

Ageing Population Related Phenomena: the Workforce Ageing, Active Ageing and Strategic Actions

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Abstract

Demographic ageing is followed by a multitude of phenomena and processes that determine changes in the population structure, in the economic sector and in the workforce, justifying the public policies and strategies need. The present study explores issues regarding the workforce ageing, active ageing and active ageing at work from a statistical perspective and also by the strategies adopted. By studying the Romania case, the demographic evolution, the exploration of the dynamics of the workforce ageing phenomenon and the public reactions (national strategy) are highlighted. The study is useful for those who ask themselves questions regarding the workforce active ageing, those who want to delve deeper into this issue, employers who are faced with the workforce ageing and people involved in the development of policies and strategies regarding the professional life of older employees.

Keywords: *Population ageing; active ageing; workforce ageing; workplace active ageing; active ageing strategies;*

1. Introduction

The old age represents both an individual condition and a stage of life (Losii, 2018, p. 17; Giddens, 2001, pp. 147-149), as well as a social issue for which governments propose strategies regarding active ageing (Márquez-López, 2023, p. 6; Giddens, 2001, pp. 147-150), especially in the context of the increasing phenomena of ageing population, recorded in European countries.

The present study, based on a theoretical approach, analyzes the concepts of *population ageing* and *active ageing of the labor force* in Romania, as reflected in the specialized literature, reports analyzing the phenomena, strategies developed by the Romanian state, and official statistical data.

Our goal is to provide a social perspective picture, regarding the active ageing phenomena in Romania, framing it in the European context. The approach includes: highlighting the relevance of the topic at a social level, both in Romania and Europe; defining the *population ageing* concept and *workforce ageing; active ageing* and *active ageing at work*; visions reflected in the specialized literature; description of actions at the European community level; statistical analysis of the active ageing population

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(over 55 years old); public and civil society strategies correlated with active ageing in Romania.

2. The relevance of the ageing issue in Romania and Europe

The demographic aspects that Romania is facing, such as: demographic decline (a consequence of negative natural growth and the young people and active workforce migration), population ageing (also highlighted by the median age increase), the dependency rates and regional disparities rising, as well as other external factors (Covid-19 pandemic, Russia's aggression against Ukraine) that determine the life expectancy decrease and migration flows that influence the population structure (Ciucă et al, 2024, p. 15-16) justifies the analyses of the phenomenon need and its societal level impact.

In 2018, in Romania, the population aged 55-64 years was employed at a 46.3% rate, the lowest value compared to Eastern European countries (Bulgaria – 60.7%, Czech Republic – 65.1%, Hungary 54.4%, Poland – 48.9% and Slovakia – 54.2%); among European countries, the state with the highest labor participation of the population aged over 55 years was Sweden, with 77.9% (Mihart, 2019, p. 122).

At the same time, the life expectancy increase is not accompanied by an increase of working life duration, and even 50% of those aged between 55 and 65 years are either inactive or retired; professional inactivity is associated with low digital skills and competitiveness on the labor market, discrimination and impaired health (Duminică & Hosszu, 2020, p. 5).

3. Defining the concepts of population ageing and workforce ageing; active ageing and active ageing at work;

3.1. Definition

The concept of active ageing of the population was advanced by the Health Organization World, emphasizing the broaden perspectives on old age need, and to maintain the participation of the elderly in the society life in all the social, cultural, spiritual and economic spheres (Apostoiu, 2015, p. 14). Marina & Ionaș shows that this concept has its gerontological theories origins (e.g., disengagement theory, according to which the involvement of the elderly in activities decreases) developed by Cumming and Henry, in Townsend's dependency theory, which highlight the isolation of the elderly generated by social constraints (2012, p. 83). The active ageing concept was developed in the contemporary period, reflecting the social perception change in the life course, with older people no longer considered a burden on society, but rather as a high potential social group in the socio-professional society area.

Starting from the active ageing pillars highlighted by the Health Organization World - namely, social inclusion, health and safety - the phenomena of ageing societies is seen as a determinant of radical changes in the perception of older people, the way they live their lives, but also in the social and cultural life needs, recreation, health, economic life and many others, it being expected that the mission of active ageing will also be fulfilled by seniors (Przybysz & Stanimir, 2023, p. 3).

