

THE EVOLUTION OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN ROMANIA DURING THE 2024–2026 PERIOD

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Abstract: *The study of unemployment is of particular importance because this phenomenon affects both economic and social life. In this regard, analysing unemployment contributes to a better understanding of labour market mechanisms and of the way in which the economy responds to internal and external changes. This paper aims to analyse unemployment from both theoretical and practical perspectives. The first chapter presents the main theoretical aspects of unemployment, namely its concept, characteristics, causes, classification, effects, and measures aimed at reducing it.*

Keywords: *unemployment, labour, market, Romania.*

Introduction

Unemployment is an economic and social phenomenon specific to market economies, reflecting the imbalances that exist between the supply and demand of labour. It constitutes an important indicator of labour market performance and the level of economic development, being closely linked to the dynamics of economic activity and the structural transformations taking place within society.

The second chapter is dedicated to analysing the evolution of unemployment in Romania during the period 2024–2026, based on the available statistical data, with the objective of highlighting the main trends and changes recorded during this period.

Through this paper, the importance of unemployment as an economic and social phenomenon is emphasised, as well as the necessity of continuously analysing it within the context of the contemporary economy.

1. Theoretical Aspects of Unemployment

1.1. The Concept of Unemployment

Unemployment is a complex economic and social phenomenon specific to market economies, reflecting the existence of imbalances within the labour market. It occurs when the supply of labour exceeds the demand for labour generated by economic agents, leading to the inability of a segment of the active population to engage in productive activities (Bodea, 2022, p. 110).

Employment and unemployment represent two opposing states of the labour market, determined by the relationship between labour demand and labour supply. Thus, when the economy fails to provide a sufficient number of jobs for the active population, unemployment emerges, reflecting a significant macroeconomic imbalance (Turcu, 2006, pp. 82–83).

Unemployment should not be analysed solely as the absence of a job, but also as an expression of the way in which the labour market functions within an economy. From this perspective, it highlights the interdependence between economic and social processes and

indicates the extent to which the economy is capable of integrating the available labour resources (https://store.ectap.ro/articole/894_ro.pdf, accessed on 25.03.2026).

Furthermore, unemployment may be interpreted as a form of underutilisation of available labour resources, generating significant economic losses and negatively affecting the population's standard of living. In this sense, unemployment has both economic and social implications.

The most widely used definition of unemployment is that developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO), according to which an unemployed person is an individual aged over 15 years who does not have a job, is capable of working, is available for work, and is actively seeking employment (<https://stec.univ-ovidius.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/3.OCUPAREA-SI-SOMAJUL.pdf>, accessed on 25.03.2026).

In Romania, according to Law No. 76/2002 on the unemployment insurance system and employment stimulation, an unemployed person is defined as an individual who cumulatively meets several conditions, including: being in search of employment, being at least 16 years old and not yet meeting the retirement requirements, being fit for work, not having a job, earning no income or earning income below the level of the Social Reference Indicator, and being available to start work within a short period of time. This definition has a legal character and forms the basis for the official registration of unemployed persons in Romania.

From a macroeconomic perspective, unemployment represents a surplus of active population relative to the economy's capacity to integrate individuals into productive activities, thus constituting an important indicator of labour market performance and overall economic efficiency (https://www.revistadestatistica.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/rrs_06_2013_a3ro.pdf, accessed on 25.03.2026).

Therefore, unemployment constitutes an essential indicator of labour market functioning and economic performance.

1.2. Characteristics of Unemployment

Unemployment, as an economic and social phenomenon, has a series of characteristics that allow it to be analysed from multiple perspectives, namely its level, intensity, duration, and structure. These characteristics provide an overall picture of the magnitude and complexity of unemployment within an economy and contribute to the development and implementation of labour market policies.

The level of unemployment represents one of its most important characteristics and is expressed both in absolute terms, through the total number of unemployed persons, and in relative terms, through the unemployment rate. The unemployment rate is calculated as the percentage ratio between the number of unemployed persons and the active population and constitutes an important indicator for assessing labour market conditions (Bodea, 2022, p. 111).

An important concept associated with the level of unemployment is that of full employment, which does not imply the complete absence of unemployment but rather the existence of a level considered normal, known as the natural rate of unemployment. In market economies, the natural unemployment rate is generally estimated to range between 3% and 5% of the active population.

Based on the concept of natural (equilibrium) unemployment, different labour market situations can be identified. Underemployment occurs when the actual unemployment rate exceeds the natural unemployment rate, indicating the existence of an imbalance and a surplus of unused labour resources. Conversely, overemployment occurs when the actual unemployment rate falls below the natural unemployment rate, a less common situation in practice, characterised by a high

degree of labour resource utilisation. Therefore, the concepts of full employment, underemployment, and overemployment facilitate the analysis of labour market conditions at a given point in time (Urziceanu, 2022, p. 133).

