WHAT DOES DEMOGRAPHIC RESILIENCE MEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINED DEPOPULATION AND RAPID AGEING?

Olga Gagauz[1] **– Mariana Buciuceanu-Vrabie**[2]

Abstract

Rapid ageing and sustained depopulation are reshaping the conditions under which societies maintain economic activity, social provision and institutional capacity. The study develops a conceptual framework for demographic resilience in contexts where population decline is not a temporary deviation but a long-term structural condition. The article defines resilience as the capacity of socio-demographic systems to maintain core societal functions under shrinking and ageing population structures. The framework links four interacting dimensions: economic adaptation; social and care provision; human capital formation and retention; and institutional capacity for anticipatory governance, policy coordination, and adaptive implementation. Methodologically, the article is based on a conceptual synthesis of resilience theory, demographic transition research and depopulation studies, complemented by an illustrative case study of Moldova. The article contributes to demographic debate by shifting attention from reversing decline to assessing how societies can adapt to persistent demographic constraints while preserving equity, service access and governance capacity.

Keywords: demographic resilience, depopulation, population ageing, adaptive governance
Demografie, 2026, 68(3): 151–166
DOI: https://doi.org/10.54694/dem.0382

INTRODUCTION

Rapid population ageing and sustained population decline are increasingly shaping the conditions under which contemporary societies function and develop. These processes redefine the foundations of economic reproduction, social organisation, and institutional performance. In many countries, the central challenge is society's capacity to remain functional, inclusive, and economically viable amid a shrinking and ageing population (*Diez-Nicolás*, 2004; *Dougherty et al.*, 2022; *Brzozowska et al.*, 2023). This shift in the demographic context calls for a reconsideration of how population change is conceptualised and governed.

The existing literature provides valuable insights into the drivers and consequences of depopulation, but it remains less developed in explaining how societies can adapt when population decline becomes a persistent structural condition. The application of the concept of resilience for long-term demographic

1) National Institute for Economic Research, Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova. Contact: gagauz.olga@ase.md.
2) National Institute for Economic Research, Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova.

transformations remains limited. This gap is particularly relevant for Eastern European countries, where rapid ageing, sustained out-migration, human capital depletion, social protection pressures and institutional constraints interact within the same demographic context. Such conditions are increasingly relevant for several Eastern European countries, including Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia (*Fihel – Okólski*, 2019), as well as Moldova (*Gagauz et al.*, 2024), where demographic projections indicate the continuation or further intensification of these trends. In these settings, depopulation is a systemic process with implications for labour markets, public finances, service provision, human capital, and institutional capacity.

The study aims to conceptualise demographic resilience as a core dimension of socioeconomic sustainability under depopulation and demographic ageing. By adopting an interdisciplinary perspective that draws on demography, economics, sociology, and resilience theory, the study provides a conceptual foundation for analysing demographic resilience in countries facing long-term depopulation. The framework is further illustrated through the case of Moldova, which exemplifies the combined effects of sustained depopulation, population ageing, and out-migration in Eastern Europe. The analysis emphasises adaptive pathways and policy orientations that enhance societies' capacity to function amid sustained population loss and rapid ageing.

The article makes three main contributions. First, it advances the conceptualisation of demographic resilience by shifting the analytical focus from demographic recovery to the adaptive capacity of societies facing sustained population decline and rapid ageing. Second, it develops an integrated, systems-based framework linking demographic dynamics to economic adaptation, social care provision, human capital retention, and institutional capacity. Third, by applying this framework to Moldova, the article demonstrates how demographic resilience can be assessed in high-emigration and ageing contexts where anticipatory governance instruments coexist with persistent gaps in budgeting, territorial service adaptation, and the creation of domestic opportunities.

DEMOGRAPHIC RESILIENCE: CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

Resilience is a complex, multidisciplinary concept, and its definitions vary by context. According to the United Nations, resilience is "the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions" (*UN*, 2009). *Grimm and Calabrese* (2011) provide a clear, interdisciplinary definition of resilience, explaining that it is a characteristic of complex systems that reflects their ability to maintain core functions and structures despite internal and external disturbances, to adapt to change, and to recover from stressors.

Population is a complex demographic system that evolves according to internal regularities, including the generalised patterns described by demographic transition theory (*Chesnais*, 1992; *Lutz – Butz – KC*, 2014; *Cecchini*, 2019). Demographic processes are strongly shaped by economic conditions, social norms, cultural values, political institutions, and public policies, leading to significant spatial and temporal variation in population dynamics (*Deimantas – Şanlıtürk – Azzollini et al.*, 2024). Changes in population size, age structure, health status, educational attainment, migration behaviour, and value systems have direct implications for labour markets, welfare systems, economic performance, social stability, and the long-term sustainability of societal development (*Lutz – Butz – KC*, 2014). UNFPA defines resilient societies as those that understand and anticipate population dynamics and possess the skills, tools, political will, and public support required to manage demographic change, mitigate its negative impacts, and capitalise on emerging opportunities for people, prosperity, and the environment (*UNFPA*, 2024).

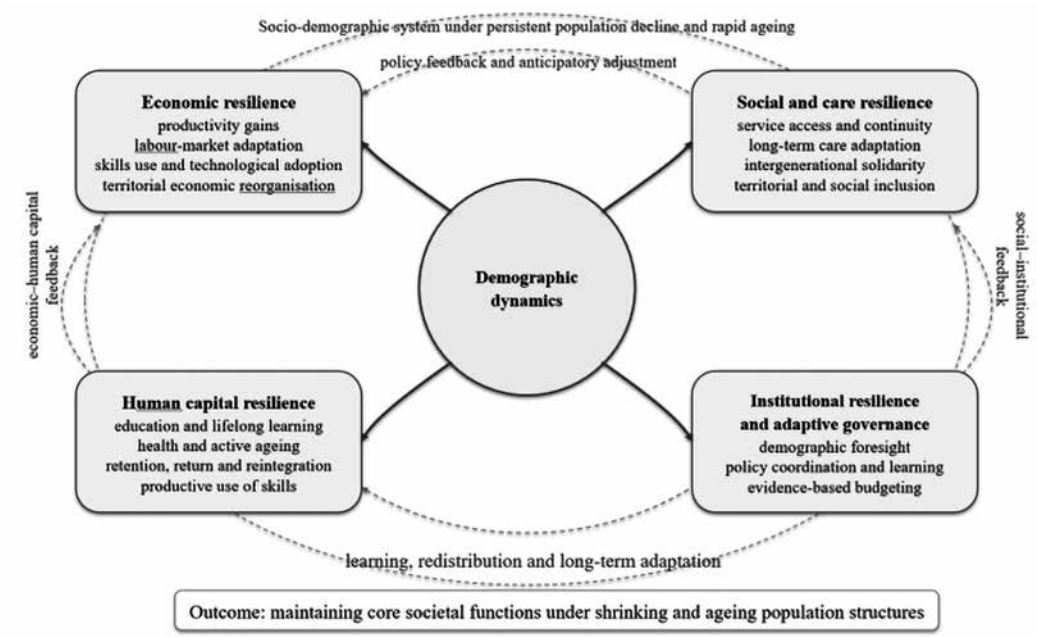
In this study, demographic resilience is defined as the system-level capacity of societies experiencing sustained population decline and ageing to maintain core economic, social and institutional functions through adaptation to changing population structures. It emerges from the interaction among long-term demographic dynamics, socio-economic adjustment,

