

EVOLUTION OF THE LABOR FORCE IN ROMANIAN AGRICULTURE

Ioan BRAD, Camelia MĂNESCU, Remus GHERMAN, Mihaela IANCU, Anka PASCARIU

University of Life Sciences "King Mihai I" from Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism, Rural Management And Development Department, ioanbrad@usvt.ro

Abstract. The study analyzes the evolution of the labor force in Romanian agriculture during the period 1990–2023, highlighting the main quantitative and structural changes produced in the context of economic and social transformations in the rural area. The study starts from the premise that human resources are a determining factor of agricultural performance, directly influencing the level of productivity, the degree of use of material resources and the ability of agricultural holdings to adapt to the requirements of the modern economy. The analysis of official statistical data shows that, after 1990, Romanian agriculture absorbed a significant part of the employed population, becoming a refuge sector in the context of the restructuring of other economic branches. Subsequently, against the backdrop of economic modernization and the diversification of employment opportunities, the share of the population employed in agriculture registered a gradual reduction, without falling to the level of the European Union average. The results highlight the persistence of structural vulnerabilities, such as the high dependence of the rural environment on agricultural activities, low labor productivity and the fragmentation of holdings. The conclusions emphasize the need for integrated policies aimed at modernizing agriculture, diversifying the rural economy, and increasing the quality of human capital in the sector.

Keywords: labor, employed population, agriculture, occupational structure, rural area

• Introduction

Agriculture occupies a central place in Romania's rural economy, not only through its contribution to agri-food production, but also through the major social role it plays in absorbing the labor force and maintaining the socio-economic balance of the rural area. Within the agricultural system, human resources are a fundamental element of the production process, as the efficiency of the use of natural, material and financial resources depends to a large extent on the level of training, organisation and involvement of the workforce.

• Results and discussions

➤ **Total resident population**

Romania's total resident population decreased from 23.207 million people in 1990 to 19.052 million people in 2023 (figure 1).