Another important characteristic of unemployment is its intensity, which reflects the extent to which individuals are affected by job loss or by a reduction in work activity. From this perspective, several forms of unemployment can be identified, including total unemployment, which involves the complete cessation of work activity; partial unemployment, characterised by a reduction in working hours and income; and disguised unemployment, encountered particularly in less developed economies, where employment is apparent and productivity remains low. Thus, the intensity of unemployment highlights the degree to which labour resources are utilised or, conversely, underutilised within an economy.

The duration of unemployment refers to the period during which an individual remains unemployed, from the moment of job loss or reduction in work activity until re-employment under normal conditions. This period varies from one individual to another depending on employment opportunities and prevailing economic conditions. In order to analyse the phenomenon at a broader level, the average duration of unemployment is often used, providing an indication of the difficulty of finding employment during a given period.

The structure of unemployment refers to the categories of population affected by this phenomenon and enables its analysis according to various indicators such as age, gender, qualification level, occupation, or field of activity. This characteristic demonstrates that unemployment does not affect all social groups equally but manifests differently depending on labour market conditions and the economic and social particularities of a given country.

In this regard, analysing the structure of unemployment makes it possible to identify the most vulnerable population groups. Statistical data indicate that women are generally more affected by unemployment than men, while, in terms of age, young people—particularly those under the age of 25—and individuals over the age of 50 face greater difficulties in integrating into the labour market (<https://stec.univ-ovidius.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/3.OCUPAREA-SI-SOMAJUL.pdf>, accessed on 25.03.2026).

Therefore, analysing the structure of unemployment represents a fundamental tool for designing employment policies tailored to the specific characteristics of the labour market.

1.3. Causes of Unemployment

The emergence of unemployment is determined by a series of economic and social factors that influence the balance between labour demand and labour supply, as well as the economy's capacity to provide employment opportunities for the active population (Bodea, 2022, p. 110).

In practice, unemployment frequently occurs during periods of economic stagnation or recession, when business activity declines, leading to workforce reductions. In this context, cyclical unemployment emerges as a consequence of fluctuations in economic activity.

Another important cause of unemployment is technological progress, which brings about significant changes in production processes. The introduction of new technologies and the automation of activities reduce the demand for labour in certain sectors, generating technological unemployment. This type of unemployment particularly affects individuals with low levels of qualification or with skills that no longer correspond to the current requirements of the labour market (Bodea, 2022, p. 113).

Structural changes within the economy may also lead to structural unemployment, which is caused by a mismatch between the professional qualifications of the labour force and the

requirements of the labour market. This type of unemployment is especially common during periods of economic restructuring or the development of new sectors of activity, when certain skills become obsolete while others are increasingly demanded.

In addition, the process of searching for employment gives rise to frictional unemployment, which is considered inevitable in a dynamic economy. It occurs during transition periods between jobs or when individuals are seeking their first employment opportunity, resulting from the time required to find a suitable position.

The seasonal nature of certain economic activities leads to seasonal unemployment, which is characteristic of sectors in which activity is not carried out throughout the entire year, such as agriculture, construction, and tourism. In such cases, labour is employed only during specific periods, while workers may become unemployed during the remainder of the year.

Depending on individuals' behaviour and labour market conditions, a distinction can be made between voluntary and involuntary unemployment. Voluntary unemployment occurs when individuals refuse to accept available jobs under existing conditions, whereas involuntary unemployment refers to situations in which individuals are willing to work but are unable to find available employment opportunities.

1.4. Classification of Unemployment

Unemployment can be classified according to several criteria, highlighting both the complexity of this phenomenon and the diversity of its forms of manifestation. Such a classification is useful because it facilitates a clearer understanding of unemployment and contributes to the identification of appropriate labour market intervention measures.

A first classification criterion is based on the theoretical approaches developed by economists who have analysed unemployment. From this perspective, a distinction can be made between classical unemployment, explained by labour market imbalances and high wage levels, and Keynesian unemployment, associated with insufficient labour demand resulting from weak demand for goods and services.

Another important criterion concerns the causes of unemployment. According to this criterion, unemployment may be involuntary, when individuals are willing to work but cannot find employment, or voluntary, when they refuse to work under existing conditions. This category also includes frictional unemployment, which is characteristic of transition periods between jobs; exclusion unemployment, which affects disadvantaged groups; and structural unemployment, caused by discrepancies between the existing socio-professional structure and the needs of the economy.

