

COMMUNICATION ON ACTIVE AGEING – A TOOL FOR ENGAGING OLDER PERSONS (COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS)

Anastasia OCERETNÎI

anastasia.oceretnii@usm.md

Moldova State University, Republic of Moldova

Résumé : *Au niveau international se manifeste un mouvement de promotion et de mise en œuvre du vieillissement actif, tenant compte de ses bénéfices dans le contexte de sociétés connaissant des rythmes accélérés de vieillissement. Une communication efficace et durable sur le vieillissement actif constitue un moyen de sensibiliser la société et de mobiliser les personnes âgées afin qu'elles adoptent un mode de vie actif. L'article présente les résultats d'une analyse de contenu des matériaux publiés dans l'espace virtuel de la République de Moldova et des publications scientifiques incluses dans une base de données nationale, dans le but d'identifier les tendances concernant la réflexion sur la problématique du vieillissement actif.*

Mots-clés : *vieillissement actif, analyse de contenu, Plan d'action international de Madrid sur le vieillissement, communauté amie des aînés.*

Introduction

All of Europe and many countries worldwide are concerned with the aging phenomenon, given the increasing number of older people. Statistical data analysis reveals a growth in the older population (aged 65 and over) at the European level from 2013 to 2023, with a 3-percentage point increase, the highest growth among EU countries being recorded in Poland (with a 5.5 percentage point increase). Among the EU candidate countries, the Republic of Moldova has recorded a 6.2 percentage point increase in the population aged 65 and over from 2013 to 2023 (EUROSTAT, 2024). The pace of population aging in the Republic of Moldova is quite rapid, with the aging coefficient¹ reaching 25.2% in 2024, 7.7 percentage points higher than it was 10 years ago. Rural areas (27.1%) and the female population (28.4%) have higher aging coefficients (BNS, 2024).

¹ The aging coefficient is calculated by the ratio of the number of people aged 60 and over to 100 inhabitants.

Demographic forecasts for the year 2040, based on the low scenario, highlight a trend of increasing the share of the population aged 65 and over, reaching up to 26.3%. There will also be a 2.6-fold increase in the population aged 80 and over: from 59.8 thousand (2023) to about 154.1 thousand (2040) (MMPS, 2025), placing enormous pressure on the social system, especially healthcare and social protection systems.

Public policies and programs for “active aging” have been presented as an intervention tool in the context of the increasing proportion of the older population and the pressure on various sectors necessary to ensure the functionality of a society: the economic system, the labor market, the social security system, healthcare, and social work. The concept of active aging emerged in the public discourse in the 1960s in the United States, during discussions on successful aging, which were a response to the disengagement theory developed by Cumming E. and Henry W. (1961). This theory argued that as people age, they gradually withdraw from social life and reduce their roles. In contrast to this theory, active aging emphasizes policies aimed at activating older individuals, marking a shift from a passive to an active approach. In the 1980s, the concept was revitalized in the context of discussions on “productive aging” focusing on the entire life cycle, not just the final stage of life (old age) (Hamblin, 2013: 8). This approach was also promoted by the United Nations General Assembly, which held the first World Assembly on Aging from July 26 to August 6, 1982. During this event, the International Plan of Action on Aging was adopted, marking the first international instrument in the field, which led to the initiation of the development and implementation of aging-related policies and programs.

The Second United Nations Assembly on Aging, held in 2002 (April 8-12), and the adoption of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) led to a diversification of the implementation perspectives of the active aging principle at the international level. The adopted documents emphasized the need to rethink how societies are organized to be as age-friendly as possible. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) contributed to the full involvement of UN member states in undertaking measures to ensure the fulfillment of the commitments made. The challenges in implementing MIPAA recommendations are discussed every five years at ministerial conferences, during which a series of ministerial declarations are adopted (Berlin, 2002; León, 2007; Vienna, 2012; Lisbon, 2017; Rome, 2022), which are then reflected in various national policy documents.