human capital mobilisation, and adaptive governance, and is expressed not in demographic recovery but in the ability to preserve societal functionality, inclusion, and development potential under persistent demographic constraints.

From this perspective, demographic resilience is a dynamic outcome that emerges from interactions among demographic dynamics and economic, social, and institutional subsystems (Figure 1*)*. societies are complex hierarchical systems composed of interdependent subsystems, the demographic subsystem occupies a central position, given that the population constitutes a foundational element of all social systems and a prerequisite for their reproduction. Resilience is not a static condition but an ongoing process of adaptation shaped by both structural constraints and responsive mechanisms. Economic and social resilience are interacting subsystems that typically adjust more rapidly to changing conditions, whereas demographic processes introduce longer-term constraints and impulses that shape overall trajectories of adaptation. Institutional resilience plays an enabling and coordinating role by linking governance structures to system performance through adaptive decision-making, policy feedback, and learning. The bidirectional nature of these relationships highlights both the influence on system responses and the evolution in response to outcomes and emerging challenges. Demographic resilience, therefore, emerges from the alignment between long-term population dynamics, short- and medium-term socio-economic adjustments, and institutional capacity to steer adaptive responses.

In systems theory, stability and resilience denote distinct properties of system behaviour. Stability is the capacity to resist disturbances and return rapidly to a predefined equilibrium, assuming relatively linear dynamics and the desirability of preserving existing structures. Resilience, by contrast, emphasises the ability to absorb shocks, adapt, and continue core functions, even when this entails substantial structural change. As *Holling* (1973) noted, systems may be highly stable yet fragile, whereas resilient systems can tolerate variability without collapse. Given the long-time horizons of demographic change, adaptability and anticipation are more critical than short-term stability.

Figure 1 **Demographic Resilience as a dynamic system**



Source: *Developed by the authors.*

This shift from equilibrium outcomes to adaptive demographic processes provides a robust conceptual foundation for analysing demographic resilience across diverse contexts. Within this framework, migration is understood not as a net demographic loss but as a dynamic component of demographic systems, capable of generating positive or negative feedback depending on institutional capacity for integration, transnational engagement, and the circulation of social capital (*IOM*, 2024). Similarly, population ageing is approached not only as a fiscal burden or a labour supply constraint but also as a functional transformation of social systems, creating opportunities for labour market reconfiguration, innovation in care provision, and the mobilisation of accumulated knowledge and social capital. Accordingly, demographic resilience extends beyond a narrow focus on population size to encompass qualitative characteristics of the population, including human capital, health, social capital, and behavioural patterns. Such an approach shifts the focus from demographic targets to system performance under constraints.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

When defining economic resilience, the World Bank draws on Hallegatte's conceptualisation, which describes it as an economy's capacity to absorb shocks, adapt to change, and maintain or restore economic performance and stability (*Hallegatte*, 2014). Similarly, the OECD defines economic resilience as the ability of an economy to sustain its functioning in the face of disruptions, including financial, environmental, and geopolitical shocks. While these definitions emphasise adaptability and continuity, their application to depopulating contexts raises specific challenges that complicate conventional interpretations of resilience (*Röhn et al.*, 2015). Depopulation poses a structural challenge for economic systems by altering the scale, composition, and spatial distribution of key economic resources. It reduces the labour supply, shrinks domestic markets, and increases pressure on public finances through a narrowing tax base and rising age-related expenditure (*van der Gaag – de Beer*, 2015; *OECD*, 2025a). These processes are cumulative and self-reinforcing, particularly when population decline is driven by the selective outmigration of young and skilled individuals.

Depopulation also reshapes patterns of demand and production. Declining and ageing populations tend to shift consumption towards health, care, and age-related services, while reducing demand in sectors linked to household formation, education, and long-term investment. At the same time, shrinking local markets limit economies of scale and weaken incentives for private investment. As a result, the capacity of firms and regions to reorient production structures, adopt new business models, or transition towards knowledge-intensive and export-oriented activities is uneven and often concentrated in a limited number of dynamic areas (*OECD*, 2025c).

At the territorial level, depopulation exacerbates spatial inequalities by reinforcing the divergence between growing urban centres and shrinking rural or peripheral regions. Population loss often triggers negative feedback loops in lagging areas, including reduced service provision, underutilised infrastructure, and weakened local economic ecosystems (*OECD*, 2025b).

In many countries where depopulation is driven by migration, population decline reflects persistent structural economic weaknesses rather than autonomous demographic dynamics (*World Bank*, 2018). Economic imbalances stimulate population outflows, which in turn exacerbate labour shortages and weaken long-term growth potential, creating self-reinforcing cycles of decline (*OECD*, 2022; *Rosinska*, 2024). Investments in education yield positive outcomes only when accompanied by productive jobs offering competitive wages and meaningful career prospects; otherwise, they tend to increase labour mobility and intensify emigration (*World Bank*, 2020). Strengthening resilience under such conditions requires addressing the economic drivers of migration by creating employment, promoting structural transformation, and improving institutional quality.

In response to labour shortages linked to depopulation, immigration is often presented as a means of strengthening economic resilience (*OECD*, 2024). Immigration may alleviate labour shortages, but it does not automatically strengthen resilience unless migrant labour is integrated into productivity-enhancing sectors and supported by coherent labour market, education, and social inclusion policies.

Otherwise, reliance on immigration risks reinforcing labour market segmentation without substantially enhancing long-term economic resilience (*Giannakis – Bruggeman*, 2020).

