

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LABOR MARKET IN ROMANIA BETWEEN 2008-2016

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**Abstract:** *The level and quality of employment are important indicators for the current society, workforce being the main engine for the development of any modern economy. Within its Europe 2020 Strategy, the European Union has set itself the target for the 2020 horizon, to reach a 75% employment rate for population aged 20-64-years old at European level. Romania has set an employment target of 70% by 2020 for the same population.*

*Given the current context, Romania's economy is under the influence of a continuous and dynamic process of change, emerged from both the transition to the market economy and the phenomenon of globalization.*

*This paper proposes a systematic, but not complete, approach of the consequences of the global crisis, on the main indicators of the labor market at national level, highlighting the main characteristics of the Romanian labor market: evolutions, structures, peculiarities, regional disparities, etc.*

**Keywords:** *labor market, labor resources, employment rate, unemployment rate, employment level*

**JEL Classification:** *E24, J21, J23, J62, J64*

### Introduction

The major concerns of all European Union states, found both in the Lisbon Strategy and in the Europe 2020 Strategy, are sustainable economic development, research, innovation and education, increasing the share of employed people and developing a inclusive labor market by creating jobs for inactive, least employable or socially vulnerable people.

Since all European states face a declining birth rate, the aging of the population, with increasing imbalances between the employed population and the one benefiting from the support of the social systems, they raise the question of integrating into the labor market a higher percentage of the population able to secure themselves an income by providing a useful work for society, by creating all the conditions for achieving this target.

The recent economic and financial crisis has shown that new skills and new jobs are needed to modernize the labor market and provide more autonomy for citizens to increase labor market participation and match labor demand and supply better, including through professional and geographical mobility.

Although Romania does not currently face a serious unemployment problem (the unemployment rate in 2016 at national level was 5.9% compared to the European average of 8.6%), the rate of activity and the employment rate of the working age population registered in our country continues to be among the lowest in Europe and almost 4 percentage points of the national target set for the achievement of the Europe 2020 targets.

In addition, disparities persist or even deepen between urban and rural areas, between small towns and big cities and between different social groups.

The uncertainty that has occurred since 2009 as a result of the economic crisis has been characterized by significant decreases in investment and consumption, leading to stagnation or even diminishing demand for goods and services and, implicitly, new jobs. In addition, in some areas, redundancies have been recorded, thus increasing the number of unemployed. At the same time, this change has strongly influenced the main features of the labor force, with strong implications, both economically and socially. The effects of these changes were felt differently at regional level in our country, depending on the degree of development, one of the most affected regions being the North-East region.

The paper aims to identify the peculiarities and problems specific to the labor market at the national level between 2008-2016. The low employment rate, activity, unemployment, school dropout, heavy family situations, poor health, gender inequalities are only a few of the causes that can lead to the growth and perpetuation of vulnerability and poverty, and implicitly to the increase in the number of unemployed or young people entering in the NEET category.

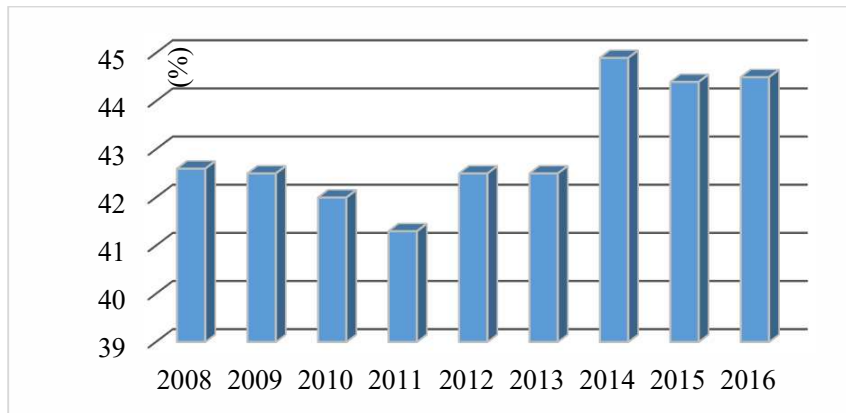
## 1. Special features of the Romanian labor market in 2008-2016

In order to understand the labor market mechanisms, a series of statistical indicators obtained either directly through measurement such as: labor resources, active population, employed population, number of employees the unemployed number, or by calculating derived indicators such as: activity rate, employment rate, unemployment rate, NEET rate, economic dependency rate, etc. are to be analyzed.