Methodology

This article focuses on analyzing how active aging is communicated in the Republic of Moldova, based on the hypothesis that frequent communication through various means about active aging can contribute to the implementation of the active aging principle and the activation of the older population. In this regard, the content of materials related to active aging in open access was analyzed, using the Google search tool, as well as the themes of scientific articles on this subject included in the national database – the National Bibliometric Tool (www.ibn.idsi.md). The content units used in the analysis were the keywords of publications addressing the aging issue. This analysis has a methodological limitation, as other scientific publications on the topic, not included in the aforementioned database, could have been identified.

Data triangulation was performed through the analysis of communication experiences on the opportunities for active aging in cities included in the World Health Organization's Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities (<https://extranet.who.int/>).

Content

The creation of an age-inclusive society is a priority for the signatory countries of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. Through the Ministerial Declaration signed in Rome in 2022, objectives were established to be achieved by 2027, two of which are particularly important in terms of changing attitudes towards older people and promoting the creation of an age-tolerant society: “promoting a positive culture and image of ageing by making the diversity among older persons an asset and by highlighting the manifold contributions of older persons to society” and “protecting older persons against ageism and all forms of discrimination in all areas by adopting or strengthening the implementation of laws and other instruments at the local, national, or international level, by modifying existing instruments based on discriminatory or stereotypical attitudes or practices, by establishing educational and awareness-raising programs and campaigns, and fostering intergenerational activities, dialogue, and support” (UNECE, 2022: 5). These tasks can be achieved through effective communication about the benefits and opportunities of active aging.

Moldova’s alignment with the objectives focused on promoting and implementing active aging began in 2012, when it joined the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. With the support of UNECE, the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection, and Family developed the Roadmap for Integrating Aging Issues into Strategic Policies. This tool was used to argue for and formulate policies in the first national policy document on aging - *The Program for Integrating Aging Issues into Policies*. The program was implemented through two action plans: *the Action Plan for Implementing the Roadmap for Integrating Aging Issues into Policies (2014-2016)* (adopted by Government Decision No. 406/2014) and *the Action Plan for Implementing the Active Aging Principle (2018-2021)* (adopted by Government Decision No. 1147/2017). By adopting these policy documents, Moldova committed to ensuring an age-inclusive society by enhancing the quality of life and promoting active aging, as well as highlighting the contribution of older persons to the socio-economic development of society.

Starting in 2023, Moldova is implementing a new public policy document on active aging – *the Program for Promoting Active and Healthy Aging for 2023-2027* (adopted by Government Decision No. 434/2023 and developed with UNFPA support), which focuses on further developing social work, healthcare, education, culture, sports, and other systems to enable the full use of the potential for active and healthy aging. This includes ensuring an inclusive labor market for all ages, developing digital skills, and encouraging active participation in decision-making processes and community development.

Public communication on active aging in the Republic of Moldova has experienced significant development, especially starting in 2017. The analysis of the information identified through the Google search tool highlighted a total of 204 information containing the words “active aging,” with a more pronounced increase in the number of such information between 2020 and 2024. The share of information from this period is 76.5%, or 156 information (see Figure 1). However, the year 2024 saw the highest number of information placed in the national virtual space, with 63 information, accounting for 30.9% of the total.

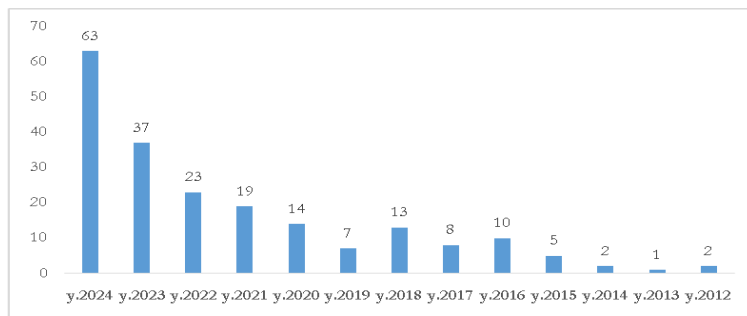


Figure 1. The dynamics of information containing the words “Active Aging” published in the virtual space of the Republic of Moldova (2012-2024 period)

In the first years after joining MIPAA, a relatively small number of articles were identified, mainly covering activities carried out by an active non-governmental organization in this field (NGO Casmed). At the same time, during this period, there were also some scientific articles published in open access addressing the topic of active aging, although their number was quite low.