The *ageing workforce* notion, although often used, does not have an explicit definition in the statistical and/or sociological literature. The concept of the *workforce* was analyzed by Marx & Engels; they state that in the production process (the production of a mass of products) a mass of workforce is required, represented by a number of workers (1969, p. 148). Currently, the labor force is considered to be the economically active and productive population—both those who are employed and those who are looking for work (Johnson, 2007, p. 166). Considering the concept of labor force synonymous with the *working-age population*, we invoke the INS definition: "people aged 15-64 years" (INS, 2024, p. 11). The only reference to the labor force notion in the mentioned statistical document is to the *additional potential labor force* (representing the sum of two categories: "inactive persons looking for a job, but not available to start work" and "inactive persons not looking for a job, but available to start work" (INS, 2024, p. 15).

We propose a definition for the concept of the ageing workforce: this represents all working - age people in the second part of the active age period, namely over 55 years old.

The labor force ageing is a phenomena or process characterized by a high share of the ageing workforce in the total labor force, produced against the background of the population ageing process.

The *active ageing at work* concept embrace issues related to employees over 55 years old and sets of measures that can be taken by employers in relation to these employees. For employers, age management at work is a challenge – some Romanian organizations have developed procedures regarding inter - generational management of employees, others have not, and attitudes towards employees of different ages are varied (Duminică & Hosszu, 2020 p. 202-203).

3.2. Visions reflected in the specialized literature

Although it seemed that the elderly would be invisible in a society oriented towards youth, recent years are marked by a reconsideration of attitudes towards old age; activist groups fight against *ageism* (Giddens, 2001, p. 149), and the european community is concerned with the analysis of ageing and the construction of strategies focused on the ageing population and the extension of active life (Bălașa, 2005).

The ageing issue has led to the theories on ageing development. Ciornei provides a synthesis of these, including: Havighurst's activity theory (1961), disappointment theory developed by Cumming & Henry (1961), continuity theory (Atchley, 1989), and critical and feminist perspectives. The author emphasizes the multiple dimensions of ageing: biological, genetic, lifestyle, social context, meanings, and the psychological dimension (2025, pp. 24-32).

Márquez-López demonstrates that people who actively participate in the labor market have better physical and mental health. Self-employment (entrepreneurship) is a viable alternative to early retirement, allowing people older to be active and healthy. The author argues that authorities should provide programs that support entrepreneurship and, at the same time, promote the long-term adult learning idea and encourage people to pursue higher education (this being correlated with

increased living conditions) and investment in health. These require investment in European public policies (2023, pp. 28-29).

4. Actions related to the workforce ageing

At the European Community level, statistical data from recent years reveal that the European population is aging, and therefore the age of the working-age population is also increasing. The European population aged over 65 years (late adulthood) has increased since 2001, when it accounted for 20% of the total population, reaching 23% in 2020 (INSa). At the beginning of 2020, there were 219 million men and 229 million women in Europe (INSa).

In order to build policies on the active ageing of the European population, the European Commission carries out diagnoses using the Active Ageing Index (AAI) structured in four areas related to active ageing: "1) employment, 2) social participation, 3) an independent, healthy and safe life, 4) the capacity and environment that enable active ageing." (Banca Mondială, 2014, p. 7).

Concerned about keeping older people active, the European Commission has developed an electronic platform called EPALE, which aims to support adult learning in Europe. The electronic platform enables the socio - professional development of older adults, bringing together, in order to serve common goals and objectives, multiple communities, partners, groups and organisations that support adult development and learning. The founders of the platform perceive active ageing as "the capacity of individuals to lead an active and productive life, both socially and economically, despite the passage of time." (EPALE, f.d.). Grouping adults with a common purpose allows them to get involved in cultural, educational, political and professional activities, which contributes to maintaining practical and mental skills in the long term.