In depopulating contexts, resilience depends on whether economies can reduce their dependence on extensive labour-force growth and strengthen alternative sources of adaptation, including productivity gains, better use of underutilised labour, skills upgrading, technological adoption, territorial reorganisation, and institutional coordination. Thus, economic resilience to depopulation is the capacity of an economy to maintain core functions amid a shrinking, ageing population structure. This includes the ability to compensate, at least partially, for labour-force decline through productivity gains, activation of underutilised labour, skills development, technological adaptation, and more efficient territorial organisation. At the same time, such resilience is neither automatic nor evenly distributed. It depends on the quality of institutions, the capacity to retain and mobilise human capital, and the ability to coordinate labour market, migration, education, innovation, and regional development policies. From this perspective, economic resilience is not the absence of demographic constraint, but the capacity to prevent demographic decline from translating into cumulative economic fragility.

SOCIAL RESILIENCE

Unlike economic resilience, which concerns the capacity to sustain productive and fiscal functions, social resilience concerns the distributional and relational consequences of demographic decline. Social resilience is the capacity of societies and territories to sustain social reproduction, care, and overall well-being under demographic stress, including population ageing and decline. Shrinking and ageing populations place growing pressure on social systems by reshaping service demand, weakening community networks, and challenging intergenerational solidarity, thereby undermining social cohesion (*Zamfirescu-Mareș – Corman*, 2025). Social resilience depends on the ability of social institutions, communities, and support systems to adapt to these structural transformations while preventing social exclusion, rising inequality, and social fragmentation.

A central dimension of social resilience in depopulating societies is the continuity and accessibility of core public services, including health care, education, social protection, and long-term care. Population decline, particularly in rural and peripheral areas, often leads to service contraction, increased territorial disparities, and declining service quality, which can reinforce outmigration and social vulnerability (*Cabañero-Garcia et al.*, 2025). Socially resilient systems respond to these pressures by reorganising service provision, strengthening territorial connectivity, and adopting innovative delivery models, including digital, mobile, and community-based solutions, to ensure equitable access across population groups and regions.

Social resilience is closely linked to the quality of human capital and the life-course opportunities available to individuals. The ability to pursue education, employment, family formation, and active ageing in one's place of residence contributes to social stability and reduces the likelihood of involuntary or economically driven migration. Investments in education, health, and lifelong learning enhance individual adaptability and support intergenerational balance, which is particularly important in societies experiencing sustained population decline and rapid ageing. At the same time, a shrinking youth population and a growing share of older people are driving a reorientation of public spending towards pensions, health care, and long-term care, while resources allocated to education, family policies, and youth investments tend to diminish. In this context, forward-looking expenditure projections and proportional redistribution of public resources across age groups are essential for maintaining social resilience (*Gailey et al.*, 2025). Strengthening social resilience requires rebalancing public investment across the life course, ensuring that rising expenditure on ageing-related needs is complemented by sustained support for children, young people, and working-age populations.

In several depopulating countries, high levels of poverty constitute an additional structural constraint on social resilience. Bulgaria, Romania, and Moldova face elevated risks of poverty and social exclusion, especially in rural and peripheral areas (*Eurostat*, 2025). Under these conditions, limited household resources reduce individuals' and families'

capacity to adapt to demographic change, restrict access to education, health care, and adequate housing, and increase vulnerability across the life course.

Community-level mechanisms are critical to sustaining social resilience under demographic stress. Strong social networks, civic engagement, and the involvement of non-governmental and community-based organisations can partially offset demographic shrinkage by reinforcing social support structures and fostering local initiative (*Coutts – Velásques*, 2025). In high-emigration contexts, these mechanisms are essential for supporting families affected by migration, maintaining social ties across borders, and facilitating the reintegration of return migrants.

Strengthening social resilience requires a shift from governance models that treat individuals and communities as passive recipients of public services towards approaches that recognise them as active co-creators of solutions. Traditional top-down service delivery often proves insufficient to address diverse, spatially differentiated, and rapidly changing social needs (*Falanga et al.*, 2021). Participatory and collaborative governance enhances the adaptive capacity of social systems by engaging citizens, community organisations, and local actors in identifying challenges, designing interventions, and implementing responses. By mobilising local knowledge, social capital, and informal support networks, such approaches make services in education, health, care, and social support more context-sensitive, inclusive, and sustainable (*Lonbay*, 2018; *Wang et al.*, 2024). They also foster trust, ownership, and collective responsibility, while enabling experimentation with community-based care, intergenerational initiatives, and digitally enabled service models. In this sense, the transition from passive service provision to collaborative governance is a key mechanism for strengthening social resilience in rural and depopulating areas facing population decline and spatial disparities (*Meister Broekema et al.*, 2022; *Rahman et al.*, 2024).

Social resilience also depends on the capacity of societies to preserve cohesion under demographic stress. In depopulating and ageing societies, resilience is not limited to maintaining access to services and care, but also involves sustaining trust, solidarity, and a shared sense of belonging across generations, territories, and social groups. From this perspective, social resilience requires not only adaptive service provision, but also policies and institutions capable of sustaining social cohesion and preventing demographic change from deepening societal fragmentation. It determines whether adaptation to depopulation preserves access to essential services, intergenerational balance, territorial cohesion, and social inclusion, or whether it produces new forms of exclusion and vulnerability. In this sense, socially resilient systems can reorganise care, services, community support, and public investment to prevent demographic change from deepening social fragmentation.

HUMAN CAPITAL BUILDING AND DEMOGRAPHIC RESILIENCE

Human capital represents a key mechanism through which societies sustain adaptation across generations. As the population base contracts, qualitative characteristics such as education, health status, and adaptability become increasingly important for sustaining population renewal and social functioning. Yet selective outmigration and ageing may weaken the capacity of human capital investments to generate cumulative demographic effects, as smaller, older populations yield weaker feedback mechanisms in family formation, intergenerational skill transmission, and population renewal. Intergenerational care support, particularly childcare assistance provided within families, remains an important mechanism for sustaining human capital formation, labour market participation, and family resilience amid demographic ageing and social change (*Buciuceanu-Vrabie – Grigoraș*, 2023). While remittances, transnational networks, and return migration can partially mitigate skill losses, their demographic impact depends on the extent to which human capital is reintegrated into the domestic population and social systems. In many depopulating societies, migration-related human capital flows remain weakly connected to long-term demographic renewal, limiting their contribution to resilience.

