

TOWARDS ACTIVE AGEING IN ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT: *The paper analyses the active ageing in Romania as a potential solution within current demographic context. The paper is structured in three parts analyzing: introduction, the complex process of ageing, the social assistance for vulnerable elderly, and active ageing, and conclusions. From the methodological point of view, the paper is based on literature review and secondary analysis of two data bases: UN population division, and National Institute of Statistics. Conclusions emphasizes the key role played by active ageing in efficiently facing current demographic challenges.*

Keywords: *demography, elderly, active ageing, Romania,*

JEL Classification: *I31, I38, J14, J18*

1. INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, demographic ageing is mainly caused by three inter-linked factors: decrease fertility, massive migration, and reduced mortality of elderly (Rotaru, 1993, p. 319, Stăiculescu, 2002, p. 398) among which the fertility aspect is assessed as being of a key impact. Recent fertility global trends emphasize the general tendency of women at childbearing age to increasingly postpone the time when first child would arrive. Among various personal and interpersonal challenges linked to this situation, we mention: the opportunity of building a solid career path, or accessing an affordable house or a reliable health system. Pro fertility social policies design also plays a crucial role when deciding to become a parent. Increased public attention is paid by various stakeholders on one hand to increase fertility, and on the other hand to protect elderly, especially the vulnerable ones in need of specific long-term care. At the same time, the current conflicts are no longer between various social classes, but rather between different generations. Practically, the proportion of elderly including retired people is higher than the ones active on the labour market (Ghețău, 2011, 876). Such demographic imbalance

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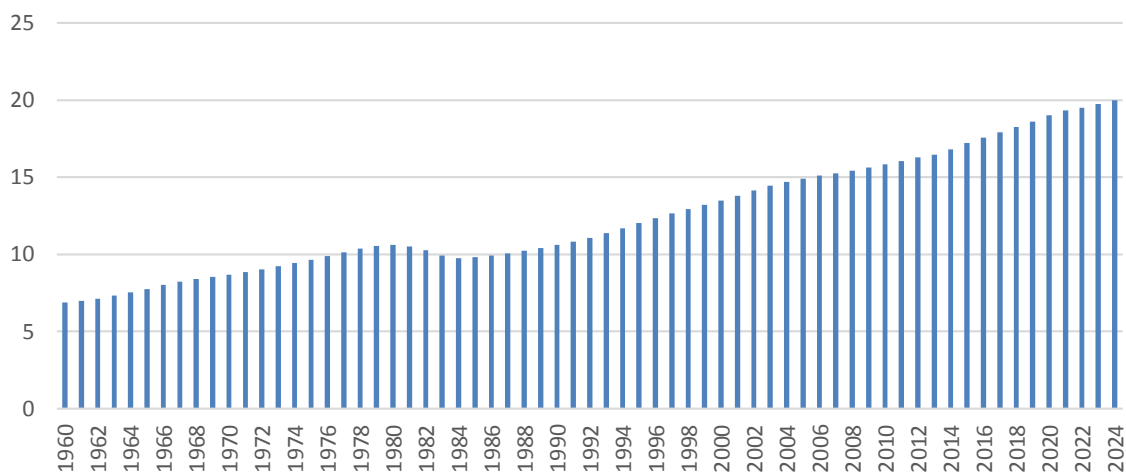
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raises a series of questions to the capability of the social policy to efficiency support it on the lung run.

2. AGEING IN ROMANIA

Taking a close look at the population aged 65 and above as the share of the total population in Romania, one can notice a constant growing trend starting with 1960 (when it has represented 7% of the total population) till 2024 (20% of the total population). The only exception to this demographic trend is represented by the period starting with the year 1981 (10.5% of the total population) till 1984 (9.75% of the total population). For more details, please see the figure bellow.

