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UNDERSTANDING TRANSITION INTO HIGHER EDUCATION IN ROMANIA

Empirical study

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Abstract

One of the most important features of the expansion of education is an increased access to higher education. Educational inequalities appear when the access to education, including higher education is unequally distributed among various groups of individuals. This paper aims to explore main factors that shape the access of individuals to higher education in Romania. I explore micro data on educational attainment in Romania. The main findings show that access to higher education in Romania continues to be mediated by factors such as region, area of residence, gender and family of origin.

INTRODUCTION

Many scholars have shown that education and training have positive effects at both macro and micro levels. Studies performed on the Romanian context confirm such findings (Pirciog et. al., 2015). Romanian educational system experienced numerous institutional reforms and changes during the post-communist period (Mocanu, 2009) with effects at the level of participation to education. One of the most important effects is the expansion of the share of individuals enrolling in and graduating from higher education.

However, Romanian data on educational attainment highlight a differentiated access of individuals with certain socio-demographic characteristics to higher educational levels. B. Voicu and M. Vasile (2009) have demonstrated the existence of a gap in the access to higher education which affected rural youth during the communist and post-communist periods and which begins to decline in the recent years.

Transition into higher education has gained importance in the recent period as the international trend is towards a universal higher education provision (Gale and Parker, 2014). A. Hatos (2012) analyzed the highest level of education attained and educational transitions by cohorts in Romania, confirming the expansion of education highlighted by the increasing volume of graduates from higher educational levels as compared to previous cohorts. The results of his research have shown that variables such as the number of brothers or urban residence and father's educational level influence the likelihood of completion of vocational education. Regarding the chances of completion the general upper secondary education, it appears that the gender gap affecting women has decreased, while different types of inequalities emerged. Such factors of inequality include belonging to large families or rural residence. Also, the level of parents' education and occupational status significantly increase chances of individuals to graduate high school. Similarly, the probability of graduation is negatively influenced by the number of brothers and increase with the family educational capital. Social origin remains the most important and wide spread predictor of the educational success in EU countries, both with respect to educational attainment and level of competences (European Commission, 2014).

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The present paper aims to explore some of the factors that shape the transition to higher education in post-communist Romania. This study analyzes data from the 2014 EU-SILC survey - sample for Romania.

Sample distribution by highest level of education attained, age and area of residence confirms the increasing participation in higher levels of education (upper secondary education and higher education) in the post-communist period, but also the influence the residence area on it. One could notice that the highest share of individuals graduating from tertiary education is displayed by urban population aging 25-34 years old (Table 1).

To analyze the influence of various factors on the access to tertiary education in Romania, we restricted the sample to individuals who have completed at least upper secondary level education. In other words, the analysis is performed only on people who could transition to higher education. We employ a logistic regression analysis in which the dependent variable is a binary one taking the value "one" for those who have graduated from tertiary education and "zero" for those without higher education. Also, in order to study the access to higher education in post-communist period, we restricted the analyzed sample only to individuals aged 25-34 years old. Thus, the analysis focuses on individuals who have reached the typical age of participation in higher education in the post-communist period, more exactly in a period of expansion of higher education. Independent variables are as follows:

- ⇒ Gender (2 categories: males and females)
- ⇒ Region (4 categories: macro-regions)
- ⇒ Area of residence (2 categories: urban and rural)
- ⇒ Age (years)

As previously shown, another factor presented in the literature as being relevant to the educational transitions of individuals is the family of origin. In this sense, the educational capital of the origin family has explanatory power and in terms of the existence of a cultural model of valuing education, but also in terms of the relationship between education and income. Thus, it is expected that families with higher educational capital have higher incomes and, consequently, superior capacity to invest in the education of its members. In this paper, the educational capital of the origin family is studied via two explanatory variables:

- ⇒ Number of years of education of the father (years)
- ⇒ Number of years of education of the mother (years).

Within the EU-SILC database, educational level is recorded for all household members, as well as family relationships between individuals. Thus, educational level of the parents is "observed" only for individuals living with their parents in the same household. Therefore, this paper analyzes only individuals aged under 25 who have completed at least upper secondary education and who live with their parents in the same household. Again, we employ a logistic regression analysis in which the

dependent variable was considered "the transition to higher education", having a value of "one" if the person has graduated or is enrolled in tertiary education and "zero" if the person is not in this situation.

RESULTS

The results show that women have significantly higher chances than men to complete higher education. The region also influences the access to higher education. Thus, individuals from the fourth macro-region (comprising the South West and West regions) are characterized by greater chances to graduate tertiary education, compared to all the other macro-regions. Lastly, the area of residence significantly influence the transition to higher education, meaning that individuals from rural areas are less likely to achieve this level of education than those in urban areas. In addition, aging decreases the chances of individuals to graduate education (Table 2).