The launch of the Active Aging Index in the Republic of Moldova in 2016 led to an increase in online information dedicated to the issues of active aging, contributing to raising awareness within the community about the challenges posed by aging and assessing the untapped potential of older persons. Of the 10 pieces of information posted in the virtual space, half reflected the results obtained following the application of the statistical tool developed by UNECE in collaboration with the European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion) to measure the extent to which older persons can realize their full potential in terms of employment, participation in social and cultural life, and independent living. The media coverage of the Index continued in 2017, with 3 news articles identified.

Starting in 2018, information reflecting local experiences in implementing the principle of active aging has been identified, including information on the integration of active aging into local strategies, best implementation practices, such as the organization of senior groups, chess competitions, intellectual games, table tennis, etc. (see images below).



Source: <https://news.ungheni.org/la-ungheni-va-avea-loc-prima-editie-a-festivalului-la-tenis-de-masa-in-acr-liber/>
<https://news.ungheni.org/la-ungheni-va-avea-loc-prima-editie-a-festivalului-la-tenis-de-masa-in-acr-liber/>



Source: <https://chisinaucentru.md/turneu-municipal-la-sah-si-joc-de-dame-cupa-seniorilor/>

Images representing some active aging activities in Ungheni city (left) and Chisinau city (right)

The years 2023-2024 have seen the highest number of online postings reflecting a series of active aging activities, including the launch of the University for the Third Age, the new Program for Promoting Active and Healthy Aging for 2023-2027, the Platform for Active Aging and Digital Inclusion of Older Persons, Senior Clubs at the local level (e.g., Ungheni city), the celebration of the National Network of Active Seniors' five-year anniversary, the implementation of digitalization programs for older persons through partnerships with the private sector and development partners (UNFPA), etc. At the same time, sports activities for older persons are reflected, with one example being the municipal chess and checkers tournament "Senior Cup" in Chişinău.

The increased reflection of active aging activities in the virtual space during the mentioned period is determined by the implementation of the Action Plan for the Program on Promoting Active and Healthy Aging for 2023-2027, with activities carried out both by governmental and non-governmental actors.

A communication platform for active aging activities, identified in the study but not covered by the Google search tool, is the website created by the National Commission for Population and Development of the Government of the Republic of Moldova – www.demografie.md. Although the Commission's activity was halted for a period (2018-2020), the digital platform continued to reflect activities in the demographic field, including those related to active aging.

The analysis of the platform allowed the identification of information regarding activities carried out at the initiative of governmental institutions, including practices reflecting activities at the local level: the launch of the Senior Club in Rezina, cultural activities in Ungheni, Nisporeni, Drochia, Pelinia, which were supported through the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection's Small Grants Program in the Field of Active Aging. Additionally, the platform contains a series of publications addressing various issues concerning older persons (22 studies), most of which regarding aging were published in 2010 (6 studies), 2016 (3 studies), and 2022 (4 studies).

One area covered by the platform is the presentation of best practices from other countries in implementing active aging programs. Between 2010-2024, 4 articles were posted, of which 2 contained information about active aging from Romania (University for the Third Age) and Bulgaria (encouraging grandparents to care for grandchildren). An important resource available on the platform for developing active aging policies is the *UNECE Guide for Integrating Aging Issues*.

