, institutions, values and behaviors similar to those of the West etc.

It is best to call it a *participatory development model* (of all players): negotiation, realistic compromise, implementation, coordination of action, sustained activity, improving the quality of life (especially through endogenous efforts) etc.

One way of achieving well-being is by *services produced* by the state or the private sector.

Not only "productive" services (directly related to material production, transportation, production of commodities etc.), but also "intangible" services, which support indirect production (for example social services).

Service Categories:

- *Cleaning Services*: cargo transport, repairs and maintenance, sanitation, washing and cleaners, veterinary care etc.
- *Services of intangible property*: banking, legal, accounting, insurance etc.
- *Personal services*: health, transport of persons, beauty salons, recovery clinics, restaurants, hairdressers etc.
- *Services related to the intellect*: education, radio - TV, information services, theaters, museums etc.

*The European social inclusion strategy* is based on the articles of the Constitution of the European Union (the fight against social exclusion being one of its main objectives).

This struggle also involves *the identification of the deficit* of social services in rural areas and solutions that guarantee access to:

- basic social services,
- health services,
- school transportation,
- support and care for the elderly, disabled,
- care and support services for the family (social benefits, management of revenue and expenses, conflict resolution, prevention of substance abuse, assistance for long-term unemployment etc.).

But also:

- hot meals for the elderly etc.
- home care (cleaning, general assistance ...) etc.

Recipients of services in rural areas are:

- adolescents and young people who have recently completed some form of education;
- children and youth who dropped out of school;

- people with disabilities;
  - chronically ill patients;
  - elderly and semi-dependents people who possess land, but cannot work;
  - children in the care of a relative without income;
  - children in the care of relatives or neighbors, while their parents work in other countries;
  - people who have served a prison sentence;
  - teenagers with children;
  - depressive individuals;
  - alcohol dependent individuals etc.
- But also:
- families unable to subsist on their own income;
  - families who rely solely on the income of a retired or disabled;
  - broken families, with several members abroad, with unemployed adults;
  - families marked by domestic violence etc.<sup>4</sup>

### **Laws and field**

The Romanian legislation in the field includes:

"Every person has guaranteed the free and full development of personality";

"The human being has the right to be treated with dignity, regardless of age, region of origin, occupation or profession etc. without discrimination ";

"Everyone has the right to social and medical assistance, as provided by law";

"The community will support individuals (if their family cannot ensure the needs) in order to maintain and strengthen the social cohesion";

"Public institutions and organizations of civil society, religious institutions etc. cooperate in the organization and development of social services".

But in the rural areas of the NE region:

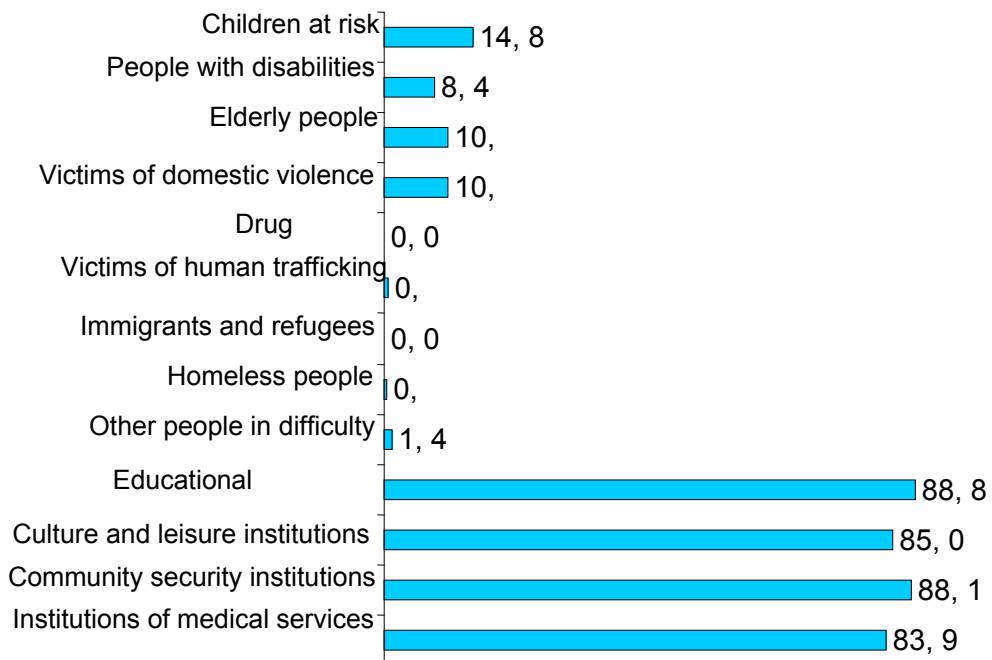
- residents do not distinguish between social services, social assistance, social protection, social security;
- in the majority of rural communities, there aren't any social services;
- there are limited opportunities to obtain funding for the development of social services;

