BRIEF HISTORY OF MIGRATION IN ROMANIA

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Romania was predominantly a country of emigration. In this period, the first large-scale outflow occurred in the context of the great wave of Eastern European migration to North America. It was mostly the population of Transylvania (incorporated into Romania after 1918) that was engaged in this outflow; in the first decade of the 20th century alone, a quarter of a million inhabitants of this province (with a total population of 4.8 million in 1900) immigrated to the United States.

In the wake of territorial changes in the course of the First and Second World Wars, Romania experienced large-scale population transfers. Approximately 200,000 ethnic Hungarians left Transylvania (which had been passed from Hungarian to Romanian authority) between 1918 and 1922.

As a result of the re-annexation of the northern part of Transylvania to Hungary in 1940, and in the framework of a population exchange agreement between Hungary and Romania, 220,000 ethnic Romanians left Northern Transylvania (then under Hungarian rule) and moved to territories under Romanian control. At the same time, 160,000 ethnic Hungarians relocated from Romanian to Hungarian territories.

During the Second World War, the bulk of the Jewish population living on Romania’s present territory was deported (by either Romanian or Hungarian authorities); the Holocaust reduced Romania’s Jewish population of 780,000 people by half. Following the Second World War, approximately 70,000 ethnic Germans were deported to the Soviet Union, and many more were forcibly relocated within Romanian territory.
During Communist rule, Romanian authorities exercised rather restrictive exit policies, severely limiting the ability of citizens to travel internationally. The police held passports, and prior approval from the authorities was required in order to obtain the travel document. Those applying as emigrants to various embassies in Romania had social and economic rights revoked and were stigmatized and harassed by authorities. Despite this harsh stance on emigration, a relatively high amount of permanent, legal emigration took place under the regime.

This is not as contradictory as it appears at first glance, as the actual purpose of this restrictive regime was not to prevent all forms of emigration, but rather to control outflows by restricting exit possibilities while allowing certain groups to leave. By limiting departures, authorities hoped to reduce the number of asylum applications made by Romanians abroad; it was feared that asylum-seeking by a
large number of Romanians would discredit the regime and threaten its legitimacy as a functioning political system, in the eyes of both foreign governments and remaining citizens.

Ethnic minorities (Jews, Germans and Hungarians) were clearly over-represented among the group of people who legally emigrated from Romania during Communist rule. For example, although ethnic Germans represented only 1.6% of the population in the 1977 census, they constituted 44% of the emigrant population between 1975 and 1989.

**FIGURE 2: Ethnic structure of the emigrant population (1975-1989) compared to the ethnic composition of the Romanian population (1977 census)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romanians</td>
<td>87.0%</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germans</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungarians</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Institutul Național de Statistică (INS)

During the communist period, many Romanians preferred to leave the country illegally, risking their lives at the borders. Many personalities of the Romanian cultural life have taken part to the phenomenon of migration in their circle of activity. For example, Paul Goma, used to support (from Paris) the Romanians in the country who wanted to flee abroad.
**Emigration after Communism**

After 1990, Romanian citizens decided to leave the country mostly because they wanted to get better-paid jobs and better working conditions. During the process of transition and the restructuring of the Romanian economy (which took place roughly from 1990 to 2002), the employed population declined by 44%. More than 3.5 million jobs vanished, with the most dramatic decreases being registered in industry, where the number of jobs declined by half. In this context, a considerable number of Romanians left to seek economic gains abroad.

In the last 17 years, the main countries of destination for Romanian labour migration have changed considerably, but three rather distinct phases can be outlined.

In the **first phase (roughly between 1990 and 1995)**, when entry to various Western European countries was severely limited, Romanian workers headed mainly to Israel, Turkey, Hungary (mostly ethnic Hungarians) and Germany.

In the **second phase (1996-2002)**, westward migration prevailed, with large numbers of workers going to Italy and, increasingly, Spain.

The **third phase** of labour migration was symbolically inaugurated on 1st January 2002 when countries included in the Schengen space removed visa requirements for Romanian citizens, making a valid passport sufficient for entry. Major destinations since then have included Italy, Spain, Portugal and the United Kingdom.
Figure 3

Since Romania is part of the European Union, the movement of the workflow to the West-European destinations has increased because of the unrestricted access to many labour markets.

Nevertheless, it is paramount to mention that Romania suffered since the beginning, especially middle of the 1990s, an alarming emigration of highly qualified specialists. The most usual trajectory has been full/partial study scholarships offered to the top ranking Romanian students by universities in the USA, UK, Ireland, France and Germany, followed by secure and well-paid employment possibilities on these host countries’ markets. Large salaries and a by far more prestigious social status constantly encourage Romanian intelligence emigration. The most notable areas of emigration study and employment in this sector are Sciences and Human Rights: Computer Sciences, Political Studies, and International Law-Human Rights. In 2006 alone, the United States provided through private job placement companies 14,742 jobs, involving summer work for Romanian students.

Moreover, the top-ranking skilled professionals, especially academia and research specialists from all domains, emigrated to Western Europe and to the USA. This outflow has started immediately after the fall of the Iron Curtain in the very early 1990s (this a few years earlier than the top students’ emigration flow) and mostly stopped at the end of the same decade, while the students outpour is still an issue. Thus, the Romanian academia and society lost its very best and skilled specialists in all fields at the very start of its troublesome transition. This may be considered one of
the very causes due to which Romania suffered such a weary and controversial socioeconomic and political transition after 1989: the top, skilled specialists and thinkers left, or had fled even during the Communist regime seeking political asylum in the West and in the USA.

Since January 1, 2007, having become an EU country, Romania is also a destination for illegal migration of foreigners from outside the European Union or a transit country. The main countries from which those illegal acts to the Romanian border come (both in terms of entry and in terms of output) are: India, China, Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt, Senegal, Republic of Moldova.

It is estimated that, between 2007 and 2010, 15,000 to 18,000 immigrants will arrive in Romania annually.

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