

# THE ROMANIAN EXODUS REVISITED: CAUSES, IMPLICATIONS, AND THE UNSEEN COSTS OF LABOR MIGRATION

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<https://doi.org/10.63356/FPNDP.2025.002>

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## ABSTRACT:

The collapse of the communist regime opened Romania's borders after decades of ideological restriction, coinciding with widespread optimism surrounding democratic transition. The first wave of emigration was driven by both the material and symbolic attraction of the West, contrasted with domestic political and economic instability. This dynamic intensified during the EU pre-accession period (2000–2006) and culminated in the full liberalization of mobility rights after Romania's accession in 2007 (with sectoral restrictions lifted by 2014). As emigration expanded in scale and duration, scholars and the media increasingly adopted the term "exodus" to describe its unprecedented demographic and socioeconomic impact. This migratory momentum persisted until the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily disrupted established labor mobility patterns and destabilized Romania's economic diaspora. One of the most pressing social consequences of sustained emigration has been the phenomenon of children left behind. A nationally representative sociological study indicates that between June 2021 and June 2022, 13.8% of children had at least one parent working abroad—approximately 536,000 children nationwide—while an estimated 184,000 were deprived of direct parental care. Although more recent data from the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (ANPDCA) show a 17% decrease in such cases by March 2024, suggesting partial post-pandemic stabilization of transnational family arrangements, the long-term emotional, educational, and developmental consequences remain a significant social concern. At the same time, Romanian migration has profoundly reshaped the country's demographic and economic landscape. Between 2007 and 2023, emigrants sent over 65 billion euros in remittances, a sum comparable to total foreign direct investment during the same period. In 2023 alone, remittances reached 6.5 billion euros, accounting for nearly 2% of GDP and contributing to household stability, regional development, and poverty reduction. Yet demographic data reveal a structural shift: since 2016, more Romanian-citizen children have been born abroad than domestically. Beyond economic transfers, Romanian migration is marked by the gradual nuclearization of transnational families, the rise of circular and digital labor mobility, and a transition toward partial return and net immigration. These trends underscore the need for integrated policy responses addressing both diaspora potential and migrant children's vulnerabilities.

**Review Article**

## UDK:

316.323.6:316.422(498)

## Key words:

Romanian migration, exodus, diaspora, transnational families, children left behind, remittances, post-pandemic mobility

## 1. Migration, a comprehensive and elusive phenomenon

A transdisciplinary analytical lens that can capture the systemic complexity of migration is necessary because it is a multifaceted phenomenon with complex social, economic, and political ramifications. From the perspective of applied sociology, the study of migration can help guide the creation of public policies that can successfully address the ripple effects created within political and socioeconomic systems (Castles, 2010). Although there are many theoretical contributions in the literature, many of them are still fragmented and not sufficiently generalizable, frequently only explaining specific aspects of the phenomenon (Massey et al., 1993, p. 432; King, 2012; Arango, 2004, p. 32).

As migration studies have developed, a number of paradigms have surfaced that have influenced academic interpretations for many years. According to the neoclassical economic paradigm, migration is a logical personal choice made by individuals with the goal of maximizing access to economic opportunities and reducing wage disparities (Todaro, 1969; Harris & Todaro, 1970). The historical-structural paradigm, on the other hand, views migration as a result of transnational economic restructuring linked to globalization (Sassen, 1988) or as a result of systemic inequality ingrained in the global capitalist order (Wallerstein, 1974). The socially embedded nature of migratory processes is also highlighted by another theoretical viewpoint, the migration network theories, which contend that interpersonal relationships tend to sustain and increase migratory flows (Massey et al., 1993) while also lowering costs and risks for future migrants (Boyd, 1989).

A more complex understanding of migration has also been made possible by complementary theoretical models. According to this framework, migration is understood as a household-level tactic that uses relational resources ingrained in social structures to diversify income sources and reduce economic vulnerability (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Portes, 1998). According to the mobility transition hypothesis (Zelinsky, 1971), these dynamics are part of larger demographic and developmental trends. They are also explained by the theory of cumulative causation, which holds that migration produces self-reinforcing effects that are visible and/or quantifiable over time (Myrdal, 1957).