**Civil economically active population**, which characterizes the potential labor supply and the employment rate of the population including the civilian employment and registered unemployed, decreased in Romania in 2016 by 414.6 thousand persons compared to 2007. The distribution by sex of the active population at national level reveals that in the period 2007-2016, the employed male population registered a reduction 1.81 times lower than the female population, out of the 414.6 thousand people 147.3 thousand were men and 267.3 thousand being women.

In terms of **gross activity rate**, it increased in the period 2007-2016 by 2.3 percentage points (from 42.2% in 2007 to 44.5% in 2016). Thought, in 2016 this rate lowered by 0.4 pp compared to that recorded in 2014 (Figure 1).

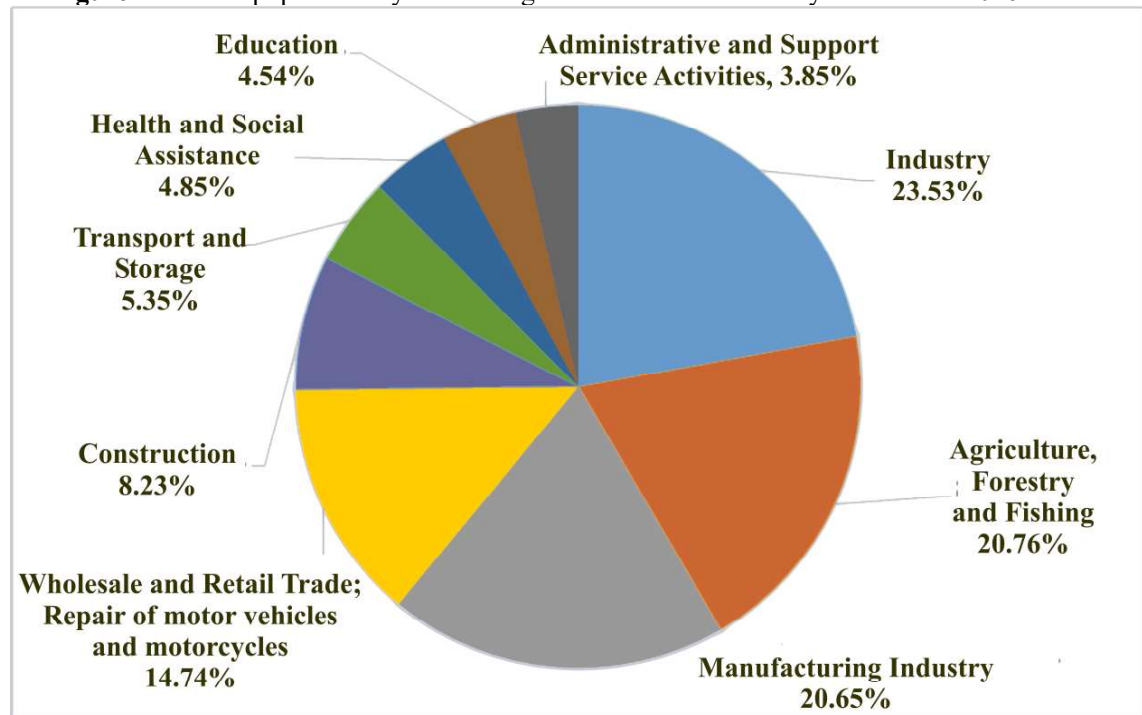
**Figure 1** Evolution of the gross activity rate in Romania during 2008-2016