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<sup>4</sup> We can emphasize the distinction between: legally constituted families with psycho-socio-economic difficulties; single parents following the death of a parent, divorce or abandonment; families formed by grandparents and grandchildren following the death of parents, family abandonment; host families etc.

- there are no facilitators for socio-economic orientation;
  - there are few kindergartens and day centers for the elderly;
  - some councils have accredited *after school* centers;
  - centers for victims of domestic violence exist mainly in the capitals of the counties;
  - in some villages there are organized home care teams for the elderly;
  - there are some shelters for the elderly (but the demands are very high, while some buildings who are ready to be used do not function ...);
  - family doctors fail to complete their profession (no satisfactory staffing etc.);
  - nurses are few compared to the number of beneficiaries;
  - potential beneficiaries feel the lack of social services near their homes etc.
- Coverage rates with socio-psycho-educational institutions and community safety:

**Table 1.** Socio-psycho-educational institutions



**Tabel 2.** Social institutions for elderly

<b>Social welfare institutions with beneficiaries - the elderly</b>	<b>Number of units</b>	<b><i>Is there a need for such type of service in the community? (%)</i></b>
a. Shelters for the elderly	31	41,8
b. Sheltered accommodation	3	16,9
c. Day centers	4	24,1
d. Home service centers	8	36,5

**Tabel 3.** Social institutions with beneficiaries - victims of violence

<b>Social welfare institutions with beneficiaries - victims of family violence</b>	<b>Number of units</b>	<b><i>Is there a need for such type of service in the community? (%)</i></b>
a. Shelters in emergency regime	3	31,6
b. Recovery centers	0	16,0
c. Assistance centers for aggressors	0	13,2
d. Centers for preventing and combating violence in family	3	34,1
e. Information and awareness service centers	0	22,5

**Tabel 4.** Culture and leisure institutions

<b>Culture and leisure institutions</b>	<b>Number of units</b>	<b><i>Is there a need for such type of service in the community? (%)</i></b>
a. Cultural centers	548	37,4
b. Libraries	432	35,3

<b>Culture and leisure institutions</b>	<b>Number of units</b>	<b><i>Is there a need for such type of service in the community? (%)</i></b>
<b>c.</b> Bookshops	9	29,4
<b>d.</b> Museums	89	25,1
<b>e.</b> Memorial houses	48	16,3
<b>f.</b> Clubs for children	22	33,3
<b>g.</b> Clubs for retired	9	24,4
<b>h.</b> Sports clubs	58	30,6
<b>i.</b> Sports Fields	429	37,2
<b>j.</b> Gyms	105	40,4
<b>k.</b> Ski track	10	19,1
<b>l.</b> Skating rinks	3	17,7

**Tabel 5.** Medical Services Institutions

<b>Medical Services Institutions</b>	<b>Number of units</b>	<b><i>Is there a need for such type of service in the community (%)</i></b>
<b>a.</b> Ambulance Service	15	23,9
<b>b.</b> Dispensaries	308	30,5
<b>c.</b> Testing laboratories	17	30,4
<b>d.</b> Family Medicine Cabinets	572	33,3
<b>e.</b> Specialty Medicine Cabinets	18	23,7
<b>f.</b> Dental offices	243	43,5
<b>g.</b> Hospitals	9	19,4

<b>Medical Services Institutions</b>	<b>Number of units</b>	<b><i>Is there a need for such type of service in the community (%)</i></b>
<b>h.</b> Pharmacies	501	38,8
<b>i.</b> Medical and social assistance centers	51	30,1
<b>j.</b> Palliative care centers	5	22,0

