



# SPECIFIC FEATURES OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR MARKET IN ROMANIA AS COMPARED WITH OTHER SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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**Abstract:** *Using textual and contextual analyses method, this paper approaches first the labour market policies in the EU and Romania, then the efficiency of the Romanian National Employment Agency. With the comparative analysis method, the paper also investigates the performance of Romania's economy as compared with Bulgaria, Croatia and Greece's economies during 2007-2016, using indicators associated with population and social conditions. The labour market data reveals visible differences between the analysed countries. The paper concludes that, as compared with the other three countries, Romania has broadly a better performance on the labour market, but still the employment rate is below the Europe 2020 Strategy target. Romania is making limited and small progress to support the young people activation and to improve the labour market conditions, implementing measures with low impact. New tailored strategies and innovative approaches are necessary in order to support the young people integration into the labour market.*

**JEL classification:** E24 Employment; Unemployment; Wages; Intergenerational Income Distribution; Aggregate Human Capital; Aggregate Labour Productivity, Unemployment, and Vacancies; Public Policy, J080 Labour Economics Policies, J010 Labour Economics: General

**Key words:** Employment, Unemployment, Labour Market Policies, Labour Market Data

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The labour market challenges and the youth unemployment issue have become extremely important to the social system, and the European Union is making efforts to develop new tailored policies and directions to be used and to be followed by the Member States, to foster employment and economic growth. Based on the EU recommendations and directives, each



Member State of the EU develops its own social policy and creates its own welfare system, a system which is adapted for each country context, with different expenses and budgets. Because in every country the social, economic and political context is different and these countries are following different welfare regimes, it is impossible for the Member States of the EU to be associated with a single welfare regime (Dumitrache and Szeles, 2012).

Before the Industrial Revolution, the labour market challenges and the unemployment rate were not a Government issue, the concept of unemployment was not considered a problem, and it was each person's responsibility to facilitate its own insertion into the labour market. Over time, capitalism changed the perspective regarding the unemployment, from a problem which only concerned the individual choice to a societal problem, and the government needed to implement measures and actions to support the young people integration into the labour market (Colander, 1998). Raising employment, finding and implementing actions to reduce the unemployment became a government responsibility (Kiss, Coheci, 1993). Over time the government implemented a large amount of measures and policies, such as social protection programme, unemployment allowance, skills development programmes related to the labour market needs or minimum wage. Not all the measures can have a positive impact on the economy, for example the minimum wage can increase the unemployment (Gorry, 2013).

## **2. EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Employment always has been on the EU agenda. In 1992 the "European Strategy for Employment" was introduced, as part of the European Union Treaty, strategy that became a foundation for the next social policy developed by the EU regarding employment and labour market.

Through the "European Union Youth Strategy for 2010-2018" the Council of the EU invites the Member States and the Commission to develop initiatives that support the young people's integration into the labour market, including to support the young people transition from unemployment or inactivity to the labour market, and to foster employment and to promote entrepreneurship among young people (Council of the European Union, 2009).

The EU launched the "Europe 2020 Strategy" for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, a strategy that approaches directly the unemployment issues, establishing targets to be reached by all the Member States of the EU. Raising the employment rate is one of the targets - 75% of



20 to 64 years old men and women need to be employed until 2020 (Council of the European Union and European Commission, 2012).

The “Youth on the Move initiative”, was launched by the EU, being relevant to the labour market issues, and aims to link the key competences and the learning outcomes with the labour market needs, to enhance employability and support young people mobility for workplace-based training. This initiative, together with a framework of policy priorities, will be adopted at national and EU level in order to reduce unemployment (European Commission, 2010).

The EU also launched the “New Skills Agenda for Europe”, another initiative that focused on the development of the people’s competences and skills and their challenges, aiming to improve the quality and relevance of these competences and skills and to improve the modalities of choosing a career path through information and skills intelligence (European Commission, 2016).

The EU also implements “Youth Guarantee”, a program that, through the Member States of the EU, will create opportunities and measures to ensure that all young people aged under 25 years, who become unemployed or leave formal education in a period no longer than 4 months, can receive a good-quality job, continue education or benefit a traineeship or apprenticeship (Council of the European Union, 2013).

Through the “Quality Framework for Traineeships” measure, the EU established a set of principles to improve the quality of traineeships and to facilitate the transition from education or inactivity to work or from unemployment to the labour market (Council of the European Union, 2014).