Data source: TEMPO-online database, National Institute of Statistics, insse.ro

Regarding the **employed civilian population by categories of activities of the national economy**, the analysis of statistical data over the considered period highlights the fact that the sector "Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries" tends to decrease starting with 2012 (by 8.53 percentage points in 2016 compared to 2012). In 2007-2011, the employed population decreased in all sectors of the national economy, except in the sectors "Wholesale and retail trade"; "Repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles", which had an upward trend over the analyzed period. The year 2016 is the first year of the considered period where the share of the occupied population in the industry exceeds that of the employed population in agriculture (Figure 2).

**Figure 2** Civilian population by some categories of national economy activities in 2016

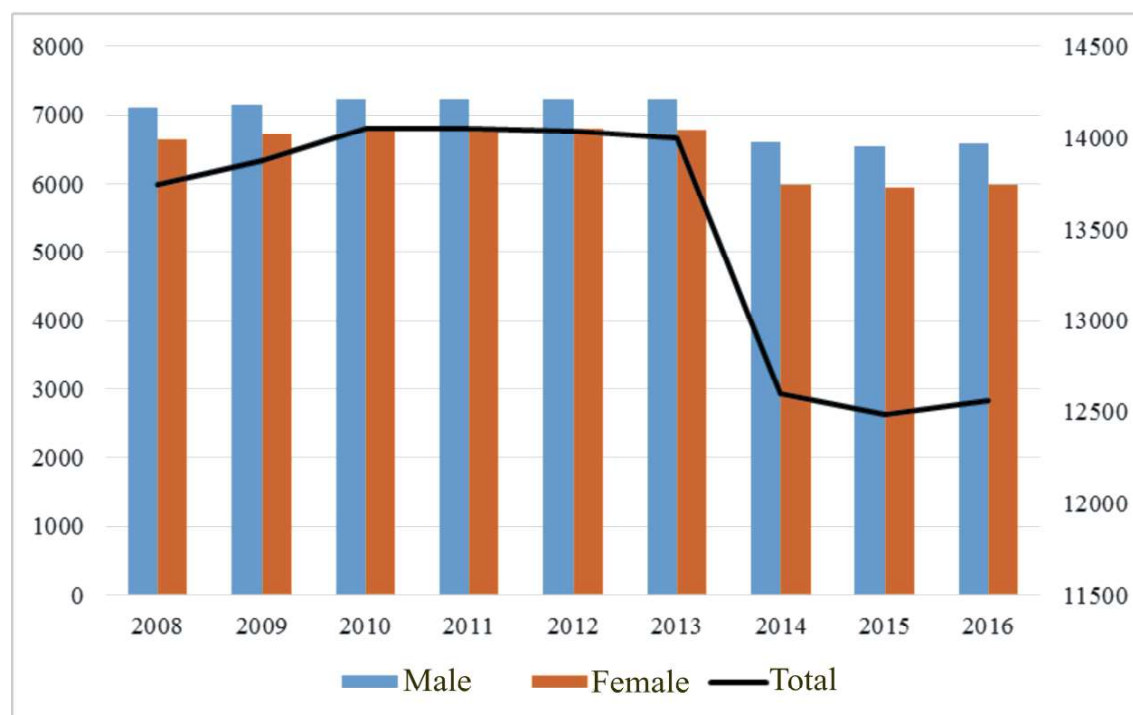


Data source: TEMPO-online database, National Institute of Statistics, insse.ro

**Resursele de muncă**, au înregistrat, în anul 2016, o creștere de 0,55 pp. față de anul 2015. Până în anul 2010, la nivel național, evoluția resurselor de muncă s-a situat pe un trend ascendent, la nivel național creșterea fiind de 830,7 mii persoane față de anul 1990. Începând cu anul 2010, numărul resurselor de muncă s-a diminuat an de an, până în anul 2015, când a înregistrat o ușoară creștere (Figura 3).