Based on recurrence, unemployment may be classified as repetitive, in the case of individuals who experience multiple episodes of job loss, or singular, when it occurs as an isolated event. This criterion highlights the frequency with which individuals encounter unemployment.

Depending on the degree of underutilisation of working time and labour capacity, a distinction can be made between complete unemployment, where work activity ceases entirely, and partial unemployment, where individuals continue to work only part of the normal working schedule. This classification reflects the intensity with which professional activity is affected.

According to the seasonal nature of work, unemployment may be classified as typical unemployment and seasonal unemployment. Seasonal unemployment is characteristic of activities that depend on particular periods of the year, such as construction and tourism, and is generally temporary in nature.

Another classification criterion is based on economic fluctuations. From this perspective, Bodea distinguishes between cyclical unemployment, also referred to as conjunctural unemployment, and chronic unemployment, which becomes a persistent and difficult-to-eliminate feature of the economy.

Furthermore, according to factors related to the production process, a distinction can be made between technical unemployment, caused by interruptions or difficulties in production activities, and technological unemployment, generated by the introduction of new equipment and technologies.

Finally, based on the authenticity of the unemployment situation, a distinction can be drawn between genuine unemployment and false unemployment. The former refers to actual situations in which individuals lack employment, whereas the latter concerns individuals who seek to benefit from social protection measures without genuinely being unemployed (Bodea, 2022, pp. 111–113).

1.5. Effects of Unemployment

Unemployment has significant effects on both the economy and society, influencing the population's standard of living and overall economic stability. Its impact is felt at the individual, social, and macroeconomic levels, making it one of the most important challenges faced by contemporary economies.

From an economic perspective, unemployment leads to a reduction in national output and income because a portion of the available labour force remains unused. Under such circumstances, human resources are wasted, and a country's economic potential is not fully utilised. Moreover, unemployment results in lower public revenues due to decreased tax collections and social security contributions, while simultaneously increasing public expenditure through unemployment benefits and other forms of social assistance.

At the individual level, job loss has direct consequences for the financial situation of affected persons, leading to reduced income and a decline in living standards. At the same time, unemployment may have negative psychological effects, generating stress, anxiety, and a loss of self-confidence. In the long term, unemployed individuals may experience a deterioration of their professional skills, which reduces their chances of successful reintegration into the labour market.

From a social perspective, unemployment contributes to increasing inequality and heightens the risk of poverty and social exclusion. Particularly among young people and vulnerable groups, the lack of employment opportunities may lead to marginalisation and difficulties in achieving social integration. Furthermore, high levels of unemployment can generate social tensions and instability.

In conclusion, the effects of unemployment are multiple and interconnected, affecting both the economy and society as a whole. For this reason, reducing unemployment remains an important objective of economic and social policies, requiring the implementation of effective measures aimed at promoting employment and labour market participation.

1.6. Measures for Reducing Unemployment

Reducing unemployment represents an important objective of economic and social policy, requiring the implementation of measures aimed at increasing employment levels and promoting a balanced labour market.

Measures designed to reduce unemployment can be broadly divided into two main categories: active measures and passive measures.

Active measures are intended to facilitate the integration or reintegration of individuals into the labour market. These include vocational training and retraining programmes, support for entrepreneurship, incentives for employers through subsidies, and the creation of new employment opportunities. Their primary purpose is to enhance employability and to ensure that the labour force is better aligned with the evolving requirements of the economy.

Passive measures are designed to protect individuals affected by unemployment by providing them with a minimum income during periods in which they are without work. These measures include unemployment benefits and other forms of social assistance, thereby helping to maintain a minimum standard of living.

In conclusion, reducing unemployment requires a combined use of both active and passive measures in order to ensure not only social protection for unemployed individuals but also their effective reintegration into the labour market. The effectiveness of these measures depends on their alignment with existing economic and social realities.