Despite evidence that investments in education can influence long-term demographic trajectories under specific conditions, particularly through their effects on fertility behaviour, health, and adaptive capacity

(*Lutz – Butz – KC*, 2014), the demographic impact of human capital policies remains highly contingent on broader structural conditions. Migration alters the age and skill structure of the remaining population, particularly when emigration is concentrated among young and highly educated groups, thereby weakening the reproductive, innovative, and adaptive potential of demographic systems (*World Bank*, 2018; *Potančoková – Stonawski – Gailey*, 2021). As a result, human capital depletion may persist despite continued investment in education and training, limiting the long-term demographic benefits of such policies. Recent research indicates that in countries with high levels of migration, investments in education do not translate into GDP growth because substantial human capital is lost through emigration (*Gagauz – Samohvalov*, 2024). Where domestic opportunities for skill utilisation are limited, investments in education may primarily increase individual mobility rather than strengthen demographic resilience in the country of origin. In such cases, human capital accumulation can unintentionally reinforce migration-driven population decline, further reshaping age structures and weakening long-term demographic sustainability (*Rao*, 2010; *Dustmann – Glitz*, 2011).

In ageing and depopulating societies, human capital resilience also requires a life-course perspective. As the share of older people increases and younger cohorts become smaller, the adaptive capacity of society depends not only on the education of younger generations, but also on the health, skills and labour market participation of adults and older workers. Longer and healthier working lives, lifelong learning, reskilling, digital competencies, and age-inclusive employment practices become essential mechanisms to partially offset the contraction of the working-age population. From this perspective, active ageing policies are not only social policies, but also human capital policies, as they help preserve accumulated experience, professional knowledge and social capital within the domestic economy. However, their contribution to demographic resilience depends on the extent to which older workers have access to flexible work arrangements, continuous training, health support, and non-discriminatory employment opportunities.

Human capital strengthens demographic resilience only when it is retained, mobilised and connected to domestic opportunity structures. In high-emigration contexts, investments in education and skills may increase individual mobility rather than national adaptive capacity if labour markets do not offer productive employment, competitive wages and credible career prospects (*Dustmann – Glitz*, 2011; *World Bank*, 2018; *World Bank*, 2020). Therefore, human capital policies contribute to demographic resilience only when they are integrated with employment creation, innovation, return migration, family formation opportunities and territorial development (*Potančoková – Stonawski, – Gailey*, 2021; *Siskova et al.*, 2023; *Gagauz – Samohvalov*, 2024).

INSTITUTIONAL RESILIENCE

If human capital constitutes a key resource for demographic resilience, institutional resilience determines whether this resource can be retained, mobilised, and translated into coherent long-term adaptation strategies. At the societal level, demographic resilience therefore depends on state capacity and the quality of governance. Institutional resilience refers to the ability of public institutions to anticipate, manage, and adapt to demographic change through evidence-based demographic, social, economic, and migration policies, supported by coordination mechanisms, demographic forecasting, and institutional learning (*Anderson – De Tollenaere*, 2020; *UNFPA*, 2024). This includes demographic forecasting, assessment of socio-economic implications, and the deployment of appropriate policy instruments to mitigate adverse effects while maximising potential benefits. In the context of sustained depopulation, institutional resilience becomes an important mediating factor in translating demographic pressures into economic and social outcomes. Declining and ageing populations simultaneously increase demands on public administration, particularly in health care, social protection, and service provision, while constraining fiscal resources and administrative capacity, thereby placing institutions under persistent structural stress.

In countries experiencing depopulation alongside high poverty, institutional resilience is further constrained by a narrow fiscal base and elevated social

expenditure requirements, thereby limiting public institutions' capacity to invest in long-term adaptive reforms. Recent geopolitical shocks, particularly the war in Ukraine, have further exposed the vulnerability of depopulating societies to sudden demographic and institutional stress. In countries neighbouring the conflict, including several Eastern European states, the war has intensified migration pressures, disrupted labour markets, and increased demand for social protection and public services. These external shocks interact with pre-existing demographic decline and poverty, testing institutions' capacity to respond rapidly while maintaining long-term adaptive strategies.

In depopulating contexts, insufficient institutional adaptation may create institutional traps that hinder the effective mobilisation and transformation of demographic and human capital resources (*Balyakin et al.*, 2022). Rigid governance arrangements, fragmented policy responsibilities, and delayed responses to demographic signals can lock territories into cumulative trajectories of decline, in which shrinking populations erode administrative capacity and weakened institutions further intensify demographic and socio-economic deterioration. Empirical research indicates that institutional capacity matters not only in absolute terms but also in its ability to convert demographic decline into adaptive responses. *Colantoni et al.* (2020) show that resilience depends on the capacity of local and national systems to reframe population loss as a driver of functional adjustment through coordinated reconversion strategies, diversification, and community engagement.

Institutional resilience also depends on effective vertical and horizontal coordination across governance levels and policy domains. Depopulation often heightens governance complexity, as responsibilities for service provision, regional development, and social protection are spread across multiple institutional layers. Weak coordination between central and local authorities can lead to fragmented service delivery, inefficiencies, and uneven territorial outcomes. At the same time, local administrations, particularly in shrinking or peripheral regions, frequently face declining administrative capacity, limiting their ability to adapt service networks or implement strategic development initiatives. Depopulation requires adjustments to administrative structures, service networks, and resource allocation mechanisms. Although digitalisation, service consolidation, and territorial reorganisation are commonly proposed responses, these measures often entail trade-offs in accessibility, equity, and social acceptance (*OECD*, 2025b).

Demographic change is directly translated into financial risks for local governments: population decline erodes the tax base, while obligations for service provision and infrastructure maintenance remain high or even increase. This heightens the likelihood of fiscal imbalances and constrains municipalities' capacity to plan and implement long-term development strategies (*Navarro-Galera et al.*, 2024). Consequently, financial sustainability is a key mechanism by which demographic decline affects the institutional capacity to adapt, coordinate policies, and ensure the sustainable functioning of public institutions.

Non-state actors, including civil society organisations, the private sector, and international partners, can partially alleviate institutional capacity constraints by supporting service delivery, implementation, and policy innovation. In high-emigration contexts, diaspora engagement and international cooperation may provide financial resources, technical expertise, and opportunities for policy learning, particularly through remittances, skills transfer, and transnational networks. Remittance flows often support household consumption, community investment, and entrepreneurial activity in contexts of high emigration and limited local opportunity structures (*Stîrba et al.*, 2023). Regional analyses document best practices for leveraging diaspora contributions, ranging from financial investment to cultural and social capital (*Arifagić – Mitrović*, 2022; *Karabegović*, 2024). While diaspora engagement can therefore enhance short- to medium-term adaptive capacity, it also reflects underlying domestic institutional limitations and cannot substitute for sustained investment in public-sector capacity, territorial governance, and inclusive service provision in the long term (*OECD*, 2021).