**Labor resources** registered an increase of 0.55 percentage points in 2016 compared to 2015. By 2010, at the national level, the evolution of labor resources was on an upward trend, at national level the increase was of 830.7 thousand persons compared to 1990. Since 2010, the number of labor resources has decreased year-by-year, until 2015, when it registered a slight increase (Figure 3).

**Figure 3** Evolution of labor resources in Romania during 2008-2016



Data source: TEMPO-online database, National Institute of Statistics, inse.ro

Over the 2008-2016 period, the occupancy rate has been oscillating, but since 2013 it has started to grow slightly, reaching 61.6% in 2016.

As during the previous years, the employment rate was higher in 2016 for males (69.7%, compared to 53.3% for women). Comparing by residence area, the employment rate was higher in urban areas (62.6%, compared to 60.2% in rural areas).

As regards the employment rate by age group, it was 22.3% for young people aged 15-24 years and 42.8% for elderly people (55-64 years).

The highest level of **employment rate** for older workers was recorded among graduates of higher education (86.2%). In 2016, 65.2% of people with medium education were employed while only 41.0% of those with low education were.

**Employees**, in the year 2016, up from 2015 (+139 thousand persons), still held the highest share (73.4%) in the total employed population. In the same year, self-employed workers and unpaid family workers accounted for 25.6% of the employed population.

Qualified workers in the “Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries” sector accounted for 19.4% of the total occupied population. Significant weights in the total employed population were also the skilled workers (16.6%), the specialists in various fields of activity (15.2%) and the workers in the services sector (14.9%).

Of the total employed population, 23.1% worked in the agricultural sector, 29.9% in industry or construction and 47.0% in services. In the non-agricultural activities, 6497 thousand persons were occupied, with significant shares being held by those working in Manufacturing (24.6%), Trade (18.1%) and Construction (10.4%).

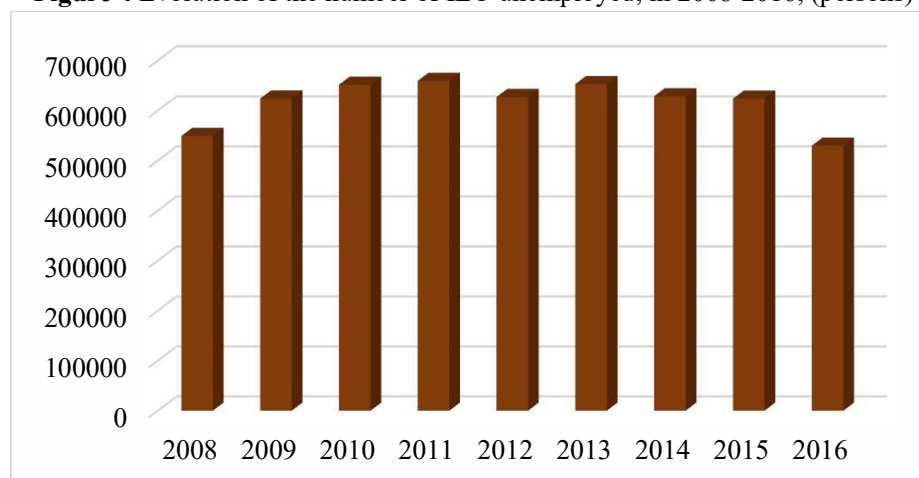
Of the total number of people employed in 2016, 723 thousand people (8.6%) worked part-time. The vast majority of part-time employees worked in the agricultural sector (82.8%).

In 2016, the average effective working week for the main activity was 38.8 hours per week; 130 thousand people also carried out secondary activities, working on average 12.9 hours per week.

According to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, the number of **unemployed** in Romania decreased by 94041 in 2016 compared to 2015 and the unemployment rate by 1.5 percentage points.

In 2010, the largest number of unemployed was registered, 659426 persons, followed by 2009, when the number of unemployed was 651696, due to the effect of the economic crisis that started at the end of 2008 (Figure 4). Except for 2013, (when there were 652984 ILO unemployed), the number of unemployed persons in Romania decreased year on year, so that in the year 2016, there were 529869 unemployed.