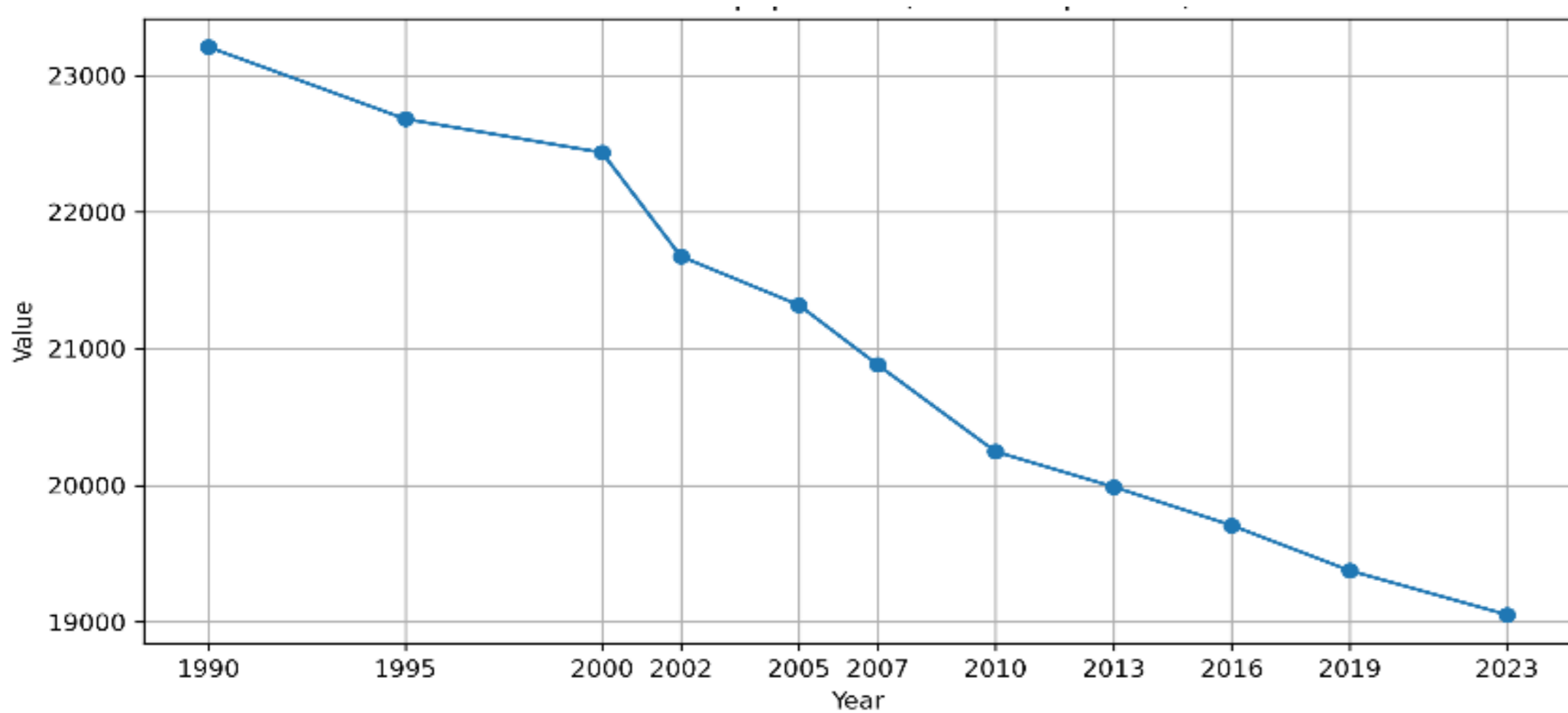


Figure 1 The evolution of total resident population in Romania (thousand persons)

• Material and method

The research is based on official statistical data on the main indicators of human potential in Romanian agriculture, for the period 1990–2023, from the Statistical Yearbooks of Romania. Descriptive, comparative and dynamic analyses were also used to assess trends in the resident population, rural population and employment in agriculture.

➤ **Employed population in agriculture**

The increase in the population employed in agricultural activities in the period 1990-2000 was mainly due to the lack of employment alternatives in rural areas, the accentuated fragmentation of land ownership and the intensive use of labor. Also, the increase in unemployment in urban areas has led a part of the population to reorient themselves towards activities in rural areas or subsistence agriculture, in the absence of other sources of income. The reduction in the number of people employed in agriculture in the period 2001-2023 can be attributed to economic growth and the emergence of new employment opportunities in non-agricultural sectors (Figure 3).