### **3. THE LABOUR MARKET IN ROMANIA**

Romania officially recognizes the unemployment in 1991, and after 7 years the country founded the National Employment Agency (Agenția Națională pentru Ocuparea Forței de Muncă - ANOFM), now being responsible of offering services for jobseekers and employers, offering social protection, outplacement services, career guidance and professional counselling, business adviser and other services.

As the responsibilities grew, the expectations from the Employment Agency grew also, and the Council of the European Union recommends to adequately staff the Agency (Council Recommendations, 2015). ANOFM has low quality and coverage, insufficient institutional



capacity (European Commission, 2013), and an overall public service with no quality (European Commission, 2014). The institution is making limited progress in attracting vacancies and offering attractive services for employers and some of their implemented actions have low impact on the labour market participation (European Commission, 2016) and, even if Romania developed the procedures to provide tailored services for jobseekers, they were not implemented (Council Recommendations, 2016, revised).

Through “The National Reform Programme” Romania defines the measures to be implemented, in order to achieve the Europe 2020 targets and defines the country structural reforms. The European Commission examines the National Reform Programme and Convergence Programme for Romania each year, and through its assessments, the Commission highlights that the target to reach 70% of woman and men aged between 20-64-year-old being employed is ambitious to reach, (European Commission, 2013), and that the country made limited progress to improve the labour market participation (European Commission, 2014) and to improve the labour market conditions (European Commission, 2015).

#### **4. YOUNG PEOPLE AND LABOUR MARKET DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIA AS COMPARED WITH OTHER SOUTH EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**

The analysis uses statistical data from Eurostat database in order to analyse the labour market performance in Romania as compared with Bulgaria, Greece and Croatia. Many social and economic policies use demographic statistic data for planning, monitoring and evaluating the implemented measures. Nowadays the EU is facing demographic challenges - the population could be characterised mainly through low fertility and greater life expectancy. At the EU-27 countries level, the young population aged between 16-29 years old decreased from 95,794,328 to 87,915,034 during the 2006-2016 period. Over time, young population suffered important changes and, as in most of the EU countries, in Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Croatia the evolution of young population aged between 15-29 years old has decreased. As compared with other EU countries from South Eastern Europe, Romania has the highest young population, that decreased from 4,627,232 in 2007 to 3,520,009 to 2016, followed by Greece, Bulgaria and Croatia. In 2016 the young population from Romania was 4.76 times higher than the young population from Croatia. During 2007-2016 interval, the number of young people aged between 15-29 years old decreased in Greece from 2,198,998 to 1,686,525, in Bulgaria



from 1,524,745 to 1,169,398, and in Croatia from 834,836 to 739,397. During the years 2007-2016, Romania had the highest share of young people in total population, followed by Bulgaria, Greece and Croatia. Although the number of young people from Greece is higher than the number of young people from Bulgaria, the young population represents a higher share in Bulgaria. The ratio of the young people in total population during 2007-2016 decreased every year, from 21.9% to 17.8% in Romania, from 20.1% to 16.3%, in Bulgaria, from 19.9% to 15.6%, in Greece and from 19.4% to 17.6% in Croatia.

Over the years, not only there were changes regarding the number of young population level, but the percentage of young people by educational attainment level has changed also. In Romania, the percentage of young people having less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2, ISCED, International Standard Classification of Education, ISCED 2011) decreased from 42.0% in 2007 to 39.9% in 2009, increasing again in 2010 to 41.3%, and until 2016 the percentage was maintained broadly over 40%, reaching 41.4% in 2016. When compared with the other three countries, Romania has the highest rate, followed by Bulgaria, Greece and Croatia. The percentage of young people having less than primary, primary and lower secondary education decreased in 2016 as compared to 2007, from 43.2% to 34.5% in Bulgaria, from 36.4% to 30.1% in Greece and from 27.5% to 25.4% in Croatia. The situation is reversed when we analyse the percentage of young people attending tertiary education (level 5-8), in all four countries the percentage increased in 2016 as compared to 2007. Although the percentage increased in Romania from 8.2% to 11.3% during the 2007-2016 interval, the country has the lowest rate among the analysed countries, reaching its highest value in 2014 - 13.4%. The country with the biggest percentage of young people attending tertiary education is Greece, increasing its percentage from 14.1% in 2007 to 17.0% in 2016. One of the reasons why there are more young people that are following a tertiary education is that the economy context and the labour market have changed, demanding high skilled and qualified labour force. There are differences between the analysed countries regarding the young people attending upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (level 3 and 4): in the case of Romania and Croatia the percentage decreased during 2007-2016 and increased in the case of Bulgaria and Greece. In 2016 Romania recorded 47.3% - the lowest value of the analysed countries, followed by Bulgaria with 49.5%, Greece with 52.4% and Croatia with 58.2%.