**Figure 4** Evolution of the number of ILO unemployed, in 2008-2016, (persons)



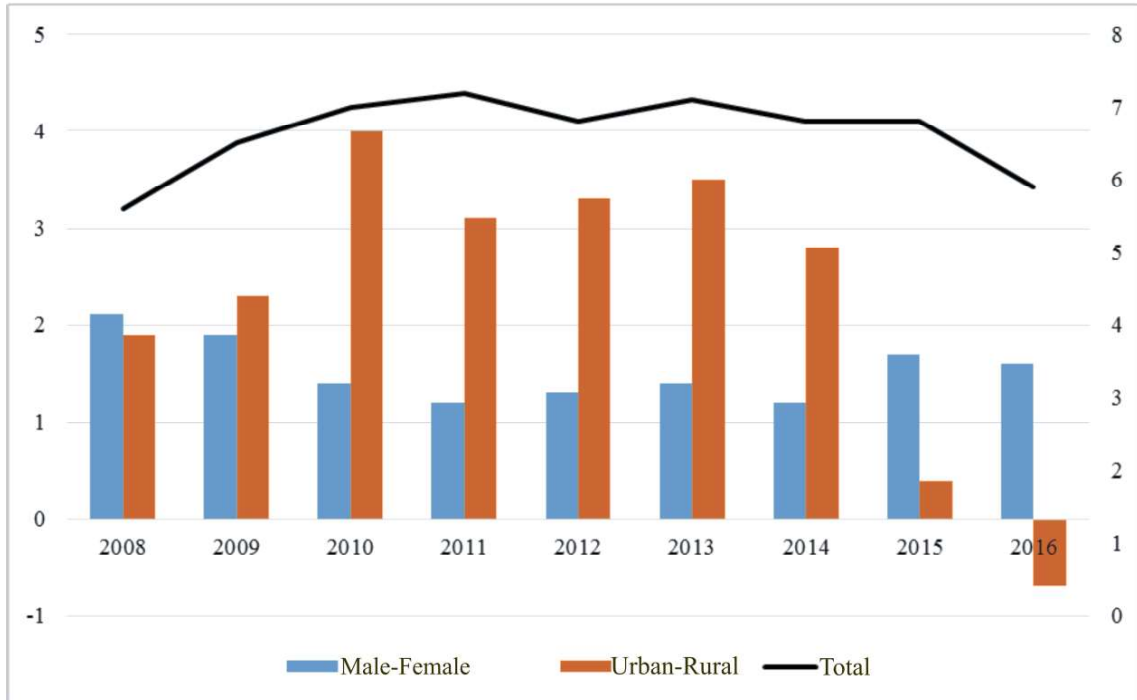
Data source: TEMPO-online database, "ILO unemployed - Household Labor Force Survey", National Institute of Statistics, insse.ro

With an unemployment rate of 5.9% in 2016 (down from the previous year: 6.8% in 2015), Romania holds a favorable position among the EU member states, ranked sixth in the top countries with

the lowest unemployment rates, a better position on unemployment than countries like France, Poland or even the Netherlands.

By gender, the difference between the two unemployment rates was 1.6 percentage points (6.6% for men versus 5.0% for women), and for residence areas by 0.7 percentage points (6.3 % in rural compared to 5.6% in urban areas) (Figure 5).

**Figure 5** Unemployment rate by residence and gap between unemployed men and women (%)



Data source: TEMPO-online database, National Institute of Statistics, insse.ro

The unemployment rate also reached the highest level (20.6%) among young people (15-24 years) in 2016.

Unemployment had a greater impact on primary and secondary education graduates, whose unemployment rate was 7.6% and 6.2%, respectively. The unemployment rate was only 3.1% for people with higher education.