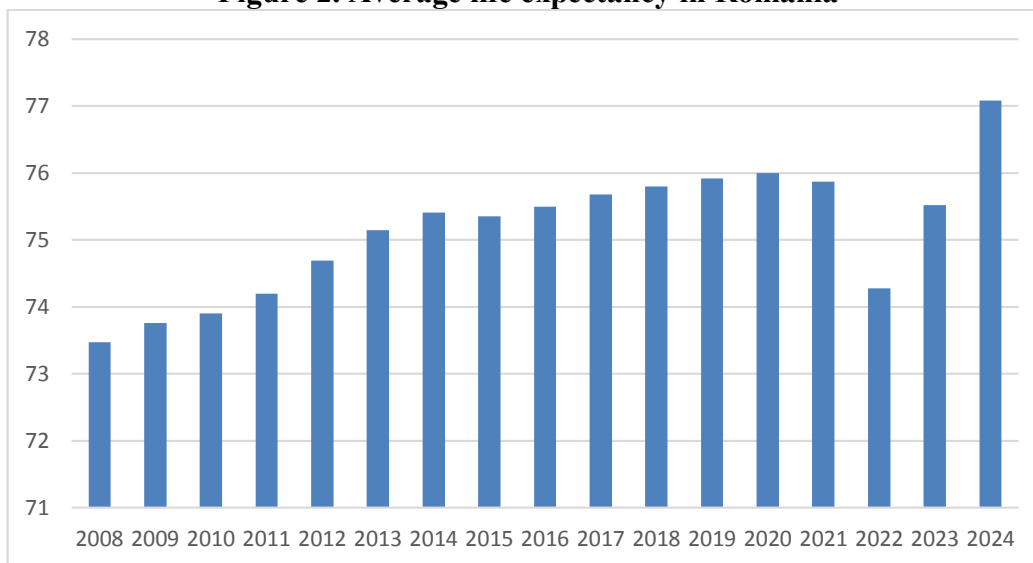
Figure 1 Population ages 65 and above (% of total population) in Romania



Source: UN Population division <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.65UP.TO.ZS>

The public policy impact of the fact that a fifth part of the 2024 total population is represented by the people aged 65 and above is directly reflected on the pression on the social insurance system, mainly the pensions zone as well as the socio-medical services. In other words, less and less people are actively contributing to the labour market, while the number of elderly at the age of potential retirement is constantly increasing. This subject is even more nuanced approached in Romania due to possibility to earlier retirement for certain professional categories doubled by their possibility to continue working in either public or private organizations while still receiving the public pension. Cumulation of income and pension is subject of current political debates towards its ban but momentarily it is still possible. In this respect, we consider that specific research in the field is more than necessary and welcome in order to support based-evidence social policies. Besides demographic predictions, supporting fertility policies would also benefit from a better scientific understanding of the current dynamic on the labour market in Romania.

The analyze of average life expectancy in Romania highlights a constant increase since 2008 with some variations in the years of 2015, 2021, and 2022 as it can be seen bellow. Besides, in the average life expectancy in 2008 was 73.47 while in 2024 increased to 77 years.

Figure 2. Average life expectancy in Romania

Source: National Institute of Statistics Tempo database

When explaining the increase of average life expectancy in Romania, various reasons are involved including more individual attention paid to promoting a healthier life style, modernization and accessibility of medical facilities (still confronting challenges in rural areas). Besides, the access to modern technology and communication opportunities support a better globalized exchange of specific information on how to age healthier.

3. SOCIAL ASSISTANCE OF VULNERABLE ELDERLY IN ROMANIA

General regulations with direct impact on elderly are represented by the three adopted Laws on the national system of social assistance: 705/ 2001, 46/ 2006, and 292/ 2011. The latest define elderly as persons above 65 years.

Specific legal framework is represented by the Law 7/ 2000 on the social assistance of elderly with its subsequent modifications. Eligibility criteria for becoming a potential beneficiary of the social assistance system include the lack of a family or legal carers, lack of a house, lack of an income or even insufficient one. Besides, other criteria refer to the personal incapacity to manage on their own, request for specialized care of if the potential beneficiary is unable to provide for their socio-medical needs due to illness or physical or mental condition (Art. 3 a, b, c, d, e).

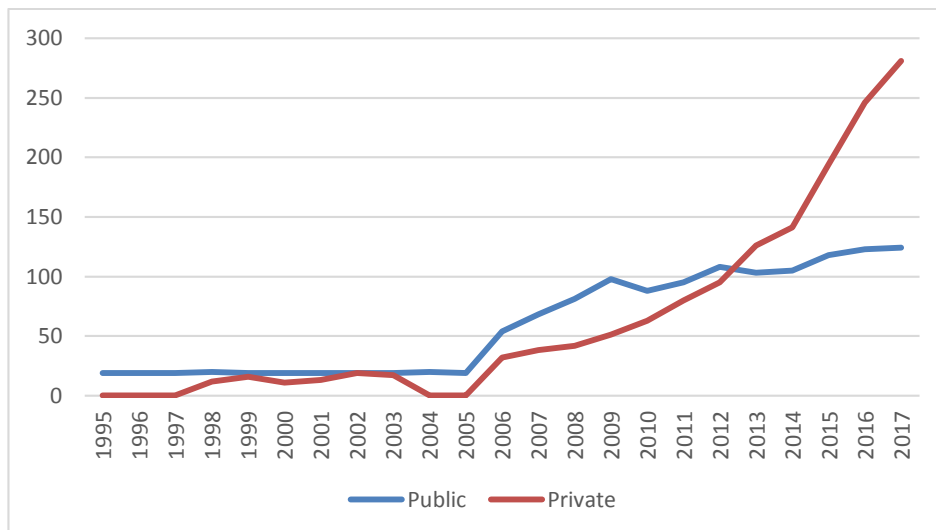
The 2015 – 2020 National Strategy for the Promotion of Active Ageing and the Protection of the Elderly has included among its objectives: prolonging and improving the quality of active life of older people; promoting active and dignified social participation of older people; and achieving greater independence and security for older people with long-term care needs. Besides, cross-cutting objectives for achieving a longer and healthier life include: delaying physical aging and the onset of chronic diseases; as well as preparing the health system for services provided to the elderly population. The National Strategy on Long-Term Care and Active Aging for the period 2023-2030 currently in force is focus on promoting active ageing in Romania.