In the period 2007-2016, the young population also changed its behaviour, Romania registering the lowest estimated average age of young people leaving the parental household, as compared with the other four countries, staying broadly over 28. In 2016, the young population from Croatia chose to leave their parental household on average at the age 31.5, the young population from Greece at the age 29.4 and from Greece at the age 29.1.

Even if the young people have jobs or live in a country with minimum wages policies, the people still can be at-risk-of-poverty. Based on the EU-SILC survey, the young population aged between 15-29 years from Romania in-work at-risk-of-poverty increased from 17.0% in 2007 to a provisional rate of 23.9% in 2016. Bulgaria is also struggling with this situation, the rate more than doubled from 5.0% in 2007 to 10.7% in 2016. In 2016 Croatia had 5.6% in-work-at-risk of poverty rate, 4.27 times lower than Romania. During the 2010-2013 period, Romania had significant more young people at risk of poverty as compared with the other South Eastern European countries: in 2013 Romania had 4.67 more young people at risk at poverty than Bulgaria, 2.16 times than Greece and 8.02 times than Croatia.

The youth employment rate has different values depending on the educational attainment level. The youth unemployment rate of young people aged between 15-29 years attending less than primary, primary and lower secondary education in Romania was 24.4% in 2007, remained broadly at 23% in 2008, 2009, 2011-2013, reaching the highest values in 2010 with 25.3%, 2014 with 24.5% and 2015 with 25.0%. The registered rate has the same value 24.0% in 2007 and 2016, because the percentage of young people in the same group age attending less than primary, primary and lower secondary education decreased, it means that even the values of the youth employment rate remain the same, there are more young people who are working. Compared with the other 3 countries, Romania is registering the highest values from 2011 until 2016. In 2016, Greece was registering a rate of 10.7%, Croatia 4.1% and Bulgaria 11%.

The youth unemployment rate of young people aged between 15-29 years attending upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education in Romania decreased in 2007 to 2008, from 47.6% to 46.4% although the percentage of young people following this type of education did not modify. Once the percentage of young people population who are attending upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education increased in 2009, the youth unemployment rate decreased to 44.3% and continued rising until 2015, reaching the highest value - 50.3% and decreasing to 48.4% in 2016, along with the augmentation of the young



people population. In Bulgaria and Croatia this rate evolved in the same direction, Bulgaria reaching the highest values in 2008, 57.8% and the lowest value in 2013, 44.4% and Croatia reaching the highest value of 55.1% in 2008 and the lowest in 2013, 38.6%. Greece evolved differently, reaching in the highest value in 2007, 43.4% and the lowest in 2013, 24.4%.

The youth employment rate of young people aged between 15-29 years old attending tertiary education in Romania progressively decreased from 2007 until 2014, from 82.7% to 67.0%, and started to grow back reaching 75.9% in 2015 and 77% in 2016. The variation of the youth unemployment rate coincided with the changes in the percentage of young people attending tertiary education, so when the employment rate decreased, the young population increased, and when the youth employment rate started to grow, the young population decreased. In 2016 Romania registered the highest rate from the analysed countries, 77%, followed by Bulgaria 73.2%, Croatia 63.6% and Greece 57%.

The youth employment rate of young people aged between 15-29 years old in Romania decreased from 40.5% in 2007 to 39.5% in 2009, along with the decreasing number of young population for the same category. The rate increased by 1.1% in 2010 and decreased again in 2011 to 39.9%, increased from 40.2% in 2012 to the highest value from the analysed period 43.1% in 2015, decreasing again in 2016 to 41.5%. Figure 1 show the evolution of youth employment rate for 15-29-year-old age category from Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Croatia. Since 2010 and until 2015, Romania has the highest employment rate, followed by Bulgaria, Croatia and Greece. The situation changes in 2016, when the employment rate from Croatia was with 1.8% higher that the employment rate from Bulgaria, but Romania maintained her position, having the highest employment rate. During the same period in all 4 countries the young population decreased, and the increasing of the employment rate can be a result of this decreasing and not necessary by creating new jobs.

