

# **DOMESTIC MIGRATIONS AND ECONOMIC POLICIES IN POST-TOTALITARIAN ROMANIA**

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## **Introduction**

Romania's transition from a centralised economy to the market system has entailed big economic and social restructurings associated with the spatial redistribution of the population, and of the labour force, in particular. Apart from small-distance moves, mainly urban-to-rural and rural-to-urban, long-distance migrations became even more frequent, acquiring increasingly more serious implications. Because of geographical-economic and social-historical particularities, Romania presents huge territorial disparities that generate population shifts, thus rebalancing the situation of its various regions.

In time, certain areas have developed a chronic labour shortage (eg. Banat, Bucharest, southern Transylvania and Constanta), while others (eg. Moldavia, Maramures, and the north-eastern parts of Transylvania) have traditionally registered a surplus. In the first half of the 1990's, the enforcement of a new Land Law, together with industrial restructuring, had a strong impact on the rural-urban migration at both local and inter-local levels. The last years of that decade witnessed sudden ample restructuring of the mining sector, a fact that brought about changes in the general pattern of long-distance migration fluxes, and exactly opposite migration trends emerged at county and regional levels. The new situation calls for adequate regional development policies to attenuate the territorial impact of that reality.

## **Methodological Remarks**

In order to make a better and more accurate assessment of the direction and intensity of recent long-distance migration, some general aspects ought to be taken into account:

- Firstly, main data reported in this study were obtained from statistical year-books of the past few years, demographic year-books detailing out inter-county migration, and from some mining enterprises, e.g. the Oltenia-based Lignite National Company.
- Secondly, migration is a phenomenon triggered by two basic situations: labour availability and labour shortage; labour availability is generated by the failure to use the workforce to capacity, or by its very low incomes; labour shortage is the result of excessive demand for available local manpower. When this situation is created by the town and the village developing in opposite directions, or in the same direction but at different rates, then it is a case of short-distance migration. This type of migration also poses certain problems. When this diverging development affects whole regions, then we have a case of long-distance migration. Its negative effects are lasting and difficult to solve.
- Thirdly, the intensity of migration at national level is a faithful mirror of the territorial disparities among a country's main regions. Long-distance migration in particular, is an outstanding indicator that measures the disparities facing each country. The majority of studies trying to devise adequate regional development policies, consider long-distance migration to be a major reference-point for quantifying gaps and assessing ways and means of bridging them.
- Fourthly, certain conditions of economic instability, or specific economic policies may trigger a wave of return to the poorer regions. Unless steps are taken for relocation to be associated with

economic reintegration, the risk for deep-running conflicts and phenomena causing upheavals in a country's economic and social life should not be overlooked.

- Fifthly, the economic measures frequently adopted by the governments that succeeded at the helm of this country lacked coherence. Quite often their main goal was to resolve some political and social crisis situations. Any approach that targets only a very short time span, though apparently beneficial, is unproductive, because it is certain to generate unpredictable medium- and even short-term behaviours and adverse reactions.
- Sixthly, assessments of long-distance migration are based on the statistical evidence of the net migration component within the mutual population exchange at inter-county level, and on the total volume of emigrations and immigrations. The analysis of net migration reveals the capacity of counties to supply or attract population in general, and labour in particular; the analysis of absolute volumes indicates the intensity of these phenomena.

## **The Policy of Economic Restructuring and Inter-county Migration**

The whole transition period traversed by Romania so far could be divided in to four short stages, each with its peculiar economic restructuring/migration ratio.

- a) The first year of the transition to market system is marked by economic measures that had a populist character. In view of it, the number of employees in the economy, generally and in industry in particular, kept growing mainly through the division of the state enterprises. This numerical increase took place largely in the non-productive compartments, specifically the administrative ones. That would explain why areas lying close to or farther away from the big cities as a rule attracted so many people that year. Moreover, that phenomenon coincided with the lifting of legal restrictions imposed on immigration into large cities, so their population would spiral up. At inter-county level, the highly industrialised zones, especially the mining areas, stirred a vivid interest. On the other hand, labour supply counties registered increased emigration rates.
- b) The next three years (1991-1994) represented a very hard period, affecting migration in very many ways. It was the first time in the post-war period that unemployment was officially recorded. In 1993 alone, some one million jobs were lost through the dramatic slump of production. By and large, unemployment values would oscillate around this figure over the next period, too. Subsequently, as the focus of reform shifted, these values would slightly decrease.

