

LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE PEOPLE INHABITING RURAL AREAS

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This study is a diagnosis of the living conditions of the people inhabiting rural areas. It approaches three fundamental domains: dwelling, incomes and consumption and it concludes analysing the self-perception of the conditions of living of the concerned population. The survey reveals the critical state of the living conditions in rural areas, which requires a sizeable practical intervention able to improve largely the conditions of living of the population inhabiting rural areas.

As shown by several European surveys, compared to the EU, Romania ranks last or before last for many indicators concerning the living conditions of the population, the situation in the rural areas accounting for much of the adverse situation of our country (Alber, Jens, Tony, Fahey *Perception of Living Condition in an Enlarged Europe*, Foundation for Living and Working Conditions Improvement, Luxembourg, 2004). On the other hand, I consider necessarily a better management of the high risk situations confronting the population from the rural areas, such as draught and floods. If this year the villagers suffered a lot due to floods, a prolonged draught affected many rural areas during the past years.

Several things have to be said, though, before the actual presentation. The rural population of over 10 million accounts for almost half of the total population (47% of the 21.7 million as shown by the *Census of population and houses, March 18, 2002*, NSI, 2003). 44% of the Romanian households are in the rural; many of these households are cultivating the land or growing livestock (*Living conditions of the Romanian population*, NSI, 2004).

I will not debate here and now the definition of the rural area but, nevertheless, I will consider it an *area of inhabiting and of activities under natural conditions, in open space*, unlike the built area, specific to the urban area. Neither will I question the rigorous character of the criteria defining the difference between the two type of human habitat; it is obvious, however, that there are multiple interferences and gradual transitions from the urban centre, multifunctional by excellence, to the actual village where crops are grown and the various sources of the soil / subsoil are used. This delimitation does not concern so much the different levels of technical facilities, of infrastructure development, of household equipping with various facilities and access to public utilities (although this differentiation exists in the case of Romania), as it concerns the elements composing the way of life and activity specific to one collective or another. The fall back of the rural areas as technical facilities has a multiple historical causality. In the developed societies, however, the living conditions in villages are so close to those of towns that the traditional perception of the rural, as a poorly developed area, has become void of significance. Some areas external to urban centres often provide similar or even better conditions than in towns. This level of comfort is characteristic, so far,