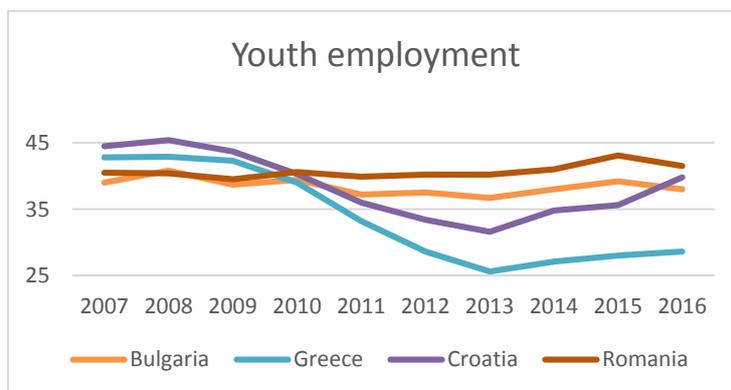


Fig. 1: Evolution of youth employment rate, young people aged between 15 – 29 years old - % (Data source: Eurostat database)

There are different types of possibilities to participate into the labour market. An important number of young people aged between 15 to 29 years old from Romania chooses to be self-employed, instead of finding a job, they create one for themselves. In 2007 in Romania, 227.4 thousand young people were self-employed, this number decreased until 2013, when only 148.6 thousand young people were self-employed, increased in 2014 to 158 thousand young people and in 2015 to 188.7 thousand people, but decreased again in 2016 to 167.3 thousand young people (Fig. 2). Even if the number of young people in Romania decrease from 2007 until 2016, it is above the number of young people that are self-employed in Bulgaria, Croatia and Greece. Croatia is the country with the lowest number of young population and has the lowest number of young people working for themselves. In 2016, compared to 2007, the number of young people self-employed decreased in all four countries, from 26.7 to 24.4 thousand people in Bulgaria, from 108.9 to 63.5 thousand people in Greece and from 29 to 1.9 thousand people in Croatia. The young population in Romania is 4.76 times higher than the young population in Croatia and has a young population self-employed 15.35 times higher.

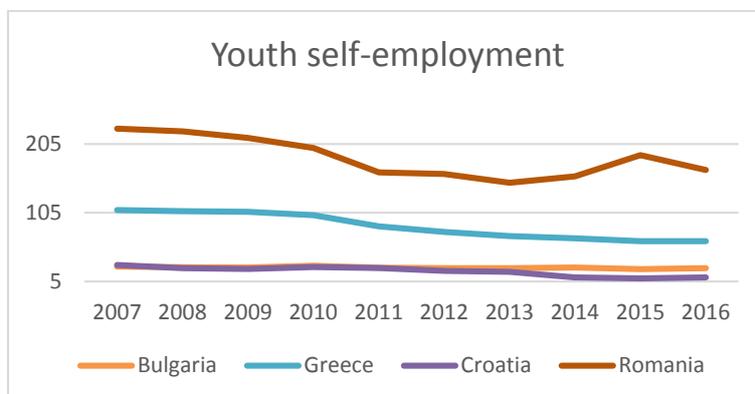


Figure 2: Evolution of youth self-employment, young people aged between 15 – 29 years old-thousand people (Data source: Eurostat database)

Part of the employees are occupying jobs that are temporary. Young temporary employees as percentage of the total number of employees, for 15-29 years old age category evolved differently in Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Croatia (Fig. 3). The percentage of the young temporary employees in total number of employees for age category 15-29 years from Romania is the lowest from the analysed countries, and increased from 2.9% in 2007 to 3.1% in 2016, the highest registered value was in 2014, 3.8%. Croatia has the highest rate, increasing its value from 28.6% in 2007 to 51.4% in 2016, reaching the highest values. In Greece, young temporary employees as percentage of the total number of employees also have increased during the analysed period, from 19.3 in 2007 to 22.3% in 2016, having the highest value in the same years as Romania, in 2014, 23.8%. After Romania, Bulgaria has the lowest young temporary employees as percentage of the total number of employees, reaching the lowest value in 2011, 5.6% and the highest value in 2013, with 9.7%. The evolution had the same tendency as the other 3 countries, increasing from 7.6% in 2007 to 8% in 2016.