Further, the significant issue of post-1989 Romanian migration towards the West will be addressed. However, the article does not seek to deliver a detailed or highly theoretical analysis; instead, it provides a comprehensive but synthetic overview of the phenomenon by exploring the root causes, the socio-political and economic effects, and, to some extent, the outcomes of this migration, focusing on how it has altered Romania's internal environment and changed the emigrant communities. The aim is to highlight the overall aspects of migration as a complex and evolving process, framed within a sociological context that considers both structural factors and shared experiences.

## 2. Context: the fall of communism and a shift in perspective

After the fall of communist governments, countries in Central and Eastern Europe saw a significant rise in international labor migration, mainly towards more developed nations. This shift was indicative of both economic vulnerabilities and a desire to align with Western standards of success. Romania was a prime example of this trend, experiencing a long and uneven transition characterized by political turmoil, economic changes, and few job opportunities at home. These factors led to one of the largest waves of emigration in the region, solidifying Romania's role as a key example in the broader context of post-socialist migration. Following the 1989 Revolution, there was a notable change in how the public and leaders viewed things: rejecting communism became synonymous with turning away from the East as a model to follow. In this newly established symbolic framework, the opening of previously closed borders allowed for not just physical movement but also a shift in values, leading to a growing association of the West with civilization, wealth, and modernity (Baltasius & Bulumac, 2014).

From an economic standpoint, post-revolutionary Romania faced a period of acute instability, shaped both by the structural legacies of the communist regime and by the erratic decisions of the newly formed political elites. The transition to a market economy was visible by the rapid privatization or outright closure of key industrial sectors, resulting in widespread unemployment and a diminished capacity for domestic production (Zamfir, 2018).

Without long-term strategic planning and practical economic options, many individuals turned to one common solution: moving to Western Europe. This trend was fueled not just by financial need but also by the appealing image of the West, which was seen as a place full of opportunities, respect, and social progress (Chirilă & Chirilă, 2017). Migrant labor thus became a transnational strategy of survival, aimed at sustaining both the individual abroad and the family remaining in Romania.

Thus, similar to other communities that faced the economic relocation phenomenon, an entire network of emigration was formed in which members brought each other to work, by recommendation, in Western countries (Boyd, 1989). Over time, this dynamic gave rise to dense migratory networks, often based on kinship or community ties, through which individuals facilitated one another's access to employment abroad. These informal circuits of recommendation and support played a crucial role in consolidating Romanian diasporic communities and in shaping the socio-economic landscape of migration (Pirwitz, 2019).

### 3. The waves of emigration

Romania underwent a unique period of emigration between the aftermath of the 1989 Revolution and the mid-1990s, during which time long-established ethnic groups, especially the Saxons and Swabians, left the country permanently. Approximately 97,000 of the more than 233,000 people who permanently left the country during this time identified as ethnic Germans, according to data from the National Institute of Statistics. In addition to reflecting larger post-socialist mobility patterns, this demographic shift also marked the end of historically anchored minority presences, whose departure altered both the transnational terrain of Romanian migration and local social configurations (Mărculescu Matiș, 2021).

The rise of an economic diaspora focused on Western Europe marked a significant turning point in Romanian migration between 1996 and 2000 (the second stage). During this time, the mobility driven primarily by economic aspirations replaced departures motivated by political or ethnic reasons. In addition to the labor market opportunities, France, Spain, and Italy became popular travel destinations because of the emergence of unofficial networks that made integration and access easier (Balcanu, 2008). The foundation for the consolidation of Romanian communities overseas was laid by the migration's contours, which were influenced by both the structural circumstances in Romania and the allure of the increasingly accessible European labor markets.

Both periods were marked by the emigration of people belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, many of whom had close and extensive foreign connections, either familial or social ties. Also, during this first decade, those experiencing acute economic hardship within their local communities were among those who emigrated.