2. Study on the Evolution of Unemployment in Romania during the Period 2024–2026

2.1. The Evolution of Unemployment In 2024

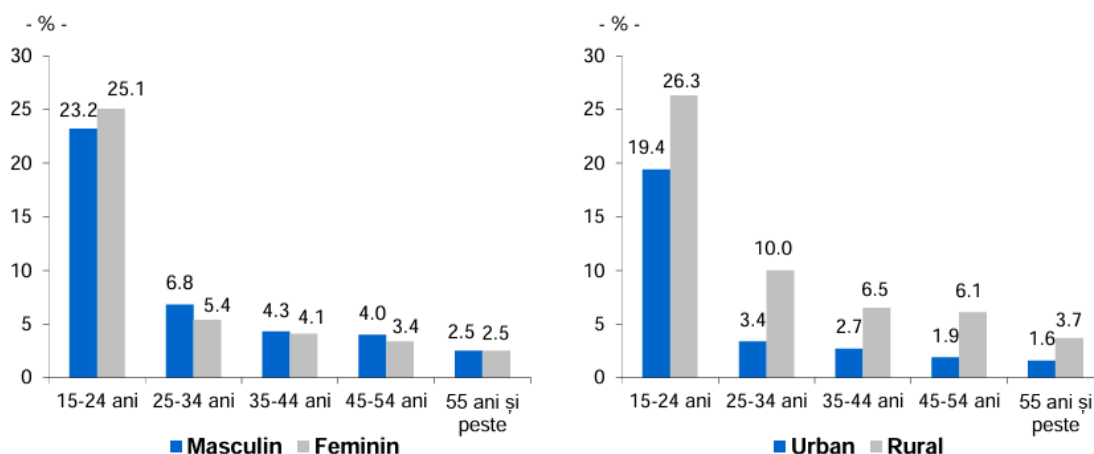
In 2024, the evolution of unemployment in Romania was characterised by a relatively stable level, with the unemployment rate standing at approximately 5.4%, according to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics.

This figure indicates a slight improvement compared to the previous year, reflecting a favourable development of the labour market and an increase in the employment rate. Although monthly fluctuations in the unemployment rate were recorded throughout the year, these variations were not significant, remaining within the range of approximately 5% to 6%.

The analysis of the data highlights that unemployment does not affect all population groups equally. Young people aged between 15 and 24 recorded the highest unemployment rates, exceeding 20%, which indicates significant difficulties in entering the labour market.

Furthermore, notable differences can also be observed between urban and rural areas, as well as across educational levels, with individuals possessing lower levels of qualification being more exposed to the risk of unemployment.

Figure 1. Unemployment Rate by Age Group, Gender, and Area of Residence in 2024



(Source: https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/com_presa/com_pdf/somaj_2024r.pdf)

In conclusion, the year 2024 was characterized by a relatively stable evolution of unemployment, with a moderate unemployment rate and no major fluctuations, indicating a balanced functioning of the Romanian labour market.

2.2. The Evolution of Unemployment in 2025

In 2025, the evolution of unemployment in Romania revealed a slight upward trend compared to the previous year, although remaining within moderate limits and without indicating major imbalances in the labour market. According to data published by the National Institute of Statistics, the unemployment rate averaged approximately 5.7%–5.8%, displaying a gradual increase throughout the year.

At the beginning of the year, the unemployment rate stood at approximately 5.6%. However, over the following months, it recorded slight increases, reaching around 5.8% during the period from May to July and approximately 5.9%–6% between August and December. This development suggests a slight deterioration in labour market conditions as a result of slower economic growth and ongoing structural adjustment processes.

Figure 2. Unemployment Rate by Age Group Gender in 2025

	2024	2025											
	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct. ^P	Nov. ^P	Dec. ^P
Total													
15-74 years	5,7	5,9	6,0	6,0	6,0	6,1	6,0	6,0	6,1	6,1	5,9	6,0	6,0
15-24 years	26,3	24,8	24,8	24,8	23,5	23,5	23,5	26,9	26,9	26,9	...	...	...
25-74 years	4,3	4,7	4,8	4,9	4,8	4,9	4,9	4,7	4,8	4,7	4,6	4,7	4,6
Male													
15-74 years	5,9	5,9	5,9	5,9	6,0	6,0	6,0	6,2	6,4	6,3	6,0	6,1	5,9
15-24 years	26,3	22,2	22,2	22,2	22,4	22,4	22,4	27,2	27,2	27,2	...	...	...
25-74 years	4,4	4,8	4,8	4,8	4,8	4,9	4,9	4,8	4,9	4,8	4,7	4,8	4,6
Female													
15-74 years	5,3	5,9	6,1	6,2	6,0	6,2	6,0	5,6	5,8	5,8	5,8	5,9	6,1
15-24 years	26,3	28,7	28,7	28,7	25,0	25,0	25,0	26,3	26,3	26,3	...	...	...
25-74 years	4,1	4,6	4,7	4,9	4,8	4,9	4,9	4,6	4,5	4,4	4,5	4,6	4,5

(Source: https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/com_presa/com_pdf/somaj_bim_decembrie25r.pdf)

Nevertheless, unemployment remained within a moderate range, suggesting that the Romanian economy continued to absorb a large share of the available labour force. Furthermore, the structure of unemployment indicates that certain population groups, particularly young people, remained more vulnerable, recording unemployment rates significantly higher than the overall average.