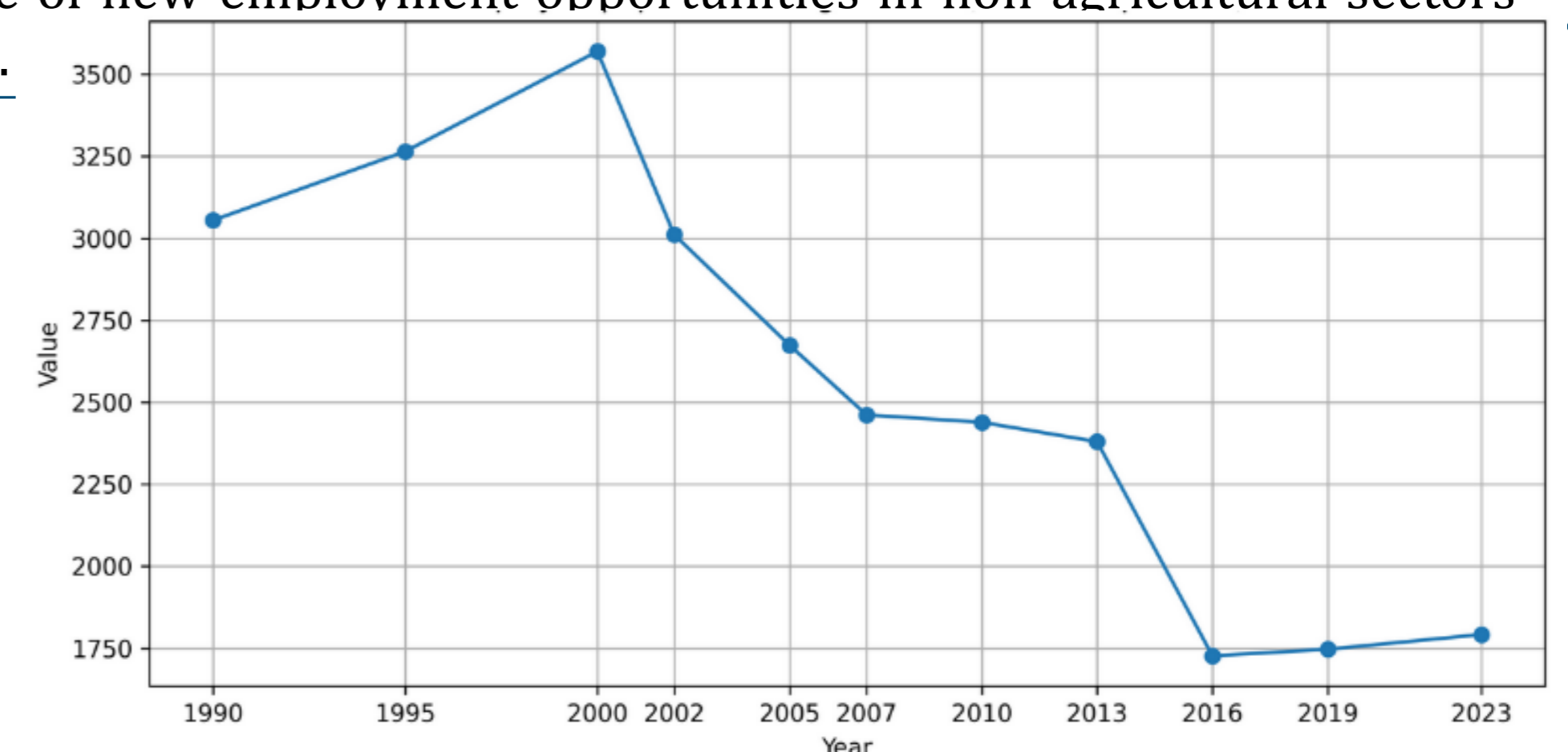


Figure 3 The evolution of employed population in agriculture, in Romania (thousand persons)

➤ **Rural population**

The rural population registered significant variations, from one year to another during the analyzed period, with a slight increase observed after 2019, an increase mainly due to the increase in the number of inhabitants in peri-urban areas (Figure 2).

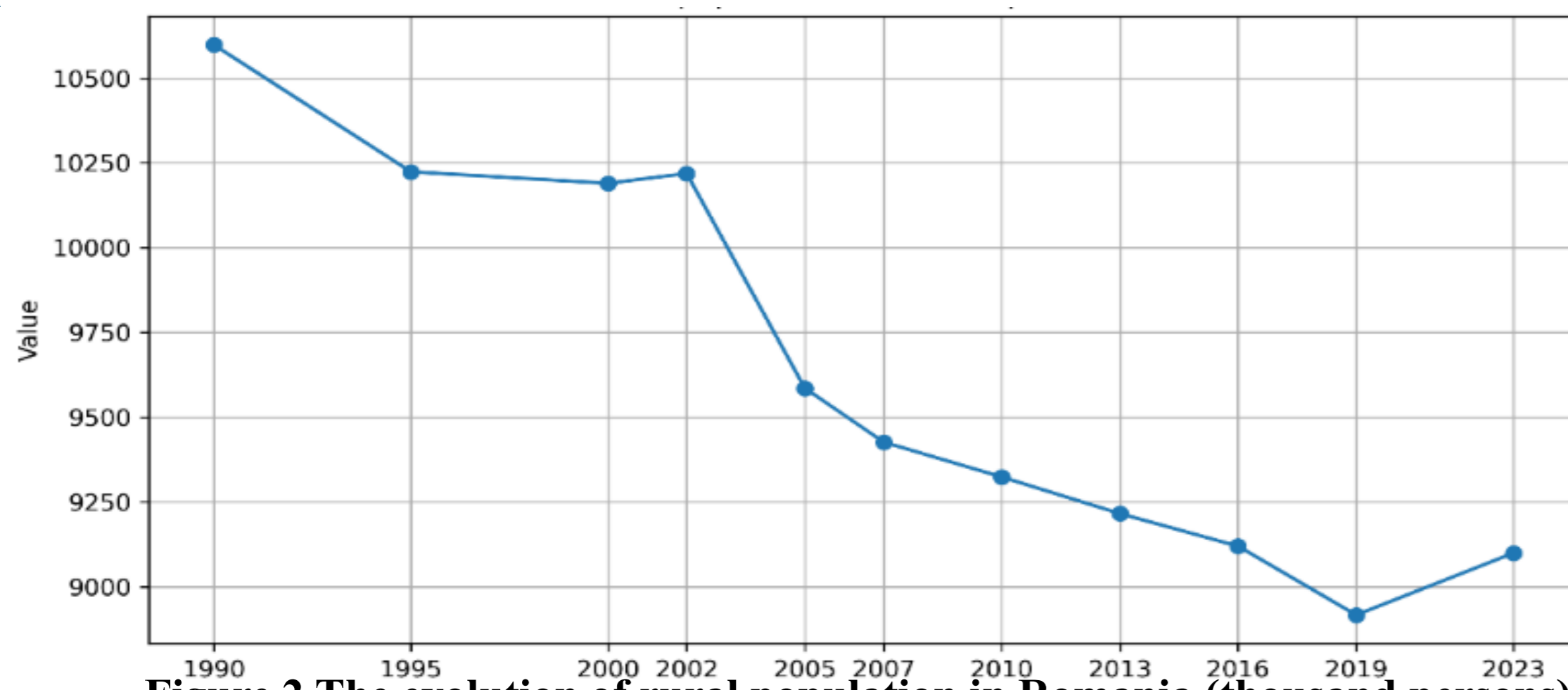


Figure 2 The evolution of rural population in Romania (thousand persons)

➤ **Employed population in agriculture**

As for the population employed in agriculture, it increased from 28.18% in 1990 to 41.37% in 2000, and then gradually decreased, reaching 28.21% in 2007 (the year of Romania's accession to the European Union) reaching 20.83% in 2023 (Table 1, Figure 3). This initial growth did not reflect the real needs of the agricultural sector, but was largely driven by layoffs in other branches of the economy.