In Romania, public documents analyze the issues that Romania is facing, namely the labor shortage (especially in some activity sectors, demographic decline and the aging of the labor force) (Piața muncii..., 2019, p. 299). In the future, it is estimated that the active population will decrease by approximately 15%, with activity rates for the 55-64 and 65-74 age groups set to increase, while employment rates for the 20-64 age group will remain at best constant (Ciucă et al, 2025, p. 16).

Although modest at the moment, attempts to keep older people in work seem to be developing. With the adoption of the new pension law, Legea nr. 360/2024 [Law no. 360/2024], the retirement age for both women and men is 65 years, with the possibility of continuing work until the age of 70, without receiving a pension (Art. 46, letter (2) and Art. 47, letter (1)). In order to put the new legislation provisions into practice, employers could offer older employees opportunities to remain in work until the age of 70, while ensuring diversity in human resources practices, while supporting an environment work appropriate to the age of employees.

5. Analysis of the statistical situation of the active population over 55 years old in Romania

We will have as reference the period 2013-2023, because the statistical data of the National Institute of Statistics (INS) provides information structured by age of the

employed population for this time interval. Statistically, the total population with employee status registered an increase in the period 2013-2024, an aspect reflected in table 1 (columns 2,3,4).

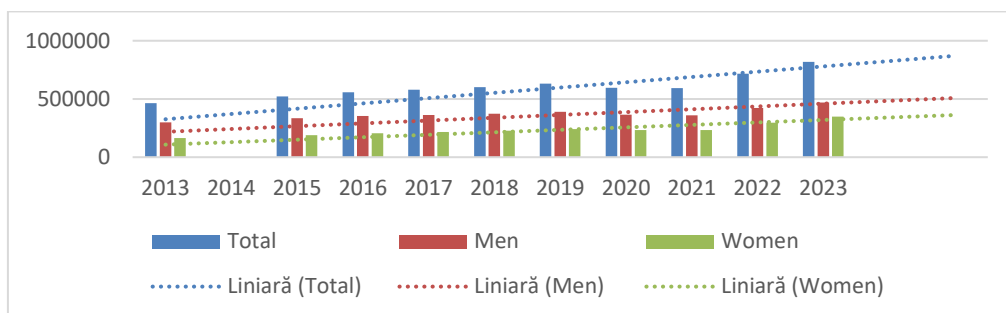
Table 1. Number of people who were listed as employees in Romania (distribution by gender)

Year	The total number of employees			Of which: employees over 55 years old, with full working hours, paid full salary in October		Share of 55 years old + employee in total employees **	
	Men	Women	Total number	Number of men	Number of women	Total number	%
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2013	2527658	2273446	4801104	299495	163107	462602	9,63
2014	2572102	2328582	4900684	_*	_*	_*	_*
2015	2653507	2387679	5041186	333549	187993	521542	10.34
2016	2744962	2478805	5223767	352899	205482	558381	10.68
2017	2804590	2557756	5362346	363103	216074	579177	10.80
2018	2837523	2588749	5426272	374549	227045	601594	11.08
2019	2841193	2639950	5481143	389370	241954	631324	11.51
2020	2819995	2591114	5411109	363921	231888	595809	11.01
2021	2864050	2652341	5516391	358399	234293	592692	10.74
2022	2890906	2716239	5607145	422088	296084	718172	12.80
2023	2924534	2752781	5677315	469629	348404	818033	14.40
2024	2992708	2760250	5752958	_*	_*	_*	_*

Source: INS - FOM105G - Number of employees at the end of the year, by employee categories, forms of ownership, activities (sections and divisions) of the national economy CAEN Rev. 2 and by gender, accessed 06.11.2025; * - missing data; ** - values obtained by calculation by the authors.

In the absence of the age distribution information of the total number of employees (regardless of the economic sector), we will refer to the data on the number of employees with a full working schedule who were paid in full in October, during the reference period.

The active population share over 55 years of age is increasing, being 12.8% in 2022 and 14.40% in 2023. The evolution of the total population statistically registered in Romania as full - time employees, paid their full salary in October, during the reference period, is reflected in Figure 1, with its general increase being visible, except for the 2021-2022 years which correspond to the Covid-19 pandemic.