The platform analysis reveals that it represents a relevant resource for communicating aging-related aspects, and its resources can be used in the development of public policies. However, the platform contains a relatively small number and diversity of best practices and informational materials, which could be useful for local public authorities, the associative sector, or other actors interested in active aging.

In the Republic of Moldova, compared to other countries, the culture of active aging is still in the process of formation. The analysis of virtual space materials shows weak promotion of this phenomenon both at the national and local levels. Some countries concerned with creating an age-inclusive society have resorted to:

- the creation of separate governmental entities for active aging (for example, in Malta, the Ministry for Senior Citizens and Active Aging operates);
- the establishment of research platforms on active aging (for example, the Research Platform on Active Aging at the University of Vienna, Austria, or the Interdisciplinary Research Platform on Aging and Wellbeing at the University of Deusto, Spain);

- the development and implementation of local strategies for active aging (for example, the municipal authorities in Gdynia (Poland) approved the Municipal Strategy for Seniors and the Municipal Senior Policy Program 2015-2020, focusing on three key areas: activation, participation, and social care; a similar example is in the city of Poznan (Poland), with the implementation of the “Senior Policy Program for 2017-2021,” which contributed to making the city more aging-friendly);
- the development of online platforms by local public authorities to inform the older population about active aging opportunities at the community level (for example, in the city of Gdynia, Poland, the website www.seniorplus.gdynia.pl was launched in 2014 to better inform and communicate with older people about the city’s offerings).

Some good practices are replicated in the Republic of Moldova, such as the development of local policy documents for creating age-friendly communities (for example, the villages of Călinești, Ilenița, Sărata Veche in the Fălești district). However, the diversification of actions contributes to better communication about the benefits of active aging and the encouragement of activism among the population.

A means of raising public awareness about active aging is scientific research and the utilization of its results. The development and implementation of active aging policies require evidence-based foundations, including those derived from scientific research. The dissemination of research data can raise public awareness of the need for the creation of an age-friendly society. The way in which active aging and issues concerning the older population are reflected in scientific publications was analyzed in the National Bibliometric Instrument database, with scientific materials from the period 2014-2024 being accessible². The content units for the analysis were: ageing, old age, elderly, active ageing, third age, demographic ageing, older persons, senior, older adults, social ageing, active ageing index, retirement, pensioner, ageing process.

The analysis of scientific materials allowed the identification of a total of 39 articles authored by 57 researchers. The highest number of articles were published in 2022 – 15 articles, representing 38.5% of the total number of materials (see Figure 2).

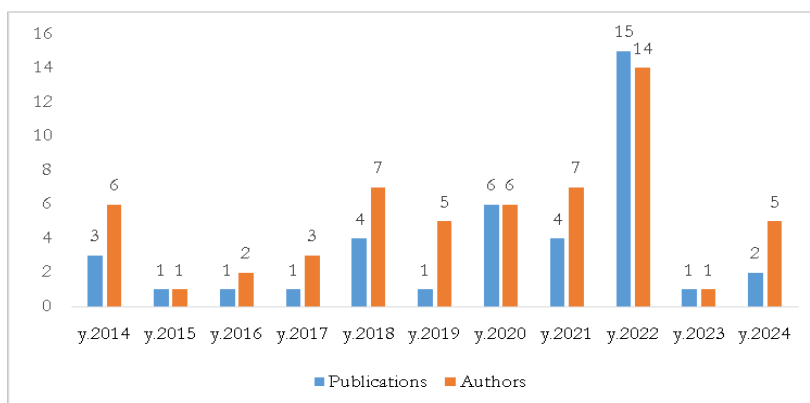


Figure 2. The dynamics of publications on the researched topic included in the National Bibliometric Instrument database for the period 2014-2024

² The period 2012-2013 is not covered by the National Bibliometric Tool.

The analysis of the materials according to the scientific field highlights a greater interest in the issue of aging in the medical field (12 publications), economics (5 publications), sociology (3 publications), and law (2 publications). In the public administration and technical fields, there is one publication in each.