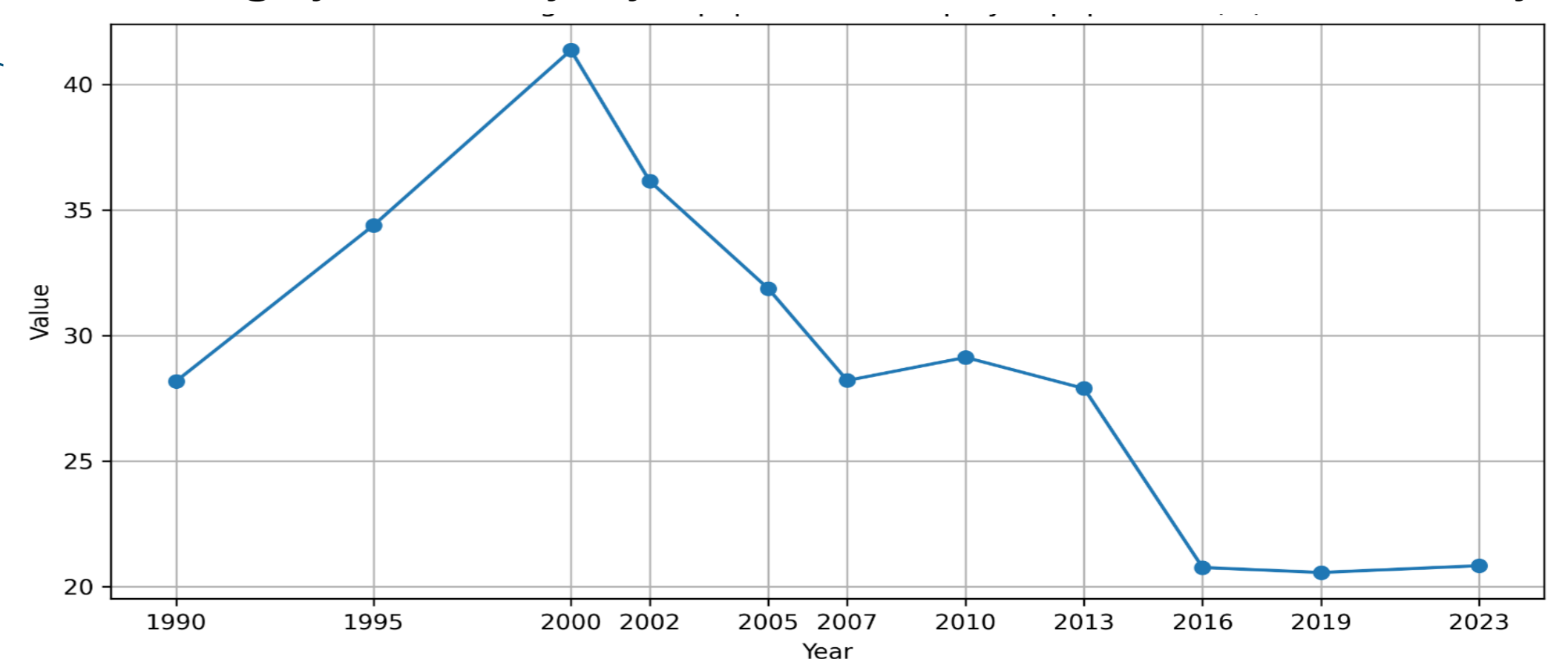


Figure 4 Share of agricultural population in employed population (%)

• Conclusions

Romanian agriculture functioned as an economic "buffer" after 1990, when the other sectors of the economy performed poorly. The low opportunity cost of labor in Romania favored a labor-intensive agricultural production model, which led to a decrease in labor productivity in the sector. The process of land restitution and privatization of state farms has had a significant impact both on the labor force employed in agriculture and on the distribution of income in rural areas. The share of people employed in agriculture in 1990 was 28.18%, in 2000, agriculture concentrated 41.37% of the total employed population, but this share followed a decreasing trend, reaching 20.83% in 2023.

The results of the research confirm that Romanian agriculture is still characterized by a labor-intensive occupational model, often associated with low productivity, fragmentation of farms and insufficient diversification of the rural economy. It is also noted that the decrease in the agricultural workforce in recent years does not reflect exclusively the modernization of the sector, but also demographic and methodological changes, such as migration, the aging of the rural population.