By providing residency and employment opportunities for Eastern European citizens during the pre-accession phase (2000–2006), the EU gradually loosened access for Romanian workers in the years leading up to Romania's EU membership. The formal recognition of Romanian citizens' right to free movement of persons and labor as EU citizens began in 2007 and, in some cases, was extended until 2014, contingent on the policies of the host countries and the particular sectors of their economies. The trajectory of Romanian labor migration was greatly influenced by this slow liberalization of mobility rights, which also helped to solidify transnational migratory trends (Pasca, 2018).

Emigration consequently increased dramatically, placing a great deal of strain on Romania's domestic labor market. Due to a significant brain drain effect caused by the departure of young people and highly qualified professionals, a shortage of skilled workers in several important industries was recorded. Specifically, the agricultural sector was forced to depend more and more on the elderly, which reflected larger demographic disparities and the structural vulnerabilities brought

on by long-term migratory departures (Sandu, 2005).

However, the figures continued to grow within the third wave, which was recorded between 2001 and 2006. And that was because, starting from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2002, Romanians were able to travel visa-free to the Schengen area, which actually meant the fact that they no longer had to pay under the table for passports. This was seen as a huge step forward in the free movement of labor dynamics. Once again, migration exploded, and Spain became the preferred destination for Romanian workers (Mărculescu Matiș, 2021).

Between 2007 and 2011, the fourth wave of Romanian migration took place, which coincided with Romania's entry into the European Union, a landmark event that greatly increased the country's citizens' freedom of movement. A dramatic increase in emigration to Western Europe marked this and the following migratory phase. A significant change in the preferred destinations surfaced during this time: Romanians with professional and intellectual skills, many of whom had previously made Italy their home, started moving directly to Germany, Sweden, and the UK. Deeper processes of integration and long-term settlement within these host societies were reflected in this movement's tendency to not return to Romania, in contrast to previous patterns (Davidescu et al., 2017).

#### **4. The magnitude**

The 2015 edition of the UN Population Division's International Migration Report 2015 stated: 'Between 2000 and 2015, some countries have experienced a rapid growth in the size of their diaspora populations. Among the countries and areas with the fastest average annual growth rate during this period were the Syrian Arab Republic (13.1 per cent per annum), Romania (7.3 per cent per annum), Poland (5.1 per cent per annum) and India (4.5 per cent per annum). In Syria, much of this increase was due to the large outflow of refugees and asylum seekers following the conflict in the area (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division, 2015, p. 19).

Thus, the Romanian diaspora was growing on average, yearly, by 7.3% over 15 years, reaching an estimated 3.4 million people in 2015 (respectively 3.6 million in 2017) (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division, 2015, p. 13). As a result, Romania became second only to war-torn Syria in terms of the number of nationals leaving the country.

Thus, the magnitude of the phenomenon led to the increased circulation of the term 'exodus' by experts, journalists and public figures in two different time periods, 2016 (Ghica, 2016; Digi 24, 2016) and 2018 (Botea, 2018), a term used precisely to emphasize the extent of the socio-economic phenomenon in question, one without precedent in the history of the country.

Figure 1. Romania's National Institute of Statistics (INS)

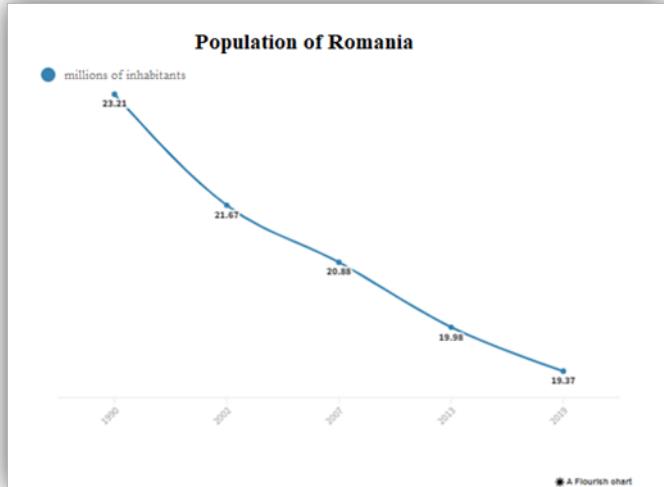
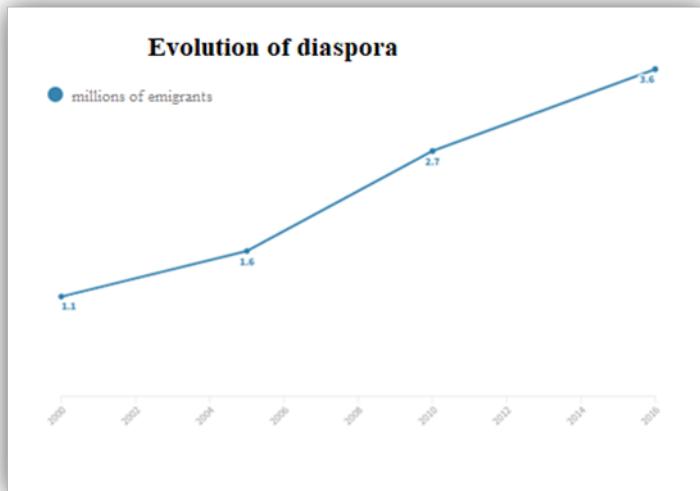