As the social assistance of elderly includes provision of social services, and social benefits, we dedicate the current part of the paper to nursing houses due to their capacity to promptly respond to urgent long-term care of vulnerable elderly.

Comparison between evolution of the total number of public nursing homes and the private ones is included in the figure bellow for the time interval 1995-2017 in line with the

National Institute of Statistics data set. While the beginning of private nursing homes was rather slowly developing, the 2017 situation shows a more than double number of the private ones compared to the public ones.

Figure 3 Public and private nursing homes in Romania

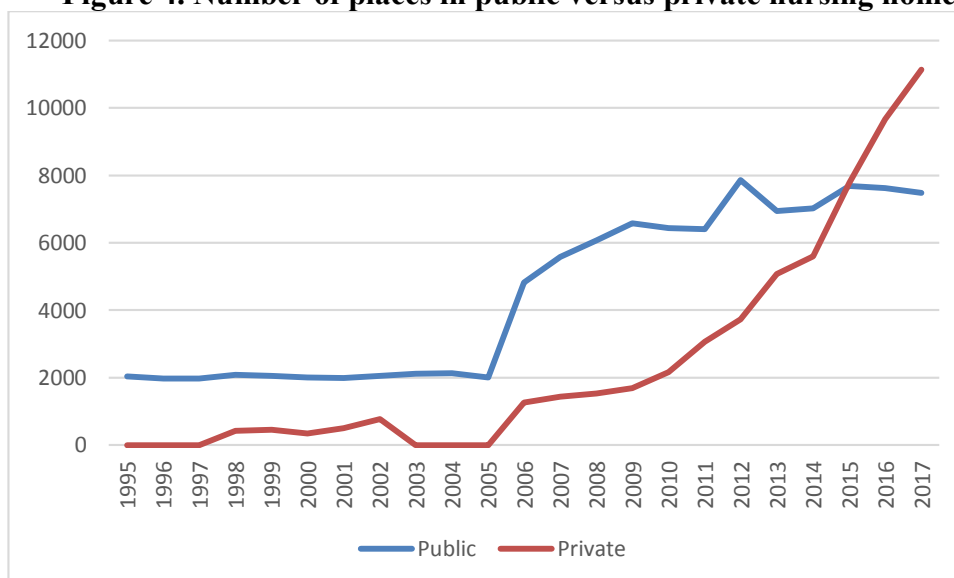


Source: National Institute of Statistics Tempo database

Follow up research taking into account the affordability of their prices and their accessibility especially in rural areas, would offer a more comprehensive picture on the capacity of vulnerable elderly to benefit of the private nursing homes.

The comparison of the total number of places in these nursing homes also reflect a better accommodation capacity in the case of the private ones in 2017 as shown in the figure bellow.

