

# THE SITUATION OF THE ELDERLY IN ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** World population growth is a global problem for which scientific explanations are sought and integrated strategies are offered, the same way as for other global problems. The issue of the elderly has also been registered on the Romanian public agenda, concerning the issuance of the adequate legal framework in line with the European legislation, as well as concerning the elaboration of social public and concrete actions of social reform. Population aging represents a social problem as it affects a great number of persons and it interests not only the respective population but the decisional factors and the society as a whole, as well as it is affected by important consequences. The phenomenon requires adequate and complete social actions in order to influence the evolution towards the autonomy and welfare of the old peoples' life, as well towards a healthy aging process, ensuring life quality with social costs as low as possible. The demographic decreased tendency is visible and for now, it is impossible to change the situation on the medium term. It is to be expected that the dimensions of this deterioration get even higher, following the logics of specific demographic connections and the impact of the international context.

**Keywords:** demography, population aging, birth rate, mortality, external migration, the elderly

**Rezumat:** Creşterea populaţiei mondiale este o problemă globală căreia i se caută explicaţii ştiinţifice şi i se propun strategii integrate, la fel ca şi celorlalte probleme care au dobândit un statut global. Problematika vârstnicilor a fost şi ea înscrisă pe agenda publică românească, atât în ceea ce priveşte elaborarea cadrului legislativ în acord cu prevederile legislaţiei europene, cât şi în ceea ce priveşte elaborarea politicilor publice în domeniul social şi a acţiunilor concrete de reformă socială. Îmbătrânirea populaţiei reprezintă o problemă socială, întrucât afectează un mare număr de persoane, interesând nu numai populaţia respectivă, ci şi factorii decizionali şi societatea în general, care suportă consecinţe importante. Fenomenul reclamă acţiuni sociale concrete şi conjugate care să influenţeze o evoluţie în sensul autonomiei şi bunăstării vieţii vârstnicilor, al îmbătrânirii sănătoase, al asigurării unei vieţi de calitate, cu costuri sociale cât mai scăzute. Derapajul demografic este vizibil şi deocamdată este imposibilă schimbarea tendinţelor, cel puţin pe termen

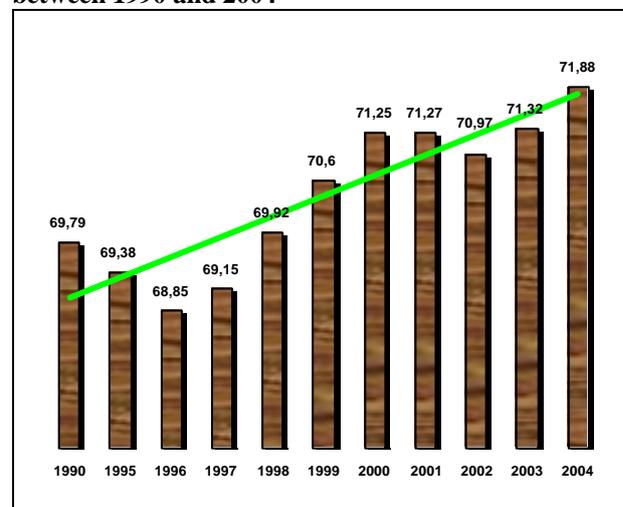
mediu. Dimensiunile deteriorării este de aşteptat să se amplifice, prin logica conexiunilor specifice demograficului şi prin impactul contextului internaţional.