Figure 2. Source: OECD. The figures refer to individuals born in Romania who reside in OECD countries; 97% of the Romanian diaspora is located within the OECD area.



From a demographic perspective, statistics show that about 75% of Romania's population decline in recent decades can be attributed to external migration. Furthermore, the Romanian diaspora is the fifth largest in the world in terms of size, which illustrates the scope and tenacity of emigration flows as well as their significant influence on the labor force dynamics and demographic makeup of the

nation (Mărculescu Matiș, 2021).

Therefore, based on the observed patterns, it was deemed unlikely that Romania's high emigration rates would decline anytime soon. Consistently high levels of emigration intent, especially among younger cohorts, which continued to influence the demographic and social landscape of the nation, provided support for this prediction. Romania had the highest emigration intentions in the region between 2009 and 2018 (26%), according to Dospinescu and Russo (2018). Furthermore, if one takes into account several more recent studies, the percentage of young Romanians (those between the ages of 15 and 24 in some studies and 16 and 35 in others) who say they wish to leave the country was extremely high at that time: 50% (Sandu et al., 2018).

## 5. The event that put the brakes on the magnitude of the phenomenon

Large-scale emigration was occurring before the pandemic period, driven by both transnational labor demand and systemic injustices. However, the start of the COVID-19 pandemic marked a significant turning point in the history of Romanian migration, upending long-standing labor mobility patterns and the socioeconomic underpinnings of the Romanian diaspora (Radu & Bălan, 2023). During the pandemic, Romania's migration situation underwent a significant reversal, with an estimated 1.3 million citizens returning home in 2020 - a number that has been widely discussed in public and referenced by both national officials and foreign media<sup>1</sup>. 'According to the Romanian government, some 1.3 million Romanians had decided to return by May [2020], and the influx has continued since' (Tănase, 2020).

In their analysis of the 'brain drain' in Eastern Europe, *The Economist* provides the following context: 'In 2010, a Romanian who moved to Italy could expect to earn five times more; in 2019, only three times. For the highly skilled, the gap is narrower still. Throw in perks such as Romanian software developers being exempt from income tax, and a job in Bucharest can trump one in Brussels' (The Economist, 2021). These structural changes imply that Romania might be changing from an emigration destination to one that can draw back members of its diaspora, especially those with digital mobility and transnational credentials. Nevertheless, some experts are skeptical regarding this unprecedented mass return (Sandu, 2024) and consider the numbers as part of a larger trend of circular migration, in which people temporarily move because of economic disruptions or the chance to work

<sup>1</sup> In 2021, a figure was circulated that attracted attention across the country: that 1.3 million Romanians had returned home in 2020 due to the pandemic, and one of the most important political figures that disseminated it was Prime Minister Florin Cîțu (Cristian, 2021), while other government officials have repeated it since then. Even *The Economist* (2021) was circulating the same numbers.

remotely from their country of origin.