The majority of the potentially negative social phenomena were attenuated by the positive effects of the Land Law, which came into effect in 1991. This law had a strong impact on migration, with people returning to their places of origin. It was largely a matter of urban-to-rural migration, both from the towns adjoining the countryside and from far-off places.

Although the average size of a landed property was small, yet the feeling of ownership was revived and it proved strong enough to draw many townsfolk back, mostly elderly people. Simultaneously with the restructuring of big industrial units, or even before it, the uncertainty of maintaining one's job kindled the back-migration movement. More so, as 32% of the smallholders lived in town, and the sharp cuts in the number of jobs might have induced them to return to their native villages.

The volume of out-migrants was 2.4 times that of in-migrants in 1991; 1.7 in 1992; 1.5 in 1993; 1.3 in 1994; 1.09 in 1995, and 1.026 in 1996.

- c) In the third stage (1994-1996), the economic policy focused on stopping the dramatic decline of industry and obviously on reducing the rate of restructuring and of privatising the big manufacturers. Unemployment dropped from cca 11% (1994) to 6.5% (1996). Migration was two-way: both from the rural to the urban and from the urban to the rural. The number of people leaving the countryside kept diminishing.

At cross-country level, the explosive 1990 migration record (three times the mean of the next three years), was followed by a relatively constant total number of migrants. Rural and urban dynamics

showed an obvious tendency for the in-migrants:out-migrants ratio values to come closer and even equalise. At the same time, beginning with 1995, total migration became more intense (Table 1).

*Table 1. Recent urban/rural migration (1990-1998)*

Year	In-migrants			Out-migrants		
	Total	In urban	In rural	Total	From urban	From rural
1990	786,471	691.803	94.668	786.471	170.381	616.090
1991	262,903	185.459	197.010	262.903	79.670	183.233
1992	293,182	186.172	107.010	293.182	111.471	181.711
1993	240,231	144.994	95.237	240.231	96.084	144.147
1994	266,745	149.712	117.033	266.745	117.368	149.377
1995	289,491	148.333	141.158	289.491	135.833	153.658
1996	292,879	152.585	140.294	292.879	148.902	143.977
1997	302,579	144.034	158.545	302.579	156.622	145.957
1998	276,154	132,472	143,682	276,154	150,470	125,684

Source: Anuarul statistic al României, 1999, p.106.

After the total migration volume kept steadily growing until 1997, a marked decreasing tendency started being noticed as from 1998 - an indication that the internal migration movement was still unbalanced. That oscillating evolution will presumably be confirmed in the following years, as the territorial impact of the controversial economic policies becomes manifest in the sudden change of the labour market.

Looking at the absolute net migration values over the past three years (1994, 1995, 1996), one finds a series of interesting aspects. Most importantly, long-distance migration began declining (Table 2), especially in the southern counties surrounding Bucharest city. Thus, nearly all of them shifted from marked negative values in 1994 to positive values in 1996 (Calarasi and Giurgiu; Ialomita - only one net positive migration value throughout the studied interval) in parallel with a dramatic drop in the attraction force of the Bucharest Municipality (only 1,061 persons, a figure that lists it in the fourth place in the national hierarchy, below Timis, Arad and Constanta counties).

Despite the high back-migration values, the counties of traditional labour supply areas continued to lose inhabitants through change of domicile. In absolute figures (1996), Vaslui, Maramures, Neamt and Galati head the table. In 1998, new counties, which a few years earlier had been labour-attractive (Hunedoara, Alba) had a high supply score, similar to some traditional labour suppliers (Maramures, and Bistrita-Nasaud). Formerly topping the table, Botosani, Iasi and Suceava registered moderate values.

Like in the previous years, the main mining counties, especially the coal-mining ones (Hunedoara and Gorj) amply subsidised by the state, continued to attract migrants in 1996, too, as did the developed counties (with a positive net migration record - Timis, Arad, Constanta, Brasov, Sibiu, etc.).