**Cuvinte cheie:** demografie, declin demografic, natalitate, mortalitate, migraţie externă, vârstnic.

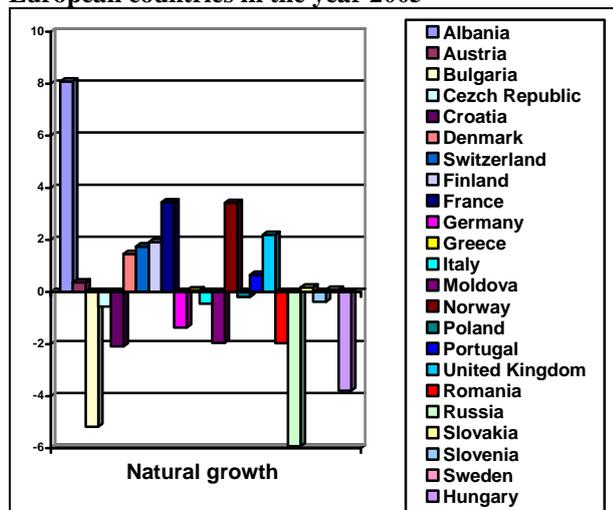
## INTRODUCTION

The population aging process started in Romania, 4-5 decades later than in the other Western countries, due to the fact that the demographic phenomenon of transition had started later. In the last six decades, Romania's population aging increased; the number of the persons of full age doubled (15,4% in 1989 as against 7,4% in 1930). Regarding the demographic prognoses issued for the year 2005, it was estimated that the population above 65 years old would raise to 3,8 million. The aging phenomenon is more prominent in women (17,2% women, as against 13,5 men in 2005). The territorial distribution of this phenomenon is not equal; the areas in Romania with the most aged population are: Banat (16,4%), Bucharest (16,1%) and Oltenia (15,7%). Between 1956 and 1992, the average life of the Romania's population raised from 63,17 years to 69,78 years, out of which, for men - 66,56 years and for women - 73,17 years, the effective growth being of 6,61 years.

**Picture no. 1. Evolution of the average life in Romania between 1990 and 2004**



Picture no. 2. Natural growth in Romania and in some European countries in the year 2005



After 1989, Romania entered a process of population decrease that will continue in future, as well. This is the conclusion of the *“Demographic decline and the future of the Romanian population”* study, issued by “Vladimir Treblici “Demographic Research Centre of the Romanian Academy. This study represents an alarm signal in order to avoid the Romanian population from entering an imminent demographic decline with consequences difficult to assess.

Within this context, starting with the 90’s, Romania, as well as the majority of the European countries, has been submitted to a change in the demographic evolution, the increase being replaced by a demographic decline.

The National Institute of Statistics makes available statistical information about the population of Romania. On January 1 2006, the Romanian population was of 21.610.200 inhabitants. The male population, meaning 10.535.100 persons, represented 48,8% of the country’s population, while the female population, of 11.075.100 persons, represented 51,2% of the general population. There were 11.926.200 persons in the urban environment, representing more than half of the population of the country (55,2%). Out of those 319 municipalities and towns, more than 86% recorded a population less than 500 thousand inhabitants (32,5% of the urban population).

The population of the towns with more than 100 thousand inhabitants, although few, represents 56% of the urban population. The city of Bucharest (1.930.390 inhabitants), capital of the country, registered 16,2% of the urban population and 8,9% of the country’s population.

The first six large cities from the point of view of the number of inhabitants are: Bucharest, Constanța – 306.200 inhabitants, Iași - 306.000 inhabitants, Timișoara – 303.200 inhabitants, Craiova – 299.200 inhabitants and Cluj 297.600 inhabitants.

There were 968.400 inhabitants in the rural environment, representing 44,8% of the total population. The average size of a village was of 3.397 inhabitants.

The largest village was Holbaca, the county of Iași, counting 12.317 inhabitants and the smallest was the village of Brebu-Nou, the county of Caraș-Severin with 95 inhabitants. The villages with a population between 1.000 and 5.000 inhabitants represented 81,7% of the total number of villages and their population - 68,3% of the rural population.

On January 1 2006, the North-East development region (including the counties of Bacău, Botoșani, Iași, Neamț, Suceava, Vaslui) held the largest number of inhabitants, representing 17,3% of the total population of the country, while the Western development region (counties of Arad, Caraș-Severin, Hunedoara, Timiș) was placed at the other extremity, registering 8,9% of the country’s population.

Table no. 1. Total population of the Western region on July 1 2005.

|                    |            |
|--------------------|------------|
| ROMANIA            | 21.623.549 |
| WESTERN POPULATION | 1.930.458  |
| ARAD               | 459.286    |
| CARAȘ-SEVERIN      | 331.876    |
| HUNEDOARA          | 480.459    |
| TIMIȘ              | 658.837    |

București-Ilfov development region is considered the most urbanized region, the urban population representing 92,5% of the total population.

According to the data of the Romanian National Institute of Statistics (INS), the number of the young people is decreasing. More precisely, according to INS, in comparison with the year 2006, the young population decreased with more than 41.000 persons, while the number of the elderly increased with 5.400 persons.