The research conducted by quantifying the occurrence of content units in the analyzed materials, based on relevant keywords, shows that the word “ageing” appears with a fairly high frequency in the keyword list, with 21 occurrences or 29.2%.

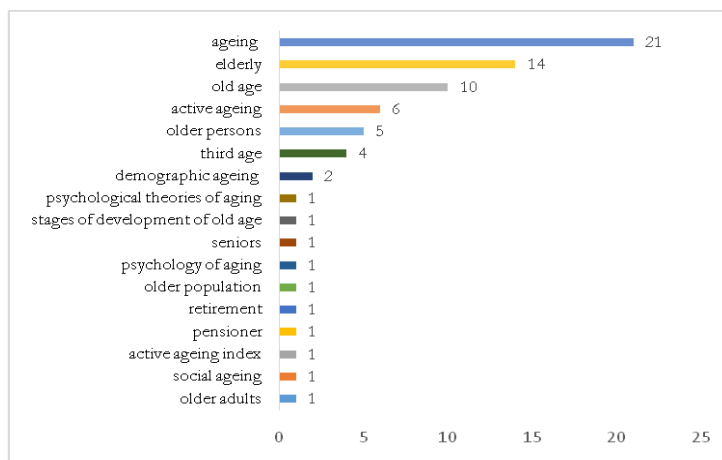


Figure 3. The distribution of publications based on keywords

“Active ageing” appears in the list of keywords of the publications at a lower percentage - 6 occurrences, or 8.3%, while “Active Ageing Index” appears once, leading to the conclusion of limited scientific research on active ageing at the national level (see Figure 3).

A relevant aspect identified in the analysis refers to the use of words considered discriminatory towards older persons in public and academic communication. Some studies indicate that the term “elderly” is considered discriminatory, suggesting alternative concepts such as “older person”, or “senior” which would not negatively impact the image or self-esteem of individuals who have passed the age of youth (Oceretnîi, 2023: 96).

In the case of scientific publications registered in the National Bibliometric Tool, the term “elderly” is used as a keyword 14 times, which corresponds to a percentage of 19.4% (see Figure 3). The frequency of the term’s usage in materials identified through the Google search tool is much higher - 187 times in the 204 materials analyzed (see Figure 4).

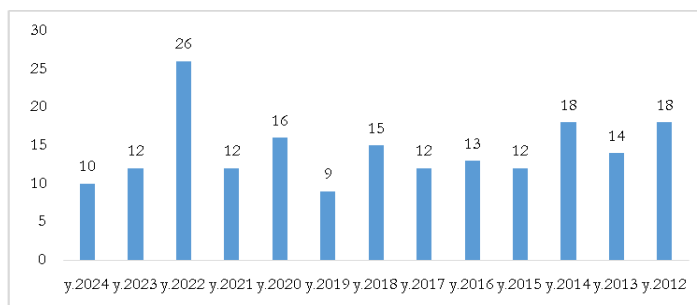


Figure 4. The use of the word “Elderly” in materials published in the virtual space of the Republic of Moldova (2012-2024)

The data presented reveal the use of discriminatory language in materials addressing aging issues, although an improvement in the situation is noticeable in the last two years. Nevertheless, there is a need to carry out awareness campaigns in the academic environment and training for journalists to ensure the use of correct and non-discriminatory terminology regarding older people.

Conclusions

Achieving the goals outlined in the Ministerial Declaration (Rome, 2022) or The United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030) requires a concerted effort from all community actors. The impact of actions can be multiplied through effective communication, which can contribute to mobilizing the population in favor of active aging.

The study conducted highlighted that in the Republic of Moldova, communication about active aging is somewhat deficient, and there is a need for concerted actions from the academia, government institutions, local authorities, civil society, and the media. The use of discriminatory terms in public communication regarding older people contributes to the promotion of stereotypes and prejudices about the burden imposed by an aging society.

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