Comprehensive and clear studies are still scarce, and the post-crisis period – which we refer to as the fifth period of migration – is still developing. New data, however, points to the emergence of a novel migratory pattern marked by circularity and transient return movements. This pattern shows how migration strategies have been recalculated in response to changing labor market conditions and pandemic-induced uncertainties (Herczeg, 2020; Lamură (Grecu), 2023).

A study published in 2021 also shows that Romanians' interest in working abroad declined significantly during the pandemic (Romanian Global News, 2021). Instead, their desire to work from home in Romania for an employer in another country has increased. Only 33% of Romanians said they would like to look for work abroad in 2021, down from 55% in 2018, according to a Boston Consulting Group and BestJobs study. On the other hand, 61% of respondents said they would be open to working remotely for foreign companies, which reflects a shift in mobility preferences toward transnational digital labor arrangements (Baier et al., 2024).

In the (post)pandemic timeframe, the percentage of Romanians actively looking for work overseas has significantly decreased, according to quantitative data from international labor mobility surveys. Just 8% of Romanian respondents stated that they intended to work overseas in 2024, compared to 13% in 2020 and 22% in 2018, according to Baier et al. (2024). These numbers provide a comparative perspective on post-pandemic migration intentions and are based on a transnational dataset with over 150,000 participants in 188 countries. The favored locations for Romanian labor migrants have not changed in spite of this drop in stated intent. Due to historical migration networks, linguistic adaptation, and sectoral labor demand, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Spain remain the main host countries (Davidescu et al., 2020; Rodriguez, 2022).

However, this fifth stage of the Romanian migration includes a new trend that, a few years back, was considered to be improbable, given the trends recorded for the last three decades. Return movements combined with permanent resettlement in rural areas are a new, albeit niche, movement in Romanian migration dynamics. This phenomenon includes discrete subgroups that have been influenced by varying migration paths. Return migration is a crucial part of some people's initial mobility project, and rural resettlement reflects desires for social capital to be valued and for family reconnection (Săghină et al., 2025). According to a comprehensive study encompassing 3,181 administrative units, repatriation was taken into consideration by others in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic (Voicu, M. et al., 2023). The results indicated a significant rise in rural return migration, especially in light of international economic uncertainty and public health restrictions.

The migratory profile of Romania has gradually changed, becoming more and more like that of a nation with net immigration. Statistics released by the National

Institute of Statistics (INS) show a steady reversal of earlier emigration-dominated trends: for three years in a row, more people have moved to Romania than have left. This positive migratory balance helped to increase the net population by more than 200,000 people between 2022 and 2024<sup>2</sup>. In particular, the 2024 migration surplus was +36,200. The number of long-term arrivals - those who stay in the country for more than a year - surpassed the number of long-term departures in each of these years, indicating a structural change in Romania's place in the European mobility circuits (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2025).

## **6. Economic dimensions of Romanian emigration: the remittances**

One of the most significant and reliable sources of external financial inflow to the national economy was the 41 billion euros in remittances sent home by Romanian emigrants employed overseas between 2007 and 2020 (Mărculescu Matis, 2021). Since seasonal workers are not included in these transfers, which are mostly from long-term migrants, the full economic impact is probably underestimated.

The RePatriot, a civic and entrepreneurial project centered on diaspora engagement, provided an alternative estimate of the economic contribution of the Romanian diaspora. During the conference 'Romania's awakening: a national plan, now!', Felix Pătrăşcanu, President of RePatriot, made a public statement affirming that Romanian emigrants made over 65 billion euros in economic contributions to the country between 2005 and 2020 (Jurnalist, 2023). This number is positioned as comparable to the total amount of foreign direct investment Romania received during the same time period<sup>3</sup>, despite not coming from official statistical sources. This financial contribution 'rivals all foreign investments in Romania', Pătrăşcanu stressed, highlighting the untapped economic potential of transnational Romanian communities. Although they should be interpreted with caution, such assertions are part of a larger discussion about the strategic value of diaspora capital.