Graph 1. Employees aged 55 and over dynamics, with full working hours, payments in October, during 2013-2023 (Source: INS, extracted from the generated report FOM121B - Number of full-time employees who were paid the entire month, gross basic salary and gross income earned in October, by age group, major occupational group (ISCO-08) and gender. Accessed on 05.11.2025. Note: no data are available for 2014.)

We find that the male population has a significant upward trend compared to the female employed population. The 2022 and 2023 years are characterized by a higher growth compared to previous years, which shows the growth of the ageing workforce (the upward trend lines reinforce our observation).

A detailed analysis of the employed population over 55 years age allows for a detailed understanding of the statistical situation (see Table 2 and Figure 2).

Table 2. Active population employed with full working hours distribution, paid full salary in October, by age groups and gender

Age	Gender distribution	Age groups			Total (55 – 65 years +)
		55-59 years	60-64 years	65 years +	
2013	Total	339513	104157	18932	462602
	Male	203591	82521	13383	299495
	Female	135922	21636	5549	163107
2015	Total	356822	136378	28342	521542
	Male	210351	102451	20747	333549
	Female	146471	33927	7595	187993
2016	Total	366080	157865	34436	558381
	Male	212619	115041	25239	352899
	Female	153461	42824	9197	205482
2017	Total	370383	168276	40518	579177
	Male	214036	119286	29781	363103
	Female	156347	48990	10737	216074
2018	Total	375081	180425	46088	601594
	Male	214798	125793	33958	374549
	Female	160283	54632	12130	227045
2019	Total	380406	195888	55030	631324
	Male	215791	133226	40353	389370
	Female	164615	62662	14677	241954
2020	Total	356704	183320	55785	595809

2021	Male	201324	122481	40116	363921
	Female	155380	60839	15669	231888
	Total	357793	175199	59700	592692
2022	Male	200531	115552	42316	358399
	Female	157262	59647	17384	234293
	Total	463381	185359	69432	718172
2023	Male	252599	120441	49048	422088
	Female	210782	64918	20384	296084
	Total	549317	193231	75485	818033
2023	Male	293789	123272	52568	469629
	Female	255528	69959	22917	348404

Source: INS

The annual increase in the number of employees is observed among both men and women - if in 2013 there were 462602 employees registered, in 2023 their number reached 818033 employees (almost double).

We will discuss the evolution of the number of employees over 65 years of age (standard retirement age): in 2013, 18932 people were registered as paid employees in October, of which 13383 were male employees and 5549 were female employees. The annual increase was also maintained in this age category, reaching a total of 75485 employees (52568 male employees and 22917 female employees) in 2023.

The increase is 3.9 times in the total elderly population (it is higher in women than in men), which shows either a need for financial resources or a paradigm shift in the elderly population (to be professionally and socially active).

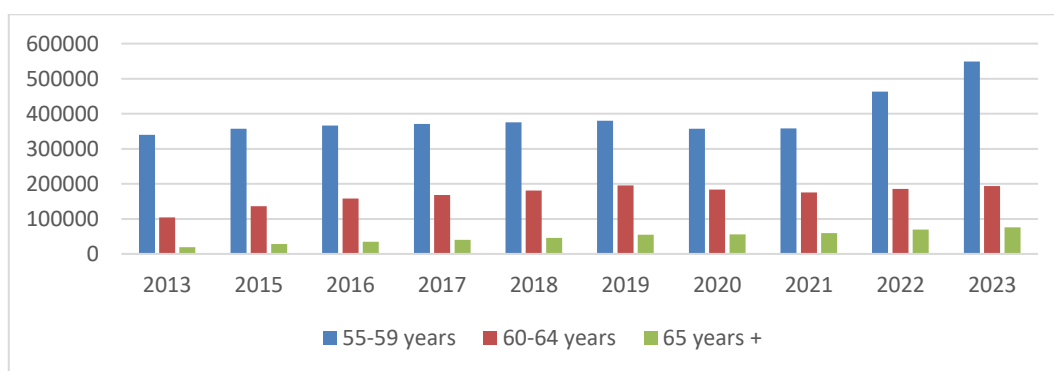


Figure 2. Active population employed with full working hours dynamics, paid with full salary in October, by age groups (Source: processing of INS statistical data)

Following the data in table no. 2 and the graphic representation (Figure 2), we note a significant difference in the employed population with a full work schedule, paid with the full salary in October between the age category 55-59 years and the category over 60-64 years, an aspect that shows us that a significant number of people are not in the workforce after reaching the age of 60, which can be interpreted as an option for employees for early retirement. However, there is a trend of growth over time, in all analyzed age segments of employees.