If in 1950, the population of our country was of 16,3 million and today, it slightly exceeds 21 million, in 2050, Romania will count the number it had 100 years ago. Thus, 42 years after, our country will have only 15,9 million inhabitants, according to specialists.

In Romania, life expectancy is of 69,2 years (65,3 for men and 73,4 for women). In Bucharest, the average length of life is of 71,2 (74,9 for women and 67,4 for men, approximately 1,5 years above the national average).

According to certain studies, in 2050 Romania will have 16 million inhabitants. If after 1989, women used to give birth to only one child, for a demographic revigoration, at least 2,1 children are needed per family.

Between 2000 and 2004, in Romania, there were born with 30% less children than 40 years ago. In 1960, the figures were discouraging too, but for a perpetuation of the people, the communist regime adopted a forced demographic policy. This brought about an increase of the population, but it also caused many troubles. The illegal abortions killed many desperate women and thousands of children were born with handicaps, as a result of the failed abortion attempts.

One of the demographic problems of Romania is the population aging; nowadays, the number of pensioners exceeds the number of the active people, bringing about

major problems to the Government, as it has to provide decent life annuity for all of them.

The political parties should focus on these objectives in order to improve life expectancy, the level of education and the living standard of the Romanian population. Only then, the present trends will turn upside down and the population will become healthy, having benefic consequences in all respects.

After 14 years of demographic decline and irremediable aggravation of the imbalances in the age structure of the population and with similar evolutions for the future, Romania is not able to overcome these demographic characteristics. There are a number of factors, of different nature and contributions, which compete with this phenomenon. Through the decrease of the birth rate and through the parallel increase of the mortality rate, Romania entered a stage of natural decrease of the number of population, after 1989. Such a situation has never been recorded in peace time, at least not for the last two decades, according to the statistical data. On the other hand, the external migration accentuated the decrease of the population. If the census of March 2002 revealed that the contribution of the external migration was moderate, the big surprise came later and a larger reduction of the population could be observed. According to the census data, the population of Romania decreased with 1,1 million people, between 1992 and 2002. It is an enormous decrease for 10 years only. This is due to three reasons: the natural decrease with almost 300.000 people, population decrease as a result of the external migration (the legal migration) of 150.000 people and the big shock, a loss of 650.000 people that can be attributed only to the statistically unknown external migration. The latter could be even larger. All these figures show only the statistical origin of the demographic decline and not the real reasons. The decrease of the birth rate may be also due to the economic and social realities after 1989.

There are also other factors that favoured the decreasing evolution of this phenomenon, which are even more complex and which bear the seal of changes suffered by the Romanian society in its passing to capitalism.

The number of marriages is decreasing; the average age of marriage is increasing, as well as that of the mothers when giving birth to their children. The child fights not only with poverty but also with the expectations of the young couple.

The model of the occidental family with fewer children and of a better quality is gaining more and more ground, here in Romania. Moreover, regarding the economy of the young family (being defined through the professional activity in the private sector with its rules, income, preferences and tastes in relation to other valences of spending the time, including the spare time), the hierarchies are changing and the child starts gaining another position.

The fact that these sociological factors play a more and more important part in the demography of the

economic and social transition countries arises from the impeccable convergence of the decreasing evolution of the birth rate in all ex-communist European countries, including those countries where the reforms were rapidly and efficiently installed and where the living standard was improving. It is not the case for the evolution of mortality. If the living standard and the medical assistance did not know dramatic deteriorations, life expectancy, which is the most synthetic indicator of health status and of the population mortality, knew spectacular increases. Unfortunately, mortality has been and is still high in Romania, although surprising positive evolutions took place in the last years.

The present demographic situation of Romania has a double origin: long term effects of the demographic inheritance Romania had from the ancient regime and political, economic and social changes Romania suffered after 1989. Moreover, the demographic phenomena and processes create proper mechanisms for its maintenance and accentuation.

The demographic decline and the imbalances of the age structure are the product of the combined evolutions of birth rate, mortality and external migration. In Romania, the process of demographic aging increased gradually. In 1992, the elderly represented 16,9% of the total population, regarding the age group between 60 years old and above). In 1998, the population above 60 years old and above represented 18% and for the year 2000, it was of 19-20%. Mention must be made of the fact that, by 2030, the number of the elderly will triple and the increase will mainly take place in the developing countries.