The proportion of out-migrants/total migrants/counties clearly reflects a decreasing trend. In three-fourth of all the counties, 1994-1996 decreases were in favour of internal migration. In general, however, they were moderate, largely between 4% and 6% over the studied interval, only some counties, e.g. Giurgiu, Calarasi, or Alba, scoring more than 10 per cent.

A comparative analysis of the situation in the first three years also reveals a highly variable share of emigrants within the total volume of migrants in the respective county. While in 1994, their share exceeded 55% in six counties, in 1996 the number of counties dropped to four (Ilfov, which emerged in the last year, was not taken into account). Values of over 60% (the case of Giurgiu and Vaslui in 1994) were no longer recorded.

Table 2. Absolute figures of net migration by counties (1994-1998)

COUNTY	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Alba	-1,008	-754	-710	-441	-1,004
Arad	1,830	2,252	2,048	2,636	2,780
Arges	-134	-466	-410	-311	-415
Bacau	-1,150	-524	-826	31	93
Bihor	463	275	214	411	491
Bistrita-Nasaud	-703	-661	-800	-1,104	-965
Botosani	-1,476	-955	-742	-79	-523
Brasov	1,304	-92	605	-225	-351
Braila	532	851	687	843	737
Buzau	-871	-252	-525	-96	-132
Caras-Severin	-181	-518	-150	-432	-316
Calarasi	-712	-177	316	82	199
Cluj	148	721	596	767	869
Constanta	1,892	1,150	1,664	648	1,612
Covasna	-214	-297	-173	-89	-27
Dambovita	-270	-297	-173	409	83
Dolj	-6	-273	78	143	721
Galati	-396	-670	-882	-79	-207
Giurgiu	-836	-556	121	355	213
Gorj	395	402	552	318	-144
Harghita	-471	-206	-326	-199	-86
Hunedoara	282	109	431	-4,201	-3,340
Ialomita	155	658	96	493	476
Iasi	-803	-47	-438	1,091	284
Ilfov	-	-	915	1,269	812
Maramures	-1,522	-1,983	-1,445	-1,687	-1,601
Mehedinti	42	104	140	-159	5
Mures	567	665	752	573	607
Neamt	-618	-1,059	-1,102	-693	-323
Olt	-806	-1,604	-607	-374	-524
Prahova	-224	-514	-293	-657	-429
Satu Mare	-160	-137	52	180	219
Salaj	-558	-385	-456	-705	-568
Sibiu	1,196	531	525	503	12
Suceava	-958	-530	-680	-961	-475
Teleorman	-1,075	-152	-698	23	136
Timis	3,789	3,506	3,033	2,994	1,799
Tulcea	-393	-138	-246	-214	-400
Vaslui	-1,830	-642	-1,749	-565	-982
Valcea	-331	-318	-114	-92	-189
Vrancea	-1,054	-541	-545	-336	-509
Municipiul Bucuresti	6,205	13,228	1,061	-70	1,073

Source: National Commission for Statistics

Of all Romania's counties, only Vaslui and Timis represent extreme cases of in-migrants and out-migrants, respectively. Both are located in traditional migrant supply and receptor areas. Vaslui emigrants (4,360 persons) are heading to the neighbouring Iasi (598 pers.) and Galati (357 pers.) counties, but also going longer distances (Constanta – 456 pers.; Brasov – 427 pers.; Bucharest – 350 pers.; Hunedoara – 297 pers.). Banat is not an attractive destination for them, nor for the inhabitants from the south of Moldavia province either, because of the very great distance (with transit through Bucharest). In Timis, a significant contribution to the total number of in-migrants (10,017 pers.) is made by counties from the north of Transylvania (Maramures – 500 pers.; Bistrita-Nasaud – 299 pers.), Moldavia (Suceava – 438 pers.; Iasi – 323 pers.; Botosani – 303 pers.) and Oltenia (Mehedinti – 327 pers.). Similarly, neighbouring counties, in particular Caras-Severin (1,640 pers.), do contribute largely to the total volume of population exchanges. As a matter of fact, Timis represents a focus of attraction for the whole country, always topping Bucharest city in direct competition (1994 – 117 pers. coming from the capital and 87 pers. going to it; 1995 – 160/93; 1996 – 105/69).