Institutional resilience represents the coordinating dimension of demographic resilience. It determines

whether demographic pressures are translated into fragmented, reactive responses or coherent adaptation strategies that link economic policy, social protection, migration management, human capital development, and territorial governance. Its strength depends on demographic foresight, vertical and horizontal coordination, fiscal sustainability, policy learning and the capacity to integrate population projections into budgeting and implementation.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK: CASE OF MOLDOVA

Moldova provides a relevant case for applying the demographic resilience framework, as population decline, ageing and migration-driven demographic change have become structural conditions shaping labour markets, social protection, territorial development, human capital formation and institutional capacity. Recent studies indicate that Moldova has entered a phase of accelerated depopulation, with an annual population decrease of approximately 1.5–2% (*Gagauz et al.*, 2024). These trends have transformed demographic change from a sectoral policy concern into a cross-cutting challenge for long-term socio-economic sustainability and governance.

Moldova's demographic governance has gradually shifted from a security-centred, predominantly natalist approach to an adaptation-oriented agenda for demographic resilience. The National Strategic Programme on Demographic Security 2011–2025 treated population decline primarily as a threat to be reversed, but its implementation revealed a limited capacity to address the structural drivers of depopulation, particularly emigration, labour-market weaknesses, and territorial disparities. Subsequent initiatives, including the Action Plan on Active Ageing 2018–2021 and the National Programme on Active and Healthy Ageing 2023–2027, introduced a broader life-course perspective and tested new service models for an ageing society. This transition has been reinforced by demographic foresight instruments, including Government Decision No. 284/2024, which formalises the regular production of national and territorial population projections as reference inputs for policy planning.

The institutional architecture underpinning this paradigm shift combines institutional discontinuity with recent consolidation efforts. The National Commission for Population and Development, established in 2007 as a whole-of-government coordination mechanism, ceased to function as a formal institution after the abrogation of its statutory basis in 2020. In the absence of a renewed inter-ministerial coordination body, demographic policy is now coordinated mainly through sectoral institutions, particularly the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. At the strategic level, demographic change has been integrated as a cross-cutting concern in the National Development Strategy "European Moldova 2030", while UNFPA continues to provide technical and advisory support (*UNFPA Moldova*, 2026). Recent reforms, including Government Decision No. 284/2024, the Diaspora-2025 Strategy, sectoral diaspora programmes, and territorial administrative reform, indicate a stronger orientation towards anticipatory governance. However, these instruments remain only partially integrated into multi-year budgeting, sectoral planning, and local implementation, limiting their transformative potential.

To assess Moldova's resilience profile, policy responses are classified into three analytical tiers. The classification is based on the depth of institutional change, the degree of integration across policy domains, and the extent to which each measure addresses the structural conditions that reproduce demographic vulnerability (Table 1). Absorptive responses cushion immediate demographic pressures without substantially altering existing structures. Adaptive responses adjust policies, services, or institutions to changing demographic conditions but remain limited in scale or integration. Transformative responses alter the underlying opportunity structures, resource-allocation mechanisms, or governance arrangements that reproduce demographic vulnerability. This classification does not measure policy success in a narrow evaluative sense; rather, it assesses the extent to which existing instruments shift from short-term mitigation to systemic adaptation.

Table 1 **The demographic policy paradigm development in Moldova**

Period	Governing Paradigm	Primary Institutional Mechanism	Strategic Progress	Critical Barriers
2011–2020	Natalist "Demographic Security"	National Strategic Programme on Demographic Security 2011–2025	Limited effectiveness: limited relevance; the approach was assessed as unrealistic and ill-suited to emigration-driven demographic change (Buzu & Lutenco, 2016).	Top-down design without stakeholder engagement; no structural reform; lack of evidence-based integration
2018–2021	Transitional (Pilot Innovation)	Action Plan for Implementing Active Ageing 2018–2021	Pilot-stage progress: Service models tested; first official active ageing policy; paradigm shift initiated	Pilot-scale only; limited geographic coverage; insufficient financing for scaling; no institutional mandate
2020–2024	Paradigm shift "Demographic Resilience" (Anticipatory)	GD 284/2024 (mandatory population projections); National Programme on Active & Healthy Ageing 2023–2027; Diaspora-2025 Strategy; European Moldova 2030;	Institutional reorientation: Demographic foresight formally embedded in the regulatory framework; inter-ministerial coordination established (DMD focal points); demographic foresight institutionalised	Anticipatory-implementation gap: Projections inform documents but do not deterministically bind budgets; local capacity variable
2024–2027	Resilience-Centred (Institutionalisation & Scaling)	European Moldova 2030 operational; sectoral Diaspora Programmes 2024–2027; territorial administrative reform; Active Ageing Index target within the National Programme on Active and Healthy Ageing	Scaling and consolidation: Scaling service models from pilot to 50+ communities; alignment with the EU acquis in statistics, social policy and employment; multi-stakeholder consensus on demographic resilience	Evidence-to-budget translation incomplete; fiscal sustainability of expanded services uncertain; educational investment paradox unresolved; diaspora engagement financing dependent

Source: *Developed by the authors, based on national policy documents, 2011–2025.*

Across the four dimensions of the proposed framework, Moldova's resilience profile remains uneven (Table 2). Social resilience has advanced through active ageing policies, community-based services, family-support measures, and emerging care models, but territorial inequalities in access to services continue to limit transformative capacity. Economic resilience remains mainly absorptive and adaptive: employment programmes, childcare expansion, digitalised employment services, and diaspora investment schemes partially mitigate labour shortages and income vulnerability, yet they do not yet constitute a coherent strategy for productivity growth and skilled job creation. Human capital resilience is constrained by the educational investment paradox: skills formation may increase individual mobility when domestic opportunities remain insufficient, thereby weakening the capacity of education and training to support long-term demographic sustainability. Institutional resilience is comparatively stronger in the area of demographic foresight but weaker in translating demographic evidence into binding multi-year budgeting, sectoral planning, and local implementation.