The long-term unemployment rate (one year and over unemployment) was 3.0%, and the incidence of long-term unemployment (the percentage of unemployed persons over one year and over in total unemployed) was 50.0% .

For young people (15-24 years), the long-term unemployment rate (six months and over) was 13.0%, while the long-term youth unemployment rate was 63.1%.

The economic growth in 2016 was also accompanied by an increase in the number of employees: at the end of the year there were 4.7 million employees, 3.4% more than in 2015. Even after 9 years of the economic crisis, the Romanian labor failed to recover the lost jobs, although the difference diminished to 100 thousand.

As in previous years, in 2016, the incidence of atypical work (fixed-term and / or part-time contracts, self-employed economically) continued its upward trend.

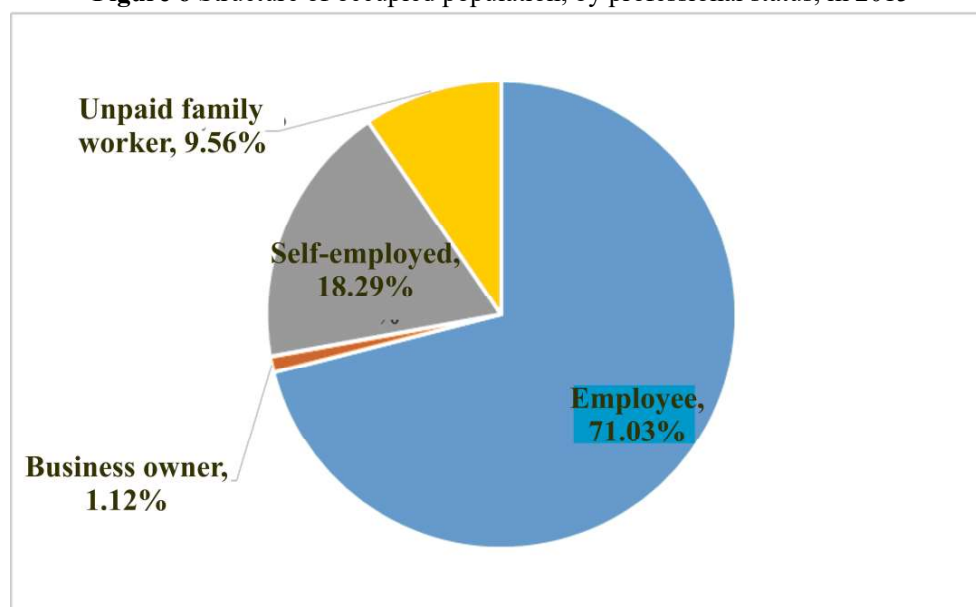
Official statistics show an unusually low number of employees with fixed-term and / or part-time employment contracts in Romania, but a detailed analysis of these shows that the difference between the number of active employees and the number of individual active contracts increased

between December 2015 and December 2016, from 13.3% of the total number of contracts to 13.9%. As a result, at the end of 2016, approximately 5.48 million active employees registered with the Labor Inspection were responsible for 6.24 million contracts. The difference can only be explained by the high incidence of atypical labor contracts.

Regarding newly created jobs, according to estimates<sup>1</sup> in 2016, more than 25% of the individual work contracts concluded were part-time, with an equivalent weight having also fixed-term contracts. A recently published study<sup>2</sup> highlights the relatively high incidence of fixed-term employment contracts in sectors such as construction or the automotive industry.

Besides atypical labor with work contract, dependent self-employment<sup>3</sup> continues to weigh heavily on the Romanian labor market. Thus, according to the statistical data of the National Institute of Statistics in 2015, the employees accounted for only 71.3% of the employed population, while 18.3% of the employed persons had self-employed status (Figure 6).