- d) The fourth stage began in 1997. After winning the 1996 elections, the new government took a series of economic measures with direct effect on migration. In August 1997, and subsequently, some industrial units with a long-standing tradition in the respective branches, and located in big cities (e.g. Ploiesti and Braila), as well as some mining enterprises, started being liquidated. The majority of their employees had been living in those towns for several generations. Having lost their original roots, their migration to the neighboring countryside or to the counties of origin was fairly limited.

A particular situation was created when the state stopped earmarking massive funds for the mining industry. In order to avoid violent social conflicts, the government granted between 15 and 20 average salaries/branch (apart from the unemployment aid) to all the employees from this sector ready to abandon mining and begin a new activity or start an individual business. The money temptation being great, some 70,000 miners from around the country left the industry.

In view of it, a shift in migration fluxes was recorded, with counties that had been attractive until 1996, turning into labour suppliers. This would account for the very high net migration values in Hunedoara, for example (mining-metallurgical profile), formerly labour deficient.

With the economic policy targeting the reduction of industrial activities, and with urban unemployment on the increase, back-migration to the countryside gained momentum. In 1999, only four counties (Arad, Satu Mare, Timis and Bucharest city) had a positive score, with four others (Alba, Bistrita-Nasaud, Caras-Severin and Maramures) compensating by a negative record. The latter four counties having major extractive sites in their rural areas, it was to be expected that the dramatic slump in the mining sector would lead to the depopulation of the respective settlements, with people migrating elsewhere.

At national level, fast going rural-to-urban migration falls were followed by a marked urban-to-rural trend, while urban-to-urban and rural-to-rural values stagnated. The November, 2000 elections pushed the opposition into power. Its old philosophy of first upgrading the industrial units and then privatising them, seemed to have a certain stabilising effect on migrational fluxes which again shifted their preferences to the large industrial areas of the rural hinterland.

## **County Typology by Migrant Attraction/Supply Capacity**

A comparative view of net migration over the past five years indicates that areas with a negative and positive record in the 1994-1996 period reached a certain degree of stability. The situation suffered a fundamental change over the 1996-1998 interval. Logically speaking, a return trend in long-distance migration occurs only in catastrophic circumstances. This change becomes relevant when comparing the net positive and negative values shown on the inter-county migration map for the years 1996 and 1998. In 1996, positive values were concentrated mainly in the west of Romania, almost continuously from Satu Mare to Dolj, in the central part of the Transylvanian Tableland and in the south-east of Romania, in a compact area situated south and east of Bucharest. In 1998, the relatively continuous western area and the Central Transylvanian one became fragmented, while the south-eastern part was expanding, incorporating other counties, too (Teleorman and Dambovită). Moldavia, in its turn, covered all over by negative values in 1996, began to show some positive pockets in 1998, e.g. the counties of Iasi and Bacău.

Looking at every county's record in each of the recent five years, enabled us to distinguish a typology of counties with temporal similitudes in their capacity to attract or supply migrants. An outline of four categories of counties is given below:

1. *Counties having registered positive values* throughout the studied interval, are migrant attractors. The majority are located in the west of Romania (Arad, Timis, and Bihor), in the central part (Cluj, Mures, and Sibiu) and in the south (Ialomița, Ilfov, Braila and Constanta). The highest absolute net migration value goes only to Arad, with Timis and Constanta standing next in line.

An interesting competition between Arad and Timis to attract people was going on over the previous two years, given that Timis had long been a choice destination for the whole migratory movement. But in 1998, a change of rank took place, Arad exceeding the absolute Timis record by over 1,000 persons, which means that it had become a kind of outlet for the over saturated Timis, the latter re-directioning its fluxes of migrants towards the former. There are also other major attractors in the long-distance migration volume, with permanently positive values and steadily growing records. It is the case of Cluj county, with its capital Cluj-Napoca, acquiring a dominant economic and especially cultural position in Transylvanian life. Relatively constant values were registered by Constanta county, though with major fluctuations, e.g. a two-third net migration value drop in 1997. All the other counties show net migration intensity oscillations, yet permanently within the positive range. Quite interesting is the evolution of Sibiu county, a great attraction in the first studied years (over 500 pers.), only to lose much of it in 1998, coming close to nil.

