



AUTHORS

Valentin Maier, Ionuț-Mircea Marcu

CONTACT

For further information, please contact us at:

EMAIL:

ahe-ro@unibuc.ro

WEBSITE:

ahe-ro.unibuc.ro

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THE STOCK OF HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATES IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA

A b s t r a c t

The aim of this research is to quantitatively reconstruct the evolutions of the stock of higher education graduates in post-communist Romania. The proposed approach entails collecting, compiling, and analysing data sets from the archives of the Ministry of Education of Romania and the National Institute of Statistics. Given the limitations related to data availability, the research results are presented both at the macro-level, as well as by applying case-studies, when possible.

The research objective proposed by this research is to link the legislative norms relevant to higher education in post-communist Romania to the trends generated by other factors, such as demography and economic trends, by looking at the stock of higher education. This includes both an assessment of the stock of higher education in post-communist Romania, as well as case studies on specific academic years and/or specialisations. The research includes both state and private higher education institutions, and will take into account the broader institutional framework of tertiary education in post-communist Romania. Specific attention is given to the impact of institutional and normative reforms on stock of higher education of graduates in the short and, when relevant, medium terms.

The research methodology distinguished between two main definitions of „educational stock”. In the „simple educational stock” it includes the number of people who finalised different specific educational phases, while the „complex educational stock” defines the number of years of education within specific socio-economic group(s). Given the important volume of data, research is focused, primarily, on the simple educational stock, with the aim to further investigate the complex educational stock in future research papers.

The relevance is built on the research of Psacharopoulos & Patrinos (2018) and other authors, who argue that the correlation between increased access to (higher) education and positive social impact is not linear. As it has been argued in the literature, in developing economies/societies, increasing access to education has a massive socio-economic positive impact, while in developed countries, the impact of

increasing access to higher education is more limited. In this context, this paper proposes a discussion on the post-socialist realities of Romania.

From the preliminary data, there were around 2.8 million graduates in Romania from 1990-2020, with 1.6 million being female and 1.17 million being male. In what regards the distribution of graduates on decades, in 1990-1999 there 484.000 graduates, 1.2 million during 2000-2009 and almost 1 million in 2010-2019. Some of these results are directly affected by some peculiarities of the Romanian higher education system. Not all graduates took their final exams and not all graduates who took the final exams received their diploma. Therefore, there 2.8 million people taking exams (some retaking) with 2.6 million actually getting a degree.

In what regards the cities with the most graduates, Bucharest is leading in both state and private higher education. In the state higher education system, the second place is occupied by Cluj-Napoca, and the third by Iași. In the private higher education system, the second place is occupied by Brașov, and the third by Arad.

Some other interesting findings are that the state higher education system amounted for more than 2 million graduates of the total, and that the most important types of higher education in terms of the number of graduates were by far economics and law.

This research also shows that the expansion of number of graduates in post-socialist Romania entailed an increase in women participation in higher education, as well as an expansion of the geographical distribution of higher education centres. Expansion started in 1990 (25.927), reached highest point in 2007/2008 (232.885), then dropped (2020 – 88.934). Private higher education institution changed the institutional landscape, as they had less state control, in a context of increased social demand for higher education. The maximum level of graduates within the state system was reached in 2007, and in the private system in 2009. It can be concluded that these evolutions are directly linked to macro-economic trends. On the other hand, the correlation with the social demands and the international trends remains to be further investigated.