**Figure 6** Structure of occupied population, by professional status, in 2015



Data source: Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2016, National Institute of Statistics

It is important that this structure of employment is not entirely due to the high incidence of self-employment in agriculture, and it also occurs in non-agricultural sectors. It is natural to consider that a large proportion of these self-employed workers are in fact dependent self-employed, not so strictly from a tax point of view, as is currently done by Romanian legislation, but more generally, from an

<sup>1</sup> Conducted by Syndex România

<sup>2</sup> Trif A., Koukiadaki A. and Kahancová M., (2016), „*The rise of the dual labour market: fighting precarious employment in the new member states through industrial relations. Country Report: Romania*”, Technical Report, European Commission, <http://doras.dcu.ie>

<sup>3</sup> Dependent self-employed work under various legal forms that involve equality (or independence) between the provider and the beneficiary, among the most widespread being the service contract as an authorized natural person or a natural person, the contract for the transfer of rights author and so-called civil conventions. The apparently contradictory phrase "dependent self-employed" suggests the discrepancy between the legal status of these workers - "on their own" - and the reality of the employment relationships in which they are located - "dependence"

economic point of view. Dependent self workers are less well paid and more vulnerable to job security and are less protected from abuses than employees, while having far less means to defend their interests<sup>4</sup> (Guga 2016). These vulnerabilities are also important for employees, since, as with those working with fixed-term or part-time employment contracts, the precariousness of self-dependent work is an indirect source of vulnerability for all participants in the labor market, including the pressure it exerts on salaries and working conditions of employees for an indefinite period of time.

If at the end of 2015 the problem of labor shortages in Romania was rarely mentioned on the working agendas of the competent bodies in the field, at the beginning of 2017 it became, together with the minimum salary, the main topic in the debates on the Romanian labor market.

In particular, employers are increasingly worried about the low availability of labor, especially when it comes to future investment. Surveys show a significantly higher concern among Romanian employers compared to other countries. According to a Pricewaterhouse Coopers survey (PWC 2016), "the availability of key skills" is a concern for 85% of respondents in Romania, compared with an average of 72% globally. Also, a Manpower survey (Manpower Group 2017) places Romania on the third place globally in terms of employers' difficulties in finding the right workforce. The situation seems paradoxical since unemployment remains a problem, employment being still far below the level of 2008 and a large proportion of the occupied population is still unpaid.

The problem has to be analyzed, both quantitatively (the actual reduction in labor supply) and qualitatively (the so-called "skills deficit", the gap between the qualifications required by employers and those actually held by those looking for a job). From a strictly quantitative point of view, the overall situation does not seem to justify the hypothesis of such a crisis. If, indeed, starting in 2012, there is an increase in the vacancy rate (or labor market demand), in 2016 the level was still much lower than in the pre-crisis period.

In 2016, however, there is a decline in unemployment, combined with a slight increase in the vacancy rate. In both ways, however, the Romanian labor market seems to be still far from the situation in 2008. Strictly from a quantitative approach we can not talk about a crisis caused by a lack of labor force, but rather by the employers' reaction to the easy improvement of the position of bargaining the employees on the labor market. This change in the ratio of forces between employers and employees is also evident in the increase of the number of resignations and the stabilization of contractual terminations initiated by employers<sup>5</sup>.

Since the labor market does not really have a national dimension, with very few employers and employees having a realistic choice to recruit from or to engage in another region, regional dynamics are in many respects much more important than the one national.

The most common solution is to boost vocational education, which has suffered an accelerated decline over the last quarter of a century, particularly in the form of closer collaboration between investors and educational institutions. One of the solutions proposed was to stimulate companies' investment in labor force skills in exchange for fiscal facilities, but this could indirectly weaken the public education system, already massively underfunded. A selective and short-term policy may also fail for employers, since the risks of leaving the company (either in Romania or abroad) increase with the level of qualification, and the ability to compensate the departures is very limited in this context.

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<sup>4</sup> Guga Șt., (2016), *Munca atipică în România de la izbucnirea crizei. O perspectivă de ansamblu*. Next Publishing, București, 2016

<sup>5</sup> *Redefining success in business in a changing world. The main results for Romania of the annual survey. Global CEO Survey*, PricewaterhouseCoopers, <http://www.pwc.com>

Hence the reluctance of many employers to invest substantial resources in training under these conditions.