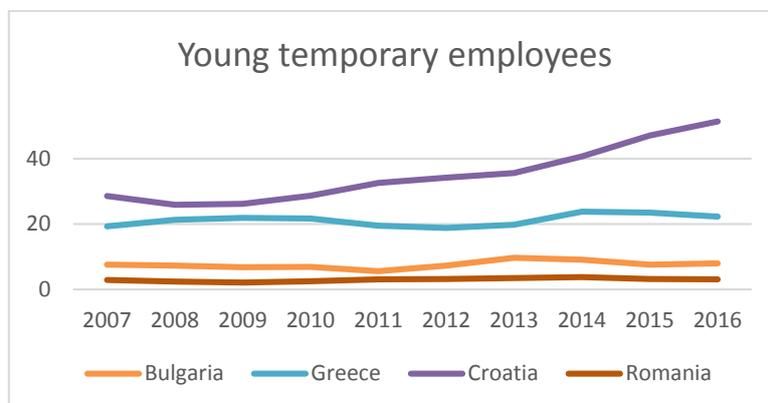


Fig. 3: Evolution of young temporary employees, young people aged between 15 – 29 years old - % (Data source: Eurostat database)

The insertion of the young people into the labour market can also be made through part-time contracts. The decision to have a part-time job can be voluntary or involuntary. The main reasons why the young people opt for part-time employment can be: they could not find a full-time job, their own illness or disability, other family or personal responsibilities, or they can be in education or training. In Romania, in 2016 compared to 2007, the part-time employment, as percentage of the total employment, decreased from 10.2% to 9.2% (Fig. 4). In the same time, the involuntary part-time employment, as percentage of the total employment, increased from 65.2% in 2007 to 69.8% in 2016, so even though the part-time employment decreased in 2016, there were more young people that occupied a part-time job involuntary. Romania reached the highest values of part-time employment as percentage of the total employment in 2011, with 11.8% from which 63.1% worked involuntary part-time, in 2014 with 10.5%, from which 72.7% worked involuntary part-time, as well as in 2012 and 2015 with 11.2%, when the involuntary part-time employment as percentage of the total part-time employment for young people was 68.6% in 2012 and 76.1% in 2015. During the analysed period, 2007-2016, the involuntary part-time employment as percentage of the total part-time employment for young people was more than 60% each year, that means that more than half of the young people that had part-time jobs did not want to occupy this kind of position. Compared with 2007, in 2016 the part-time employment as percentage of the total employment for young people 15-29 also increased for Greece, from 8.1% to 18.4%, in Bulgaria from 1.8% to 3.5% and Croatia from 5.1% to 7.4%.

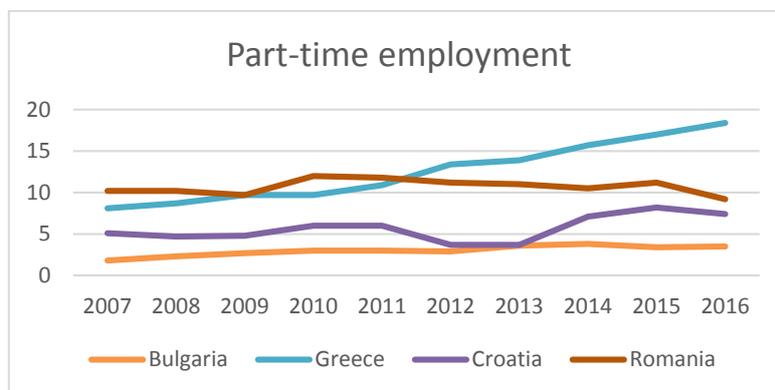


Fig. 4: Evolution of youth part-time employment rate, young people aged between 15 – 29 years old - % (Data source: Eurostat database)