In 2020, at the height of the pandemic, the Romanian diaspora sent home 3.4 billion euros, equivalent to 3.1% of Romania's GDP (Bechir, 2023). Solely in 2023, the figure was 6.5 billion euros according to the National Bank of Romania, a sum which represents approximately 2% of Romania's GDP in the same year, and larger than 2022 by 350 million euros (Roşca, 2024). Remittances are a strategic economic stabilizer that frequently equals or exceeds foreign direct investment in volume when compared to Romania's GDP growth, which increased from 127.6 billion

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<sup>2</sup> 2020 (114.469), 2021 (149.513), 2022 (190.205) (Luca, 2024), 2023 (324.000) (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> Based on a combination of data from the National Bank of Romania (BNR) and economic analyses released by organizations like the Foreign Investors Council and UNCTAD, Romania received an estimated €80–85 billion in total foreign direct investment (FDI) between 2005 and 2020 (Zapalcea, 2020).

euros in 2007 to 223.3 billion euros in 2019 (Romania GDP - Gross Domestic Product) and an estimated 353 billion euros in 2024 (Grădinaru, 2025). Researchers have observed that remittances, especially in economically underdeveloped regions, not only support household consumption but also regional development and poverty alleviation (Mehedințu et al., 2020; Prelipcean et al., 2024).

Still, their developmental potential is contingent on policy frameworks that channel these funds toward productive investment rather than short-term consumption. Romania's case exemplifies the dual nature of remittances: while they mitigate the economic consequences of labor emigration, they also underscore the need for coherent diaspora engagement strategies and long-term reintegration strategies. Policy frameworks that direct these funds toward profitable investment rather than impulsive consumption are necessary to realize their developmental potential (Ghosh, 2006; de Haas, 2005). The situation in Romania serves as an example of the twofold nature of remittances: they both lessen the financial effects of labor emigration and highlight the necessity of long-term reintegration policies and an effective diaspora engagement approach.

## **7. Children left behind: the social effects of labor migration**

One of the most pressing social consequences of large-scale labor migration from Romania concerned the children left behind. Due to this phenomenon, a sizable group of minors experienced varied levels of parental absence, from brief separation to total lack of direct care. According to a 2022 nationally representative sociological study by the non-governmental organization Save the Children Romania, 13.8% of Romanian children had at least one parent employed overseas between June 2021 and June 2022. This percentage translates to roughly 536,000 children impacted by transnational parental migration when extrapolated to the total child population (3,896,943). Of these, an estimated 184,000 children were completely denied direct parental care because the only caregiver had moved for employment or both parents were overseas (Organizația Salvați Copiii România, 2022).

There are also disparities in how this phenomenon was measured, according to earlier institutional data. 94,896 children with at least one parent living overseas were reported by the National Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Children, and Adoptions (ANPDCA) in 2017. But according to the data gathered from County School Inspectorates, the Ministry of National Education's figures showed a much higher number - 159,038 children. It is important to remember that the educational data only include children who were enrolled in formal education and were between the ages of 3 and 17 (Copii singuri acasă, n.d.). Preschool-aged children and those who were not enrolled in school, including dropouts, were not

included. Thus, the actual number of children impacted by parental migration may be significantly higher than official statistics indicate, according to this methodological limitation.

The number of children impacted by parental labor migration, especially those placed in the custody of extended family members or the official child protection system, has significantly decreased, according to recent statistical reports. 61,007 children from more than 50,000 families were registered under such circumstances, according to the data released by the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (ANPDCA) in March 2024 (Hătiș, 2024). Compared to the same time period in 2023, when 72,902 children from almost 57,000 families were recorded, this represents a 17% drop (Hătiș, 2024). The downward trend points to a partial stabilization of transnational family arrangements following the pandemic, which may have been impacted by changes in labor mobility patterns and the growth of remote work opportunities. These factors call for more research on the changing connection between Romanian child welfare and economic migration.