6. Strategies for active ageing in Europe and Romania

At the European level, the reducing unemployment rates among older people concern is followed, at the European Union level, by the development in 1999 of the Communication Towards a Europe for All Ages - Promoting Prosperity and Intergenerational Solidarity, which highlights the effective policies in the fields of employment need, but also social policy, health and combating discrimination against the elderly (apud Duminićă & , 2020, p. 10).

Directive no. 78 of the European Union of 2000 was adopted to create a common legislative framework for European countries for equal treatment in employment and occupation. It refers to the Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers and supports the adoption of measures that support the social and economic integration of older people and people with disabilities (Council of the European Union, 2020, p. 7).

Concerns about how to address issues related to population ageing are redefined in the Green Paper on population ageing, developed in 2021, including references to healthy ageing, lifelong learning, making the most of working life, attracting people to the labour market (including older workers), innovation and business opportunities (the "third age economy"), opportunities and challenges after retirement (involving pensioners in voluntary actions, intergenerational learning, mobility, adequate pension systems, covering the needs of healthcare and long-term care of the elderly population (Comisia Europeană, 2021)

At the national level, Romania has successively developed two strategies: the Strategia națională pentru promovarea îmbătrânirii active și protecția persoanelor vârstnice 2015–2020 [National Strategy for the Promotion of Active Ageing and the Protection of the Elderly 2015–2020] and the Strategia națională privind îngrijirea de lungă durată și îmbătrânirea activă pentru perioada 2023–2030 [National Strategy on Long-Term Care and Active Ageing for the 2023–2030] period. While the strategy covering the 2015–2020 period] was much more comprehensive, covering multiple facets of the issues of the elderly, the one that followed for the period 2023–2030 is limited to long-term care.

To exemplify, we mention that the Strategia națională pentru promovarea îmbătrânirii active și protecția persoanelor vârstnice 2015–2020 [National Strategy for the Promotion of Active Ageing and the Protection of Older Persons 2015–2020] emphasizes and defines the concept of active ageing (designing a society in which older persons are encouraged and have the opportunity to lead a life as healthy, productive, participatory and independent as possible) and includes as objectives: (1) prolonging and improving the quality of life of older persons; (2) promoting the active and dignified social participation of older persons; (3) achieving a higher degree of independence and security for persons with long-term care needs, with sets of measures regarding the work of older persons (and we give some examples: a) changes in human resources policies for better integration of older workers – with six priority measures, including: combating discrimination against older workers in case of layoffs and developing volunteering programs; b) creating and maintaining age-friendly jobs – with priority measures such as encouraging employers to adapt jobs

and assign assistive technologies; providing career counseling and guidance services or placing older people looking for a job; database with job offers for older workers, subsidies for employers; c) improving the skills, employability and independence of the elderly population (with priority measures targeting opportunities for developing ICT skills).

The current strategy, the Strategia națională privind îngrijirea de lungă durată și îmbătrânirea activă pentru perioada 2023-2030 [National Strategy on Long-Term Care and Active Ageing for the 2023-2030 period], acknowledges that only some of the objectives set in the previous strategy have not been achieved and builds actions around long-term care for the elderly, aiming to develop a long-term care system and the development of human resources to ensure care services. Explicit measures to support the professional activity of older people are not mentioned.

7. Discussions

In order to progressively reduce the consequences of the low demographic rate, with a direct effect on the active workforce, we consider it necessary to promote and support active ageing among employees.