As well as before the crisis and like in other Central and Eastern European countries, the lack of workforce in some regions is due to the combination of low wage levels and the re-emergence of alternatives in the labor market. Economic recovery at European and national level has reopened the possibility of going abroad for work and emerging of new opportunities (such as public employment) that were no longer available in the years of austerity. In other words, the lack of workforce experienced by employers, and in particular the middle and upper workforce, is rather a consequence of the development model based on the competitive advantage of skilled and cheap labor, a model that can not function rather than coercive, to the extent that employees have no viable alternatives to earn their living, and their ability to defend their interests is limited by legislative changes that weaken the power of trade unions.

### Conclusions

Throughout the results obtained, the present paper contributes to the analysis and knowledge of the Romanian labor market situation during 2008-2016.

To some extent, Europe's and implicitly Romania's national economies have managed to recover losses and reach the pre-crisis levels of economic growth, but the number of new jobs created is still not sufficient to reduce the pressures on the labor market. This is due to the increased complexity of the economic environment that underwent profound transformations, including during the crisis period, with the choices of many businesses and companies making savings and cost cuts, especially by introducing new technologies on a large scale, implicitly reducing jobs and, in particular, reducing the opportunities for creating new jobs.

In this context, a first result of the paper is the realization of a brief analysis of the labor market peculiarities at national level during 2008-2016.

The labor resources registered a 0.55 percentage point increase in 2016 compared to 2015 and the employment rate had an oscillating evolution, but starting in 2013 it started to increase slightly, reaching 2016 to 61.6%.

The highest level of employment rate for older workers was recorded in 2016 among graduates of higher education (86.2%). 65.2% of people with medium education were employed and 41.0% of those with low education.

Compared to 2015, the number of people who worked in Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (-232 thousand people), as well as those who worked in Education (-9 thousand people) decreased in 2016, Public Administration and defense (-8 thousand persons), Mining and quarrying, Information and communications and Real estate transactions (all decreasing by 4 thousand persons over the previous year). The most significant increases compared to the previous year were recorded in Manufacturing (+46 thousand persons), Construction (+42 thousand people), Trade (+28 thousand persons) and Hotels and restaurants (+19 thousand persons).

With an unemployment rate of 5.9% in 2016 (down from the previous year: 6.8% in 2015), Romania ranks sixth among the Member States with the lowest unemployment rates, a better position concerning unemployment, than countries like France, Poland or even the Netherlands.

Besides atypical work contract work, self-dependent work continues to weigh heavily on the Romanian labor market.

By gender, the difference between the two unemployment rates was 1.6 percentage points (6.6% for men versus 5.0% for women) and 0.7 pp for residence (6.3 % in rural versus 5.6% in urban areas).

The fact that unemployment has not fallen sharply at the same time is not necessarily surprising, especially if the proliferation of fixed-term, part-time and temporary agency contracts is taken into account. In 2016, however, there is a decline in unemployment, combined with a slight increase in the

vacancy rate. However, the Romanian labor market seems to be still far from the situation in 2008. Strictly quantitative we can not bring into discussion a crisis caused by a shortage of the labor force but rather by the employers' reaction to the easy improvement of the bargaining position of the employees on the labor market.

Exhaustion of the labor pool with adequate qualifications, as far as this can be said, would be due to the combination of demand growth (as a result of investment) and falling supply (due to the aging and migration of skilled workers).

The most common solution is to boost vocational education, which has suffered an accelerated decline over the last quarter of a century, particularly in the form of closer collaboration between investors and educational institutions.

The labor market for the young population is defined by its specificity, namely the fact that it addresses a segment of the relatively narrow population, that of the population aged 15 to 29 years. The phenomenon of aging populations facing all European countries is impacted on this segment of the population, meaning that smaller groups of young people are assimilated into the active population, including the workforce.

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