One of the most pressing sociological issues in Romania is the long-term effects of parental labor migration on the children left behind. Given that many cases go unreported or are underreported, the phenomenon's true scope probably surpasses official statistics despite efforts to quantify it (Sănduleasa & Matei, 2015). It has been demonstrated that losing one or both parents during early developmental stages can have long-lasting emotional and psychological repercussions, such as chronic feelings of desertion and disturbed attachment styles (Cheie & Prodan, 2025). Research indicates that the absence of a mother has a particularly significant effect and is frequently linked to increased emotional susceptibility, whereas the absence of a father figure is linked to behavioral issues and identity conflicts (Matei & Bobârnăt, 2022). Additionally, communication problems are common among children in transnational families, and they can show up as social disengagement, depression symptoms, or, on the other end of the spectrum, increased aggression (Costin, 2021). Increased risks of school dropout and juvenile delinquency exacerbate these psychosocial disruptions, particularly in situations where caregiving structures are brittle or irregular (But, 2021). The body of evidence emphasizes the necessity of focused social policies and support systems that take into account the multi-layered vulnerabilities of children impacted by international parenthood.

## **8. Another relevant shift**

After the economic stabilization of the diaspora, more precisely after the first members of the families managed to create a secure environment (home, stable job, social insurance, etc.), the main trend was to bring the rest of the family abroad

(nuclearization). Thus, the phenomenon of children left behind decreased.

After the first stage of economic stability among Romanian migrants, which was marked by housing, work, and social protection, there was a noticeable change in family migration tactics. Transnational households gradually became more nuclearized as the prevailing trend shifted from individual labor migration to family reunification. The number of children left behind in Romania decreased noticeably as a result of this process, in which migrants attempted to take spouses and children overseas after ensuring basic living conditions. In the post-accession migration context, where mobility shifts from short-term labor strategies to long-term settlement and integration, such changes mirror larger patterns of transnational family consolidation (Saghir & Lupu, 2020; Sănduleasa & Matei, 2015).

The reproductive geography of Romanian families has changed significantly, according to recent demographic analyses, with about 25% of Romanian children now born abroad (Anițoiu, 2023). This pattern is especially noticeable in the UK, where 16,069 births to Romanian-born mothers were registered in England and Wales in 2019; this number only slightly decreased to 15,518 in 2022 (Anglia mea, 2024). This figure is noteworthy because it exceeds the number of births in any one Romanian county and accounts for more than 8% of all births registered nationwide (Prundea, 2021).

Similar trends are seen in other host nations in Europe. According to recent data, mothers of Romanian descent give birth to an average of 5,000 children per year in France (Institut national d'études démographiques, 2025). Although the number of births among Romanian citizens in Italy has been gradually declining, 14,693 such births were recorded in 2017 (Instituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2018). Similar trends are seen in Spain, where 8,115 births to Romanian mothers were recorded in 2020 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2024).

More than 50,000 Romanian-citizen children have been born every year among the European diaspora during the last seven to eight years, according to estimates from the Institute for Quality of Life Research, from the Romanian Academy (Cristian, 2019). For the first time, more children born abroad to Romanian parents than in Romania were born in 2016, marking a turning point in this demographic shift (Negrea, 2017). The fact that these numbers only include children who are officially registered as Romanian citizens and do not include all children born to Romanians abroad raises the possibility that the true numbers are much higher.

## **Concluding remarks**

Since 1989, Romanian migration has developed into a complex phenomenon influenced by structural injustices, historical upheavals, and changing labor dynamics around the world. Political liberalization and economic instability were the

initial drivers of emigration, which spread in waves with different reasons, ranging from transnational labor tactics to ethnic displacement. The gradual liberalization of mobility rights within the European Union catalyzed long-term settlement abroad, transforming Romania into one of the world's leading emigration countries. A reproductive diaspora has emerged as a result of this change, with about 25% of Romanian children now born outside of their country. These trends show the extent of migration as well as how deeply ingrained it is in long-term integration and transnational family consolidation.

Migration has had an equally important economic impact. Remittances, which frequently matched foreign direct investment in volume, have continuously functioned as a strategic stabilizer for Romania's economy. Diaspora contributions bolstered household consumption, regional development, and poverty alleviation, with over 6.5 billion euros sent home in 2023 alone. Their capacity to develop, however, was still dependent on well-thought-out policy frameworks that direct these resources toward profitable ventures and long-term reintegration. Later, a new migration phase characterized by circularity, digital labor mobility, and rural resettlement was brought about by the pandemic, which may partly reverse earlier trends and reshape Romania's place in European mobility circuits.