Even if the size of the youth labour market force decreased, the major part of the EU member states need to create more jobs to accommodate the young population. The educational attainment level influences the number of young people facing unemployment. In Romania, the number of young people that attained less than primary and lower secondary education (level 0-2), decreased from 93.7 thousand in 2007 to 67.4 thousand in 2010, increasing again to 69.3 thousand in 2011, decreasing until 2013 to 59.6 thousand young people and increasing again until 2015 to 70.2 thousand people. In 2016 the number decreased to 59.2 thousand young people. Compared with the other 3 EU countries, overall Romania has more young people, unemployed young people that followed less than primary, primary and lower secondary education, in 2016 registering 59.2 thousand unemployed young people, followed by Greece with 41 thousand people, Bulgaria with 18.4 thousand young people and Croatia with a low liability number of 6.6 thousand young unemployed people. The young people who attained upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education in Romania decreased in 2016 to 133.1 thousand young unemployed people, compared to 2007, when Romania registered the highest value during 2007-2016, 177.7 thousand young people. If in 2007 Romania had the highest number of young people with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education, followed by Greece 97.1 thousand people, Croatia 58.6 thousand people and Bulgaria 39.9 thousand people, starting from 2012 the situation changed, and until 2016 Greece has the highest number of young people who attained upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education, 163.2 thousand in 2016, followed by Romania 133.1 thousand young people, Croatia 71.9 young people and Bulgaria 32.0 thousand people. During 2007-2016, Greece had the highest number of young people who attained tertiary education who are unemployed,

followed by Romania, Croatia and Bulgaria. Compared with 2007 the number of young people who attained tertiary education from Romania raised from 26.5 thousand people to 29.7 in 2016, having the highest number in 2014, 61.3 thousand people and 2013 with 55.9 thousand people.

The unemployment situation affects young people across Europe. The evolution of the of youth unemployment rate, young people aged between 15 – 29 years old were the same in Bulgaria, Greece and Croatia (Fig. 5). Even if the young population decreased, from 2007 until 2008 the youth unemployment rate decreased in Romania from 12.9% to 11.8%, in Bulgaria from 11% to 9.4%, in Greece from 17.9% to 16.8% and in Croatia from 18.1% to 15.9%. The rate starts growing from 2009 until 2013, when reaches the highest values: 21.7% in Bulgaria, 48.6% in Greece and 33.5% in Croatia. In Romania the rate maintained broadly at 15% during 2011-2014. After 2013, the rate decreased for all four countries, in 2016 Greece is having the highest unemployment rate, 38.3%, followed by Croatia 24.4%, Romania, 13.1% and Bulgaria 12.2%.

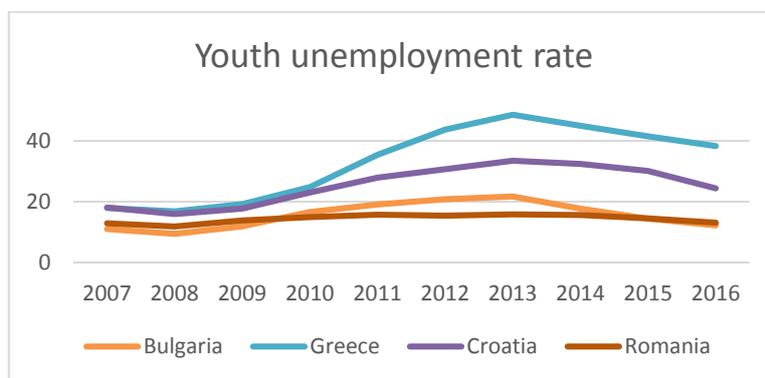


Figure 5: Evolution of youth unemployment rate, young people aged between 15 – 29 years old - % (Data source: Eurostat database)

In Romania, there are major differences between the youth unemployment and the adult unemployment, the young people being more affected by the unemployment than the adults. One of the reasons can be the high minimum wages, that a firm is not willing to pay for the work of a young people, that is at the beginning of his career, without experience and expertise. The firm is rather hiring an adult with experience and pay him the same wage, and have a better productivity. The minimum wage increased in Romania, from 500 lei in the first Semester of 2007 to 1450 lei in the second semester of 2016. From 2008 until 2011 the youth unemployment increased, the same as the minimum wage in Romania, during 2011-2014. In 2015 and 2016



youth unemployment decreased, even if the minimum wage increase, but the in same time the young population decreased.