Table 2 **Policy responses and remaining resilience gaps in Moldova**

Demographic pressure/resilience risk	Named instruments already initiated	Highest tier reached	Remaining gap and priority next-tier shift
Shrinking working-age population & labour shortages *(Economic)*	National Employment Programme 2022–2026; childcare expansion; digitalised employment services; PARE 1+1	Adaptive	Shortages coexist with inactivity, informality and skills mismatch. Transition to the transformative tier requires structural job creation in productive sectors
Falling birth numbers and low fertility *(Social/reproductive agency)*	"Family" Programme allowances; family-friendly workplace law (flexible & shared parental leave, flexible childcare leave); employer childcare; National Nursery Fund concept	Adaptive	Support is income- and leave-based, not yet a coherent reconciliation system. Advancing beyond adaptive capacity demands institutionalised, affordable childcare financing and life-course rebalancing
Out-migration & loss of young, skilled population *(Human capital)*	Diaspora-2025 & Sectoral Diaspora Programme 2024–2027; Diaspora Excellence Groups; "Government Closer to You"; PARE 1+1	Adaptive	Diaspora engagement cannot substitute for domestic opportunity. Reaching transformative capacity depends on building retention and structured return-reintegration tied to employment
Population ageing & rising demand for care *(Social/care)*	National Programme on Active & Healthy Ageing 2023–2027; Integrated Community Assistance; home-care & day centres; U3A; Cultural Voucher	Adaptive	Rural–urban inequality in primary social and medical services; thin infrastructure in low-income areas. Sustainable care financing remains the precondition for transformative progress
Rural & territorial depopulation *(Social + Institutional)*	Reorganisation of social-service provision; territorial-administrative reform; territorial-coverage measures	Adaptive	Consolidation raises efficiency only if accessibility and equity are preserved; otherwise, it deepens disparities and out-migration
Weak integration of demographic evidence into planning *(Institutional)*	Government Decision 284/2024 (annual/triennial projections); GGS Wave I & II; Theory of Change for Demographic Resilience; demography mainstreamed in "European Moldova 2030"	Advanced adaptive, with transformative potential	Foresight exists but is not binding. The critical next step is embedding projections into multi-year budgeting, sectoral design and local implementation

Source: *Developed by the authors.*

The analysis shows that Moldova exhibits a compressed resilience profile, in which relatively advanced anticipatory instruments coexist with predominantly absorptive and adaptive sectoral responses. The country has developed key elements of demographic foresight, active ageing policy, family support, diaspora engagement, and employment activation. However, these measures remain insufficiently integrated across economic, social, human capital, and institutional domains. The central resilience gap is therefore not the absence of policy responses, but the limited capacity to translate demographic evidence into coordinated resource allocation, adaptation of territorial services, and the creation of domestic opportunities. Moldova's demographic resilience will depend on the capacity

to translate institutional foresight into transformative action under conditions in which cohort ageing, labour-force contraction and fiscal pressures are already producing cumulative effects. This requires moving beyond anticipatory planning towards coordinated implementation that links demographic evidence with budgeting, territorial service adaptation, employment creation, care provision and human capital retention.

CONCLUSIONS

The article has examined demographic resilience in the context of sustained depopulation and rapid population ageing, conceptualising these processes not as temporary demographic deviations but as long-term structural conditions that shape socio-economic development. Moving beyond growth- and reversal-oriented perspectives, the analysis has framed demographic resilience as the capacity of societies to maintain core economic, social, and institutional functions under demographic constraints through adaptive and systemic responses, rather than through demographic recovery.

Adopting a systems-based approach, the article shows that demographic resilience emerges from the interplay between slow-moving population dynamics and economic, social, human capital, and institutional adjustments operating across different temporal and spatial scales. While demographic processes shape the structural boundaries of adaptation, institutional arrangements play a central coordinating role by linking demographic trends to policy design, implementation, and learning. From this perspective, demographic resilience is best understood as a dynamic, path-dependent process shaped by feedback mechanisms and governance capacity, rather than as a fixed or uniform outcome.

The article's broader contribution is to reposition demographic resilience as a governance and adaptation framework for societies facing long-term population decline. The case of Moldova shows that demographic resilience depends not only on recognising demographic decline and ageing as long-term structural conditions, but also on the capacity to translate demographic evidence into concrete institutional and financial decisions. Moldova has developed relatively advanced demographic foresight instruments, including regular population projections and policy frameworks oriented towards active ageing, diaspora engagement and demographic resilience. However, the main gap lies not in the absence of policy responses, but in their limited translation into multi-year budgeting, territorial service adaptation, local implementation and domestic opportunity creation. The Moldovan case shows that moving from adaptive programmes to transformative resilience requires stronger links between projections, financing, institutional coordination, employment creation, care infrastructure and human capital retention. In this sense, demographic resilience becomes a practical governance challenge rather than merely a conceptual or demographic objective.

Acknowledgements

The article was developed within the national research programme 'The demographic transition in the Republic of Moldova: particularities, socioeconomic implications and demographic resilience strengthening (TDRM, 2024–2027)'.

References

- Anderson, C. – De Tollenaere, M. 2020. Supporting Institutional Resilience. In: *OECD. Development Co-operation Report 2020: Learning from Crises, Building Resilience.* Paris: OECD Publishing, pp. 190–194. https://doi.org/10.1787/f6d42aa5-en.
- Arifagić S. – Mitrović O. 2022. *Compendium on Best Practices in Diaspora Engagement in the Western Balkans.* Editor: Siniša Marčić. 54 p. https://www.rcc.int/pubs/148/compendium-on-best-practices-in-diaspora-engagement-in-the-western-balkans.
- Balyakin, A. A. – Nurbina, M. V. – Taranenko, S. B. 2022. Depopulation Processes and Their Impact on the Quality of Human Capital. In: Solovev, D. B. – Savaley, V. V. – Bekker, A. T. – Petukhov, V. I. (eds.). *Proceeding of the International Science and Technology Conference "FarEastCon 2021".* Smart Innovation, Systems and Technologies, vol. 275. Singapore: Springer, pp. 713–724. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-8829-4_69.