The phenomenon of children left behind has revealed serious weaknesses in international caregiving arrangements on a social level. Even though the number of impacted children appears to be declining, the long-term psychological and developmental effects are still a major worry. It is commonly known that children who experience parental absence face risks to their education, behavioral disturbances, and emotional detachment. Some of these effects have been lessened by the nuclearization of immigrant families overseas, but child welfare interventions and targeted social policies are still required. When combined, these factors highlight how complicated Romanian migration is as a lived and structural experience, necessitating ongoing sociological research, creative policy solutions, and international cooperation.

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# RUMUNSKI EGZODUS U NOVOM SVJETLU: UZROCI, POSLJEDICE I NEVIDLJIVI TROŠKOVI RADNE MIGRACIJE

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## APSTRAKT

Novostečena sloboda putovanja preko granica nakon pada komunističkog režima poklopila se sa opštim entuzijazmom koji je pratio demokratsku tranziciju Rumunije. Prvi talas emigracije bio je podstaknut materijalnom i simboličkom privlačnošću Zapada, nasuprot nestabilnosti u zemlji. Ovaj trend se ubrzao tokom perioda predpristupanja Evropskoj uniji (2000–2006) i kulminirao potpunom liberalizacijom prava na mobilnost nakon pristupanja 2007. godine, uz sektorske varijacije koje su trajale do 2014. Kako je emigracija rasla, termin „egzodus“ postao je široko korišćen u akademskim i medijskim krugovima kako bi se naglasio neviđeni obim i socioekonomski značaj ovog fenomena u savremenoj istoriji Rumunije. Ova masovna migraciona dinamika trajala je sve do izbijanja pandemije COVID-19, koja je poremetila dugogodišnje obrasce radne mobilnosti i privremeno destabilizovala ekonomsku dijasporu Rumunije. Jedna od najurgentnijih društvenih posledica ovog dugotrajnog iseljavanja jeste fenomen djece koja ostaju u zemlji kao posledica radne migracije roditelja. Između juna 2021. i juna 2022. godine, 13,8% djece imalo je najmanje jednog roditelja koji radi u inostranstvu, što odgovara broju od približno 536.000 pođene djece, od kojih je oko 184.000 bilo u potpunosti lišeno neposredne roditeljske brige. Noviji podaci Nacionalne uprave za zaštitu prava djece i usvajanje ukazuju na smanjenje ovih slučajeva za 17% do marta 2024. godine, što sugerise delimičnu stabilizaciju u postpandemijskom okruženju. Demografske i ekonomski promjene izazvane rumunskom migracijom podjednako su značajne. U periodu između 2007. i 2023. godine, emigranti su poslali više od 65 milijardi evra u vidu doznaka, što gotovo odgovara ukupnom iznosu stranih direktnih investicija primljenih u istom periodu. Samo u 2023. godini, transferi su dostigli 6,5 milijardi evra, odnosno približno 2% BDP-a, stabilizujući potrošnju domaćinstava, regionalni razvoj i smanjenje siromaštva, naročito u ekonomski ranjivim područjima. Od 2016. godine, više djece rumunskih državljana rada se van Rumunije nego unutar zemlje, što ukazuje na pomeranje „reproaktivne geografije“ rumunskih porodica. Pored demografskih promjena i ekonomskih doznačaka, rumunska migracija ima i šire implikacije. Složen i promjenljiv proces ogleda se u sporoj nuklearizaciji transnacionalnih porodica, porastu digitalne i cirkularne radne mobilnosti, kao i u promjeni migracionog profila Rumunije — od zemlje iseljavanja ka zemlji djelimičnog povratka i neto imigracije. Ovi faktori naglašavaju potrebu za sveobuhvatnim politikama koje uzimaju u obzir strateški potencijal angažovanja dijaspore, ali i ranjivosti sa kojima se suočavaju dječa migranata.

**Ključne riječi:**  
rumunska migracija,  
egzodus, dijaspora,  
transnacionalne  
porodice, djeca  
bez roditeljskog  
staranja, doznake,  
postpandemijska  
mobilnost