Population aging and the reduction of the young workforce raise a series of social, economic and/or administrative issues. On the one hand, the workforce aging can be viewed optimistically - maintaining the elderly population in activity has a positive effect on health (as shown by Márquez-López, 2023). At the same time, it could be one of the solutions for reducing relative poverty - which in 2017 the relative poverty risk for people aged 65 and over in Romania was for 20% of the respective population, for women being 24.5% and for men 13.2% (Mihart, 2019, p. 127). On the other hand, the issue represents a long-term economic and social capacities of developed and developing countries threat.

Active ageing aims to optimise the participation of older people in socio-professional life, while also focusing on the complex experience of work, trying to compensate for their increased productivity (generated by ageing). Furthermore, we believe that active ageing promotes the mental and physical well-being of older employees, taking into account the need for their workplaces to be adapted to their demands and needs.

The active ageing concept aims to highlight the contribution of older people to the labor market, thus facilitating the knowledge transfer to young employees, newly engaged in employment relationships. Keeping older people active brings added value to social development.

Moreover, from a medical point of view, socio-professional inclusion reduces the illness among older people risk. The interpersonal relationships of older employees with the different categories of employees in the professional environment are certainly of the win-win type, both parties involved in this process obtaining their own benefits, material or non-material.

Active ageing, on the background of the multiple demands to be met at work, involves a balance between emotional and occupational aspects, the elimination of stress factors, and the carrying out of daily activities in better conditions, which allows these people to remain in their professional activity for a long time. Older

employees manage challenging professional demands better from an emotional point of view.

The elderly population in the workforce participation is a major social issue, with multiple factors, personal or contextual, such as national legislation, social policies, economic situation, culture, tradition, attitudes and prejudices. Considering the effects of discrimination (direct or indirect) at the societal level, we highlight the fact that these are accentuated in the situation of disadvantaged people such as: elderly employees, people with disabilities active in work, employees belonging to the single-parent family category, etc.

The highlighting of losses due to aging is balanced (in the sense of balancing) by highlighting the gains generated by the occupational status of older workers. Thus, if memory, cognitive speed, physical capacity fail, the skills formed over time in the context of multiple professional experiences, increased self-confidence and emotional balance compensate and become strengths. While young people focus on personal development, on the need for professional growth, older employees focus on maintenance needs, on autonomy, on economic independence, which makes them more stable in the perception of employers. Artificial intelligence could prove to be an ally in the attempt to keep employees in work for as long as possible.

Aging is a complex process and occurs on several levels: chronological (ageing), biological (as a transformation of the human body, through the decrease in physical and cognitive capacity), social (socio-economic status change but also in the possession of professional experience), as well as psychological (the ability to adapt to change, the perception of life). Therefore, in order for individuals to suffer as little as possible as a result of aging, the transition to aging must be a less dramatic one, without significant changes in the spheres of socio-professional life.

8. Conclusions

In summary, the age-related indicators in measuring professional performance are subjective, to a certain extent, and need to be associated with other defining characteristics such as length of service, complexity of professional experiences, background and periods of inactivity.

The social impact of professional valorisation by keeping people over 55 and even over 65 in work consists in reducing the risk of poverty (contribution to the pension system for a longer period of time can be accompanied by a higher pension, to which is added an increase in the capacity to save), maintaining health, participation in socio-economic life and, implicitly, the effective achievement of active ageing.

Faced with demographic mobility (the phenomena of youth labor migration), the labor market is forced to capitalize on the resources offered by the elderly labor force. At the same time, employers can ensure human resource stability through workplace adaptation actions (time, technology, support services, etc.).

Demographic evolution, signaling the continuous process of demographic ageing and that of employee ageing, determines the adoption of human resources policies both at the level of organizations and at the level of public authorities. By reporting to the National Strategy on Long-Term Care and Active Ageing for the 2023

- 2030 period, we cannot be optimistic about the valorisation of the professional experiences of the elderly, nor can we expect that employers will be determined to provide a labor market for this category, which requires reconsidering its vision and building an economic and social context based on concrete actions to stimulate the participation of people over 55 years old, as well as the construction of a support structure (system) (for example: network of socio-professional activation centers).

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