- Brzozowska, Z. – Zhelenkova, E. – Gietel-Basten, S. 2023. Population Decline. *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research*, 21, pp. 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1553/p-n48k-cabb.
- Bureau for Diaspora Relations. 2016. *National Strategy "Diaspora-2025"*. Approved by Government Decision No. 200 of 26 February 2016. Chișinău: State Chancellery of the Republic of Moldova. https://brd.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/sn_diaspora_2025_web.pdf.
- Buciuceanu-Vrabie, M. – Grigoraș, E. 2023. Intergenerational Care Support Transfer: Insights from the Generation and Gender Survey. *Economy and Sociology*, (1), pp. 53–64. https://doi.org/10.36004/nier.es.2023.1-05.
- Buzu, A. – Lutenco, V. 2016. *Assessment Report of the National Strategic Programme on Demographic Security of the Republic of Moldova 2011–2025*. Chișinău: UNFPA Moldova. https://moldova.unfpa.org/en/publications/assessment-report-national-strategic-programme-demographic-security-republic-moldova.
- Cabañero-Garcia, E. et al. 2025. Barriers to Health, Social and Long-Term Care Access among Older Adults. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 24(72). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-025-02429-y.
- Cecchini, M. – Cividino, S. – Turco, R. – Salvati, L. 2019. Population Age Structure and Resilience Potential. *Sustainability*, 11. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11072050.
- Chesnais, J.-C. 1992. *The Demographic Transition: Stages, Patterns, and Economic Implications*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198286592.001.0001.
- Colantoni, A. – Halbac-Cotoara-Zamfir, R. – Halbac-Cotoara-Zamfir, C. – Cudlin, P. – Salvati, L. – Gimenez Morera, A. 2020. Demographic Resilience in Local Systems: An Empirical Approach with Census Data. *Systems*, 8(3), Article 34. https://doi.org/10.3390/systems8030034.
- Coutts, A. P. – Velásquez, D. M. D. 2025. *Social Infrastructure and Social Capital – The Active Elements of Community Resilience.* https://www.neighbourhoodscommission.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/ICON-Social-Infrastructure-and-Social-Capital-report-FINAL.pdf.
- Deimantas, V. J. et al. 2024. Population Dynamics and Policies in Europe. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 43. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-024-09871-w.
- Diez-Nicolás, J. 2004. Implications of Population Decline for the European Union (2000–2050). In *Environmental Challenges in the Mediterranean 2000–2050*. Dordrecht: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0973-7_15.
- Dougherty, S. – de Biase, P. – Lorenzoni, L. 2022. *Funding the Future: The Impact of Population Ageing on Revenues Across Levels of Government.* Paris: OECD. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2022/08/funding-the-future_3fcedfd6/2b0f063e-en.pdf.
- Dustmann, C. – Glitz, A. 2011. Migration and Education. In *Handbook of the Economics of Education*, vol. 4. Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-444-53444-6.00004-3.
- Eurostat. 2025. *Living Conditions in Europe - Poverty and Social Exclusion.* https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion.
- Falanga, R. – Cebulla, A. – Principi, A., – Socci, M. 2021. The Participation of Senior Citizens in Policy-Making: Patterning Initiatives in Europe. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health,* 18(1), 34. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18010034.
- Fihel, A. – Okólski, M. 2019. Population Decline in Post-Communist Countries of the European Union. *Population & Societies*, 567(6), pp. 1–4. https://shs.cairn.info/article/E_POPSOC_567_0001?tab=texte-integral.
- Gagauz, O. – Samohvalov, A. 2024. The Paradox of Educational Investments. *Economy and Sociology*, 2, pp. 84–100. https://doi.org/10.36004/nier.es.2024.2-08.
- Gagauz, O. et al. 2024. *The Population of the Republic of Moldova at the Horizon of 2040.* Chisinau: National Institute for Economic Research, 105 p. https://doi.org/10.36004/nier.2024.go.105.en.
- Gailey, N. – Gagauz, O. – Pahomii, I. 2025. Demographic Change and the Future of Resilience Planning in Moldova. *Economy and Sociology*, 1, pp. 5–18. https://doi.org/10.36004/nier.es.2025.1-01.
- Giannakis, E. – Bruggeman, A. 2020. Regional disparities in economic resilience in the European Union across the urban–rural divide. *Regional Studies*, 54(9), pp.1200–1213. https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2019.1698720.

- Grimm, V. – Calabrese, J. M. 2011. What Is Resilience? A Short Introduction. In *Viability and Resilience of Complex Systems.* Berlin: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-20423-4_1.
- Hallegatte, S. 2014. *Economic Resilience: Definition and Measurement.* Washington, DC: World Bank. https://www.openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/18341.
- Holling, C. S. 1973. Resilience and stability of ecological systems. *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, 4, pp. 1–23. https://pure.iiasa.ac.at/id/eprint/26/1/RP-73-003.pdf
- IOM. 2024. *World Migration Report.* https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2024.
- Karabegović, D. 2024. Diaspora and development: The IOM's role in diaspora mapping in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *International Migration*, 62(5), pp.146–158. https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.13293.
- Lonbay, S. 2018. Participatory approaches to social policy in relation to ageing. *Social Policy First Hand,* pp. 211–222. Policy Press. https://doi.org/10.51952/9781447332558.ch023.
- Lutz, W. – Butz, W. P. – KC, S. 2014. World *Population and Human Capital in the Twenty-First Century.* Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198813422.001.0001.
- Meister Broekema, P. – Horlings, L. G. – Bulder, E. 2022. Tackling societal challenges together: Co-creation strategies and social innovation in EU policy and funded projects. *European Policy Analysis*, 8(1), pp.68–86. https://doi.org/10.1002/epa2.1133.
- Ministry of Labour and Social Protection – UNFPA Moldova. 2022. *Teoria Schimbării pentru Reziliența Demografică: adaptare, atenuare, ajustare* [Theory of Change for Demographic Resilience: Adaptation, Mitigation, Adjustment]. Chișinău: Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and UNFPA Moldova. https://ggs.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/teoria_schimbarii_pentru_rezilienta_demografica_-_adaptare_atenuare_ajustare_compressed.pdf.
- Ministry of Labour and Social Protection – UNFPA Moldova. 2024. *Program on Active and Healthy Ageing for 2023–2027.* Chișinău: UNFPA Moldova. https://moldova.unfpa.org/en/publications/program-active-and-healthy-ageing-2023-2027.
- Navarro-Galera, A. et al., 2024. Fighting depopulation in Europe by analyzing the financial risks of local governments. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 90(1), 48–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/00208523231158982.
- OECD. 2021. *Empowering the Immigrant Diaspora for Sustainable Development.* https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2021/03/development-co-operation-tips-tools-insights-practices_d307b396/empowering-the-immigrant-diaspora-for-sustainable-development_241ad8b2/d054470a-en.pdf.
- OECD. 2022. *Labour Migration in the Western Balkans: Mapping Patterns, Addressing Challenges and Reaping Benefits.* https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2022/05/labour-migration-in-the-western-balkans_c885a35f/af3db4f9-en.pdf.
- OECD. 2024. *International Migration Outlook 2024.* Paris: OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/50b0353e-en.
- OECD. 2025a. *OECD guidelines on the multi-level governance of demographic change.* https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/10/oecd-guidelines-on-the-multi-level-governance-of-demographic-change_483643ae/f66426ea-en.pdf.
- OECD. 2025b. *Place-Based Policies for the Future, OECD Regional Development Studies.* Paris: OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/e5ff6716-en.
- OECD. 2025c. *Shrinking Smartly and Sustainably.* OECD Publishing. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/shrinking-smartly-and-sustainably_f91693e3-en.html.
- Potančoková, M. – Stonawski, M. – Gailey, N. 2021. Migration and Demographic Disparities in Macro-Regions of the European Union, a View to 2060. *Demographic Research,* 45(44), pp. 1317–1354. https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2021.45.44.
- Rahman, M. H. A. – Finsterwalder, J. – Kuppelwieser, V. G. 2024. Ageing and wellbeing co-creation: systematic literature review and future avenues for Transformative Service Researchers. *The Service Industries Journal,* pp.1–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/02642069.2024.2363934.
- Rao, N. 2010. *Migration, education and socio-economic mobility.* https://doi.org/10.1080/03057920903545973.
- Röhn, O. – Sánchez, A. C. – Hermansen, M. – Rasmussen, M. 2015. *Economic resilience: A new set of vulnerability indicators for OECD countries.* https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economic-resilience-a-new-set-of-vulnerability-indicators-for-oecd-countries_5jrxhgjw54r8.pdf.