Consequently, despite the fact that participation in higher education has increased steadily in the post-communist period, access to higher education continues to be influenced by individual and structural factors such as gender, region and area of residence.

In case of the population aging less than 25 years old, the results confirm the influence of the same factors identified for the population of 25-34 years old. Thus, females have higher chances to transit to higher education as against men. Also, individuals in the first macro-region are more likely to transit to tertiary education compared to those in the fourth macro-region and the latter have higher chances than those form second and third macro-regions. The influence of the area of residence is confirmed in the sense that people from rural areas have less access as those in urban areas to pursue higher education. In addition, the educational capital of the origin family turns out to have significant influence. Increasing the number of years of education for both father and mother leads to an increase in the chances of transition into higher education. The influence of the mother's education is slightly higher as compared to the educational level of the father. Therefore, the analysis confirms the influence of factors that capture characteristics that individuals are born with on their chances to enroll in and graduate from higher education (Table 3).

CONCLUSIONS

This paper studied the distribution of the access to higher education in Romania with a focus on the cohorts educated during the post-communist

period. Our results show that chances to transit into higher education are distributed very unequally in Romania. Factors such as gender, region, area of residence and family of origin continue to shape educational transitions into higher levels of education.

Concluding, among various challenges that Romania faces, one of the most important is to reduce the level of educational inequalities. An important dimension of the educational inequalities in Romania remains the rural-urban inequalities, even during the post-communist period. One of the most important path for increasing the quality and equality of educational outcomes is to reduce inequality in the access to education, including higher education. Future policies in this field need to address the rural-urban inequalities, as well as other types of inequalities in a more effective way.

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ANNEXES

Table No. 1
Educational attainment in Romania, by age and area of residence (%)

		<25	25-34	35-44	45+	Total
Rural	No education	0.70%	3.10%	1.40%	2.30%	2.10%
	Primary education	7.50%	7.80%	4.20%	24.80%	15.90%
	Lower secondary education	33.70%	33.40%	28.20%	35.60%	33.50%
	Upper secondary education	52.90%	45.20%	60.70%	33.90%	43.20%
	Post-secondary non-tertiary education	1.10%	1.70%	2.20%	1.60%	1.70%
	Tertiary education	4.20%	8.70%	3.20%	1.80%	3.60%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Urban	No education	1.30%	8.40%	8.00%	6.80%	6.80%
	Primary education	1.50%	2.80%	0.90%	7.90%	4.80%
	Lower secondary education	19.10%	10.60%	10.30%	18.70%	15.40%
	Upper secondary education	67.10%	43.30%	59.20%	52.90%	53.60%
	Post-secondary non-tertiary education	1.30%	4.20%	5.80%	6.00%	5.10%
	Tertiary education	9.80%	30.70%	15.80%	7.70%	14.20%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total	No education	1.00%	6.40%	5.30%	4.90%	4.90%
	Primary education	4.10%	4.70%	2.20%	15.00%	9.40%
	Lower secondary education	25.50%	19.20%	17.70%	25.80%	22.90%
	Upper secondary education	60.80%	44.00%	59.80%	44.90%	49.30%
	Post-secondary non-tertiary education	1.20%	3.30%	4.30%	4.10%	3.70%
	Tertiary education	7.30%	22.40%	10.60%	5.20%	9.80%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Eu-SILC Romania 2014

Table No. 2
Binomial logistic regression applied to individuals aging 25-34 years old who have graduated at least upper secondary education: Dependent variable = higher education (reference category: no higher education) (Nagelkerke R2: 0.121)

		Exp (B)	Sig.
Gender (reference = Male)	Female	1.307	0.000
Macro-region (reference = Macro-region 4 (SV+V))	Macro-region 1 (NV+C)	0.600	0.000
	Macro-region 2 (NE+SE)	0.572	0.000
	Macro-region 3 (S+BI)	0.409	0.000
Area of residence (reference = Urban)	Rural	0.262	0.000
Age (years)		0.932	0.000

Source: Eu-SILC Romania 2014

Table No. 3

Binomial logistic regression applied to individuals aging less than 25 years old who have graduated at least upper secondary education and who live with their parents: Dependent variable = graduate or enrolled in higher education (reference category: no higher education) (Nagelkerke R2: 0.116)

	Exp (B)	Sig.
Gender (reference = Male)		
Female	1.116	0.000
Macro-region (reference = Macro-region 4 (SV+V))		
Macro-region 1 (NV+C)	1.243	0.000
Macro-region 2 (NE+SE)	0.997	0.637
Macro-region 3 (S+BI)	0.934	0.000
Area of residence (reference = Urban)		
Rural	0.376	0.000
No. of years of education of the father	1.014	0.000
No. of years of education of the mother	1.102	0.000

Source: Eu-SILC Romania 2014