Long term unemployment affects differently man and woman, and there are still gaps between the female long-term unemployment rate and male long-term unemployment rate. During 2007-2016 period in Romania, there were more young man aged between 15-29 years old that were in long-term unemployment than young woman within the same age group. The female youth long-term unemployment rate registered a value of 5.8% in 2007, decreasing until 2009 to 3.4%, increasing until 2013 to 6.6%, decreasing again in 2014 to 5.4% and start increasing again to 6% until 2016. The male youth long-term unemployment rate decreased from 6.8% in 2007 to 4.8% in 2009, increased until 2012, reaching the highest value 7%, and start decreasing again, reaching 6.2% in 2016. During 2007-2017 the female and male young people from Bulgaria, Greece and Croatia were affected differently. In Bulgaria, in 2007, 2011 and 2012 the where more females than males in long-term unemployment, reaching the highest value of 10.0% in 2013 and the lowest values in 2008, 3.5%. The situation is reversed during 2008-2010 and 2013-2016, when there were more men than women in long term unemployment, registering the highest value in 2012, 11.8% and the lowest value in 2009, 4.3%. Except 2007 and 2010, in Greece, during 2007-2016 the women were more affected by the long-term unemployment than men, reaching the highest female long-term unemployment rate of 31.4% in 2014 and the lowest female long-term unemployment rate of 9% in 2009. The highest male long-term unemployment rate in Greece was registered in 2014, reaching a value of 27.6% and the lowest value in 2008 and 2009, reaching 4.4%. Very similar with the situation from Romania, except one year, in 2008, during 2007-2016 period the male from Croatia where more affected by the long-term unemployment than woman. The highest long-term unemployment rates were recorded in 2012 for woman, 17.0% and in 2014 for man, 27.6%, and on the opposite side, the lowest values for woman, in 2016, 9.5% and 2009 with 9.8% and 6.3% in 2008. The young long-term unemployment rate registered lower values during the economic expansion 2007-2009 and the highest values after the economic crisis.

Analysing the youth long term unemployment ratio, for young people aged between 15 – 29 years old we observe that, in Romania, the rate maintains broadly at 7% during 2010-2015. Compared to 2007 in 2016, the rate increased from 6% to 6.3%. In 2016 the highest youth long-

term unemployment ratio was in Greece, with 17.8%, Croatia with 13%, Romania, and followed by Bulgaria with 5.3% (Fig. 6).

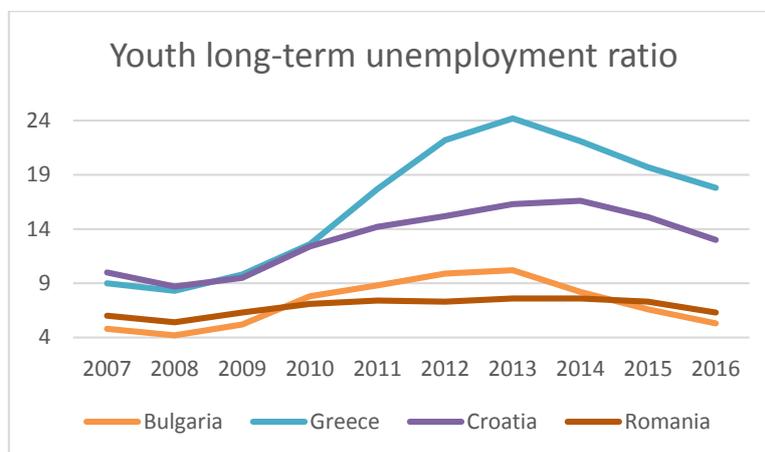


Fig. 6: Evolution of youth long-term unemployment ratio, young people aged between 15 – 29 years old - % (Data source: Eurostat database)

## CONCLUSIONS

The EU is making significant efforts to raise the employment and to offer high-quality services for the young population, offering them different opportunities to develop their skills and facilitate their transition from education, unemployment and inactivity into the labour market.

Romania is also making efforts to reduce unemployment, and even though the analysed indicators during 2007-2017 improved, according to the European Commission assessment, Romania registered limited progress in improving the labour market participation and conditions and the implemented measures had limited impact. The National Employment Strategy, one of the most important institution addressing labour market issues, still needs to be adequately staffed and to improve the institutional capacity and coverage.

Based on the analysed indicators during the period 2007-2017, Romania, as compared with the other three EU countries from South Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Croatia and Greece), has broadly a better performance on the labour market for the young population in the age category 15-29 years, reaching in 2016 the highest youth employment rate, the highest youth self-employment rate and the lowest young temporary employees rate as percentage of the total number of employees. Even though it had not the lowest unemployment rate, there is only a 1.1% difference as compared with Bulgaria, the country that has the lowest rate, and a 0.7%



difference for the youth long-term unemployment ration as compared also with Bulgaria, which has the lowest rate.

Future research needs to consider also the migration indicators and the impact of the social policies, unemployment and employment on the economic growth.

**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND PLAGIARISM:** I, Gabriela Rimbu declare that the paper has no conflict of interest and plagiarism.

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