- Rosinska, A. 2024. *Drivers of Migration: Dimensions and Indicators. A Policy-Oriented Literature Review.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/5771973.
- Siskova, M. – Kuhn, M. – Prettner, K. – Prskawetz, A. 2023. Does human capital compensate for population decline? *The Journal of the Economics of Ageing,* 26. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeoa.2023.100469.
- Ștîrba, V. – Stratan, A. – Lucașenco, E. 2023. Migration, remittances, and local development in Moldova. Economy and Sociology, 2, pp.57–64. https://doi.org/10.36004/nier.es.2023.2-06.
- UN. 2009. *UNISDR Terminology on Disaster Risk Reductio*n. https://www.undrr.org/publication/2009-unisdr-terminology-disaster-risk-reduction.
- UNFPA Moldova. 2025. *Demographic Resilience in Moldova: Projecting Future Needs and Policy Implications. Situation Report.* Chișinău: UNFPA Moldova. https://moldova.unfpa.org/en/publications/demographic-resilience-moldova-projecting-future-needs-and-policy-implications.
- UNFPA Moldova. 2026. *Shaping Demographic Resilience: Turning Challenges into Opportunities.* Chișinău: UNFPA Moldova. https://moldova.unfpa.org/en/publications/shaping-demographic-resilience-turning-challenges-opportunities.
- UNFPA. 2024. *UNFPA Demographic Resilience Programme: Strengthening demographic resilience in Europe and Central Asia* (brochure). UNFPA Eastern Europe & Central Asia Regional Office. https://eeca.unfpa.org/en/publications/unfpa-demographic-resilience-programme-brochure.
- Van Der Gaag, N. – de Beer, J. 2015. From Demographic Dividend to Demographic Burden. *Tijdschr Econ Soc Geogr,* 106, pp. 94–109. https://doi.org/10.1111/tesg.12104.
- Wang, G. et al. 2024. Co-designing community-level integral interventions for active ageing: a systematic review from the lens of community-based participatory research. *BMC Public Health,* 24, 649. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-18195-5.
- World Bank. 2018. *Moving for Prosperity: Global Migration and Labor Markets*. Washington. https://www.worldbank.org/en/research/publication/moving-for-prosperity.
- World Bank. 2020. *Moldova Higher Education Project. Project Appraisal Document, Report No. PAD3405.* https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/232091583719289928/moldova-higher-education-project.
- Zamfirescu-Mareș, D. – Corman, S. 2025. Depopulation, Ageing, and Social Sustainability: Institutionalized Elderly and the Geography of Care Between Rural and Urban Romania. *Sustainability*, 17(22), 10419. https://doi.org/10.3390/su172210419.

OLGA GAGAUZ

is a Habilitated Doctor in Sociology, an Associate Professor, and the Head of the Centre for Demographic Research "Academician Gheorghe Paladi" at the National Institute for Economic Research, Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova, in Chisinau. Her research focuses on population dynamics, fertility, demographic projections, and demographic policies.

MARIANA BUCIUCEANU-VRABIE

has a PhD in sociology, is an Associate Professor, and a senior researcher at Centre for Demographic Research "Academician Gheorghe Paladi" of the National Institute for Economic Research, Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova in Chisinau. Her research focuses on ageing and demographic policies.

SUMMARY

Rapid population ageing and sustained depopulation are increasingly shaping the socio-economic trajectories of many countries, particularly in Eastern Europe. Rather than temporary demographic deviations, these processes constitute long-term structural constraints that reshape labour markets, welfare systems, territorial organisation, human capital formation, and institutional capacity. This article develops

a conceptual framework of demographic resilience to examine how societies adapt to persistent population decline and rapid ageing without treating demographic recovery or population growth as primary policy objectives. Drawing on resilience theory and a systems-based perspective, demographic resilience is conceptualised as a system-level capacity to maintain core socio-economic and institutional functions under demographic constraints. The framework emphasises that demographic resilience emerges from dynamic interactions among demographic dynamics and economic, social, human capital, and institutional subsystems, with governance playing a central coordinating role. While demographic processes operate as slow-moving structural forces, adaptive responses unfold unevenly across space and over shorter time horizons, allowing national-level resilience to coexist with persistent local or regional fragility. The framework is illustrated through the case of Moldova, where sustained population decline, rapid ageing, and migration-driven population loss have become structural conditions affecting development and policy capacity. By synthesising key adaptive mechanisms across resilience dimensions, the article offers an analytical lens for understanding socio-economic sustainability under sustained demographic decline. It contributes to contemporary debates on depopulation by shifting the analytical focus from demographic recovery to adaptation, governance, and the preservation of societal functionality under long-term demographic constraints.