Figure 4. Number of places in public versus private nursing homes

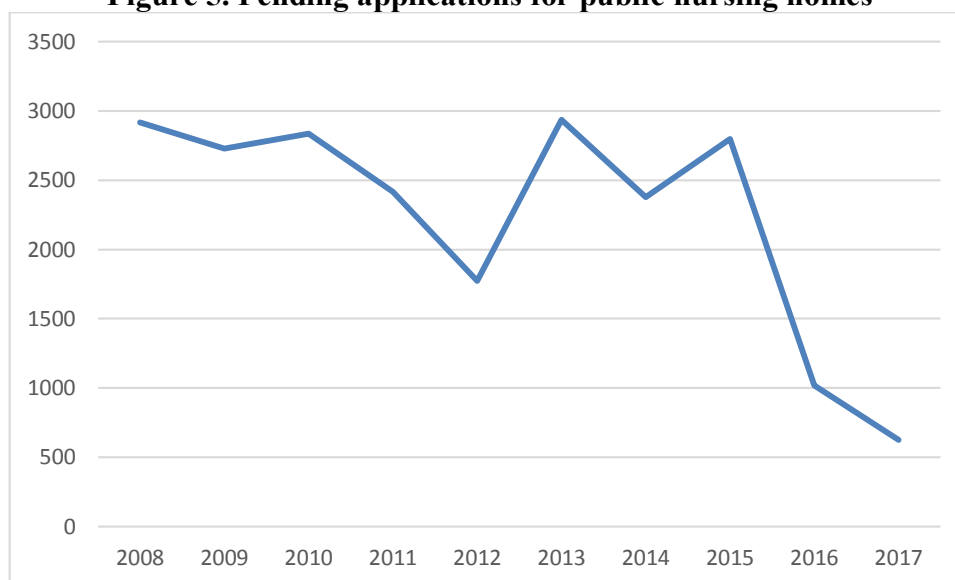


Source: National Institute of Statistics Tempo database

Another sensitive issue when approaching the subject of nursing homes is represented by the total number of pending applications as it is shown in figure 5 bellow. Their number substantially decreased in 2017 compared with 2008 but fluctuations were registered during

the time. Reasons behind this situation can be linked with potentially not affordable costs for the private nursing houses compared to the public ones.

Figure 5. Pending applications for public nursing homes



Source: National Institute of Statistics Tempo database

A research focus on the impact of 2007-2013 EU funds on the development of public social services for elderly showed their prevalence in urban areas (Stănculescu, Marin 2019). Increase absorption of available of EU funds crucially depends on the information and education of public stakeholders in writing such application, and monitoring their implementation.

The need to long term care of the ones in need in Romania, especially the elderly is confronted with a massive migration of the medical staff. Besides, high socio-economic vulnerability of informal carers for elderly is doubled by their massive migration namely in other EU member states. A qualitative sociological research focus on Romanian and Moldavian informal carers in Italy pointed out the impact of highly intensive 24/7 specific work on their psychical and mental state (Țoc, Guțu, 2021). This happens in the conditions of no psychological support is provided for personal care givers.

4. ACTIVE AGEING

While failing in adopting efficient social policies for vulnerable elderly would directly impact their quality of life (Stănescu, 2018), active ageing represents a real underexploited gold mine.

Active ageing was defined as "the continued participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic activities, not merely the ability to be physically active or to participate in the labor market" (World Health Organization, 2002). Complementary concepts developed during the time were: successful aging (Venn and Arber 2011), productive aging (Hank, 2011), and healthy aging (Hung et al. 2010).

Social exclusion is associated with four interconnected domains: social relationships, material resources, services, and neighborhood/ social life (WHO, 2012). In this respect, the mental health of older people depends on their social inclusion (Precupețu, Aartsen, Vasile, 2019). Furthermore, within contemporary context "the loneliness paradox was named because of the counter-intuitive finding that the loneliest older people live in countries where there are

high rates of co-residence and large, proximate networks” (Aartsen, Precupețu, Suanet, 2025, vi).

Various risks confronted by elderly request for setting up social policy adequate responses towards their specific support and protection as well as maintaining their decent life (Bogdan, 2002, 131).

A successful ageing is characterized by a minimum psychical deterioration caused by promotion of a healthy life style in terms of sport, diet, as well as social and intellectual stimulation (Curaj, 2010, 293). Additional factors of active *papy-boomers* are linked to increased levels of education, wealth, and health, more active roles in both consumer society (including technology and the digital world), and possibilities of leisure time (Segalen, 2011, p. 227).

5. CONCLUSIONS

One step forward in promoting a successful ageing is represented by a national public attention towards health education in terms of raising information and communication specific campaigns and programs. Besides, the design of a 2050 national strategy on population in line with sustainable development goals should further focus on:” improving health, decrease of mortality, increase of life expectancy at birth” (Alexandrescu, Istrate, 2021, p. 123) towards demographic recovery. Besides, support towards active aging is conditional on participation in the labor market, which maintains life satisfaction and happiness (Ramia, Voicu, 2020)

A paradigm shift should envisage the structural change from deficit, decline, disability, and dependence to well-being, activity, and independence (Precupețu, Aartsen, Vasile, 2019). Support of active ageing in Romania could be based on: a most detailed scientific knowledge regarding the situation of the elderly, implementation of social inclusion strategies for elderly, increasing the degree of access to basic services (medical, social assistance), and a better focus on the rural areas and marginalized communities including elderly.

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