Before 1990, the demographic aging in Romania was more reduced than in many other European countries, because the level of birth rate was higher than the European average. In the conditions of the dramatic decrease in the '90's and due to its maintenance at a very low level, the demographic aging increased, placing us among the countries with the highest levels. Today, the aging of the Romanian population does not take place due to the decrease of the birth rate; this is just a transition period of time towards an aged population. Demographic aging is more visible in the rural environment, where almost 19% of the population exceeded the age of 65 and above, while regarding the total of the rural female population, the percentage of the third age women was of 21,7%

Romanian reality is made up of a combination of villages and towns in a well-known demographic proportion: 46% rural as against 54% urban, according to the data resulted from the 1992 census. In villages, there is a viable strategy regarding the care for "the old and children". Villages relieve the state from the burden of taking care of the old and children. The rural environment reveals an extraordinary but tragic power of supporting, both the national poverty and the helpless old people and children. The last 15 years are years of dramatic fall regarding the demographic limit, both in the urban Romanian and in the rural one.

## PUBLIC HEALTH AND MANAGEMENT

**Table no. 2. Population per counties and age groups in the Western region on 1.07.2005**

| Development Region/<br>County | Age group (years old) |           |           |           |           |              |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
|                               | 0-4                   | 5-9       | 10-14     | 15-19     | 20-24     | 25-29        |
| Total Romania                 | 1.053.889             | 1.108.895 | 1.209.931 | 1.727.418 | 1.618.093 | 1.786.029    |
| Arad                          | 86.408                | 93.526    | 108.115   | 152.439   | 138.612   | 152017       |
| Caraş-Severin                 | 15.343.               | 16066     | 18517     | 26500     | 24015     | 24349        |
| Hunedoara                     | 20576                 | 23417     | 27411     | 37575     | 32782     | 35777        |
| Timiș                         | 29410                 | 31229     | 36517     | 53175     | 49850     | 54835        |
| Development Region/<br>County | Age group (years)     |           |           |           |           |              |
|                               | 30-34                 | 35-39     | 40-44     | 45-49     | 50-54     | 55-59        |
| Total Romania                 | 1.678.743             | 1.761.497 | 1.238.076 | 1.535.338 | 1.505.522 | 1.241.759    |
| Western region                | 150805                | 162054    | 116033    | 143280    | 140926    | 120294       |
| Arad                          | 36079                 | 37191     | 25509     | 33185     | 33273     | 33093        |
| Caraş-Severin                 | 24403                 | 25192     | 20745     | 25778     | 24432     | 21185        |
| Hunedoara                     | 38391                 | 43653     | 30548     | 34924     | 34574     | 29491        |
| Timiș                         | 51932                 | 55015     | 39137     | 50393     | 48547     | 40585        |
| Development region            | Age group (years)     |           |           |           |           |              |
|                               | 60-64                 | 65-69     | 70-74     | 75-79     | 80-84     | 85 and above |
| Total Romania                 | 973314                | 1089.704  | 907414    | 665075    | 374355    | 155096       |
| Arad                          | 20209                 | 23970     | 19859     | 15326     | 8897      | 3585         |
| Caraş-Severin                 | 15871                 | 17345     | 13764     | 10185     | 5566      | 2120         |
| Hunedoara                     | 23760                 | 25496     | 19202     | 13117     | 6941      | 2024         |
| Timiș                         | 28571                 | 30169     | 24533     | 19397     | 11014     | 4425         |

Source: Statistics Annual Report of Romania 2006, ISN, 2006.

After 1990, a decrease of the demographic ceiling in the rural environment with 30% was registered, meaning the equivalent of 140.000 persons for each age group of 5 years each (proportion estimated by reporting the age groups of 0-5, 5-10 and 10-15 years to the age group of those between 30-34 years old).

The demographic decline cannot be stopped in Romania. After almost 15 years of deterioration and without any perspective of medium term rehabilitation, the negative trend will continue and will strengthen on long term through its internal and dynamic mechanisms. The responsibility of the political people and of other decision factors is enormous. Through specific policies, the speed and the magnitude of the already signalled processed could be reduced.

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