**Tabel 6.** Community Security Institutions

<b>Community Security Institutions</b>	<b>Number of units</b>	<b><i>Is there a need for such type of service in the community (%)</i></b>
<b>a.</b> Police station	401	50,2
<b>b.</b> Gendarmerie station	12	24,9
<b>c.</b> Protection service against fires	171	38,3
<b>d.</b> Local Police	60	40,6
<b>e.</b> Communal Security	181	49,8

### ***Solutions***

- **temporary accommodation during the winter** for the elderly;
- a **revitalization policy of the rural area**, associations, clubs that provide opportunities for meetings, visits, excursions etc. ;
- encouragement of **ageing at home**, with a financial outlay for home assistance (cooking, washing etc.);
- **school buses** that can also transport the elderly weekly at a fair (when there is a fair day);
- **registration of beneficiaries**, "clients" of social assistance, according to their Personal Number;
- **qualified and better paid social worker**;
- local authority that answers the social issues in the community (each local public authority should develop a Public Service Social Action - PSSA);
- a **coherent policy for the reduction of poverty**, investment stimulation, development of infrastructure, job creation;



- development of the mechanism of **identification, intervention and monitoring of children at risk**, especially in rural areas where social services and child protection are underdeveloped;
- development of **strategies aimed at keeping rural children in the compulsory education system**;
- development of **campaigns and effective parenting programs**;
- **common farms (livestock farming)**, pertaining to the City Council, to provide products at low prices, for the poor;
- measure entitled "**Lunch at school**";
- implementation of the "**after school**" system in all villages with the help of volunteers (retired);
  - "**local initiative groups**" in each village;
  - **preparing a family from each isolated area** (which can provide first aid in order to reduce the number of people losing their lives because there is no medical emergency service ...)
  - **training of multispectral teams** in the field of the protection of older people in difficulty;
  - uniform practices at national level in the field of **medical and social assistance for the elderly**;
  - development of **medical and social services and social health for the elderly**;
  - professionalization of medical services, **home care**;
  - creating mobile response teams to address the psycho-social and educational needs in rural communities:
    - o for example, a **mobile clinic** (a team made up of a psychologist, social worker, police officer, doctor)
    - o **mobile school** (a team of psychologists, social workers, educators, specialists ; there is a success story of the mobile school team in rural municipalities in the counties Iasi and Vaslui)
  - **house of social services**,
  - **outreach worker** etc.

The best solution: **youth remaining in their villages, creating well-paid jobs, pleasant living conditions in tolerable villages...**

### Conclusions

**Reducing the development gaps** remains a big problem. Globalization is both an **opportunity** and a **threat** (*opportunity* because it can enable communities to bring value to the products of the market, regardless of the distance and isolation, *threat* - when it tends to eliminate territorial barriers , destroying the identity without any protection). To cope with globalization, village communities have to be competitive on the economic, social,

environmental field... *Social competitiveness* of rural communities must take into account existing players, project promoters, those who share the same values; it requires a good knowledge of social management and community development etc. *When the village is no longer able to keep its young people, its business, trades, occupations, the local fabric disintegrates and the village loses the capacity for innovation and dies...*

Since 1990, we have relied on **the intervention of NGOs, associations** in order to help modernize and revitalize the villages and rural life. But **they do not replace the public authorities and their functions**. Their real impact cannot be measured when there is no *initial diagnosis* (before the intervention in the community ...). After 1990, about ten million people made use of the 14 social assistance benefits and of the 5768 other social assistance services...

It was hoped for the **(re)migration of Romanians**. Migrants can be a significant resource development for the Romanian communities. How can we determine those who left from the villages to return? They do not want to return to poverty, with a very low income ... More critical is the fact that *doctors are leaving the cities and countryside*. Also critical is the fact that the *Roma inclusion programs have failed* ... In these conditions, many villagers make exhortation **to leave the country** ... and many encourage them **to return to the country**. There is good potential in rural communities for **organic farming, biodynamic agriculture and community supported agriculture, bio Cart, rustic basket** etc.

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