In addition, it should be noted that the unemployment rate calculated by the National Institute of Statistics is higher than the rate reported by the National Agency for Employment because it includes all individuals seeking employment, not only those officially registered as unemployed.

In conclusion, 2025 was characterised by a slight increase in unemployment compared to 2024, but without significant fluctuations, indicating the maintenance of a relatively balanced labour market.

2.3. The Evolution of Unemployment in 2026

In 2026, the evolution of unemployment in Romania indicates the continuation of a relatively stable trend, with values similar to those recorded during the previous year. According to the data available at the beginning of 2026, specifically for January, the unemployment rate stood at 6%, reflecting a slight increase compared to 2024 but a stabilisation relative to the developments observed in 2025 (https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/com_presa/com_pdf/somaj_bim_ianuarie26r.pdf).

This evolution reflects the fact that the Romanian labour market is experiencing a period of relative equilibrium, characterised by moderate fluctuations in unemployment. Although the unemployment rate remains slightly higher than in previous years, it does not signal a significant deterioration in economic conditions but rather an adjustment to the prevailing economic environment.

In conclusion, the data available for the beginning of 2026 indicate a relatively stable evolution of unemployment, with the rate remaining around 6%, reflecting the overall stability of the Romanian labour market.

2.4. Comparative Analysis and Trends

An analysis of unemployment trends in Romania during the period 2024–2026 reveals a relatively stable evolution of this phenomenon, characterised by moderate variations and the absence of major fluctuations.

In 2024, the unemployment rate stood at approximately 5.4%, reflecting a balanced labour market situation. In 2025, a slight increase was recorded, with the unemployment rate reaching approximately 5.7%–5.8%, mainly as a result of factors such as slower economic growth and structural adjustments within the labour market. At the beginning of 2026, the available data indicate a stabilisation of unemployment at around 6%, maintaining the moderate upward trend observed during the previous year.

Comparatively, it can be observed that the analysed period was not characterised by abrupt changes but rather by a gradual evolution, with unemployment increasing slightly from one year to another without reaching high levels. This development indicates that the Romanian labour market has remained relatively stable and has continued to demonstrate its capacity to absorb a large share of the available labour force.

At the same time, the analysis highlights the persistence of certain structural imbalances, particularly regarding the integration of specific population groups into the labour market, as reflected by the high unemployment rates among young people. This situation underscores the need for active employment policies focused on skills development and facilitating access to employment opportunities.

Overall, the general trend of unemployment during the period 2024–2026 can be described as one of moderate growth followed by stabilisation, indicating the labour market's adaptation to current economic conditions. Therefore, although unemployment does not currently represent a major concern, its evolution should continue to be closely monitored, and effective employment policies should be implemented accordingly.

Conclusions

From a theoretical perspective, unemployment is a complex economic and social phenomenon that reflects existing imbalances within the labour market and the economy's ability to integrate the active population into productive activities. The theoretical analysis conducted in

this paper highlights the fact that unemployment cannot be reduced merely to the absence of a job but should be understood as an important indicator of labour market performance and overall economic development.

Unemployment can be examined through its concept, characteristics, causes, classifications, effects, and measures aimed at reducing it. The analysis of these dimensions demonstrates that the phenomenon manifests itself in various forms and is influenced by economic, social, technological, and structural factors. At the same time, its effects extend to the economy, individuals, and society as a whole through reduced income, increased inequality, and a higher risk of social exclusion.

The analysis of unemployment trends in Romania during the period 2024–2026 reveals a general pattern of relative stability, accompanied by a slight increase from 5.4% in 2024 to approximately 5.7%–5.8% in 2025, followed by its maintenance at around 6% at the beginning of 2026. This evolution indicates that the Romanian labour market has remained relatively balanced, without major fluctuations, although certain structural imbalances continue to persist.

Furthermore, the findings of the analysis indicate that unemployment affects population groups differently, with young people representing one of the most vulnerable categories. This aspect highlights the need for tailored policies aimed at facilitating labour market integration and reducing the risk of social exclusion.

Recommendations

In order to reduce unemployment and improve the functioning of the Romanian labour market, the following measures may be considered:

- developing vocational training and retraining programmes in accordance with current labour market requirements;
- supporting young people in their transition into employment through internships, work placement programmes, and career counselling services;
- encouraging employers through subsidies and incentives designed to promote the creation of new jobs;
- supporting entrepreneurship and local economic initiatives, particularly in areas with limited employment opportunities;
- improving the alignment between the education system and the actual needs of the labour market in order to reduce skill mismatches and labour market disparities;
- continuously monitoring unemployment trends and adapting public policies in response to economic and social developments.

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