2. *Counties with a negative score* until 1996 would subsequently become attractive. This category comprises two types: a) counties in which back-migration was prompted by the restructuring of highly-industrialised areas, part of the layoffs, still of working age, returning to their native counties (Bacau, Dolj, and Iasi); and b) counties where the back-migrants were largely elderly, retired people, who chose to leave town, particularly Bucharest city (it is the case of the counties surrounding the capital – Giurgiu, Calarasi, Ilfov and Teleorman). It should be mentioned that the cultural and economic life unfolding in the capitals of the first set of counties did to a certain extent influence migrant options, attracting part of the layoffs from other counties, too. But the strongest back-migration trends targeted the rural area, where the effects of the Land Law proved to have beneficial effects.
3. *Counties which continued to act as labour suppliers* (18) represent nearly 50% of the cross-country total. They are located mainly in highly rural zones like Moldavia (Botosani, Suceava, Neamt, Vaslui, Vrancea and Galati), Maramures and Transylvania (Maramures, Bistrita-Nasaud, Harghita, Salaj and Alba); Banat (Caras-Severin), Dobrogea (Tulcea) and the south of Romania (Prahova, Olt, Buzau and Arges). This category includes not only poorer counties, but also some of the most developed ones in Romania, such as Prahova. Most counties registered oscillating absolute net migration values. In Bistrita-Nasaud and Tulcea the slide-down was constant and even very sharp.
4. *Counties which had been active until 1996, subsequently growing into migrant suppliers.* This category includes two sub-classes: a) counties showing slight increases within the first interval of the studied period (1994-1996), only to have a negative absolute net migration record afterward in the wake of internal migration and the attraction exerted by other neighbouring counties (Mehedinti); and b) counties that had been a great attraction within the first period only to lose their attraction after 1997. The second sub-class lists Hunedoara and Gorj where the labour structure had been dominated by mining. With the closure of pits or the slowdown of activity, many families did not resist the temptation (understandable in this category of people) of being paid by the state in advance for no work at all, and returned to their counties of origin. So, massive self-remittance was a means to avoid social conflicts. However, these fluxes did not attain expected figures because of the complex reintegration problems the returnees had to cope with in their native villages.

From a geographical viewpoint, these measures had a visible impact on inter-county net migration levels, directly affecting the respective county which found itself overnight turned from labour attractor into labour supplier. The other counties, too, were indirectly affected. An obvious example of the re-orientation of migration fluxes is Hunedoara. A comparative approach to the pattern of migrant fluxes by using the net migration values of 1996 and 1998 reveals the immediate effect of the previously mentioned measures.

In 1996, net migration values were positive and migrant fluxes implicitly converged. In-migrants originated mainly from two distinct areas: central and southern Moldavia (the counties of Iasi, Vaslui and Bacau), and Maramures. Hunedoara was a migrant supplier to the neighbouring Timis and Arad. The first signs of a possible back-migration trend appeared when negative fluxes

compared to Oltenia counties or to the north Transylvanian ones even (Bistrita-Nasaud and Salaj) started being recorded.

In 1998, Hunedoara became a labour supplier and the dominant presence of diverging fluxes was absolutely obvious. Masses of migrants would return to their Moldavian counties (especially Iasi, Vaslui and Bacau), previous tendencies in its relationships with counties from Oltenia or Banat intensifying. This re-orientation of fluxes created big problems in the migrants' places of origin, which appeared to be wholly unprepared to integrate them economically and psychologically.

## **Conclusions**

Although the time-interval for which our study was undertaken is relatively short, yet the change-induced geographical problems are particularly complex. The phenomenon of migration is the direct and evident companion of economic and social evolutions. The measures imposed by transition from a centralised economy to the market system, whatever the ways and means of implementing them, do affect the workforce and the population, generally. People try to find a 'space pocket' according to individual reference points.

In parallel with the assertion of the traditional structure in the geographical distribution of population attraction and supply centres, a process of territorial resettlement and re-sizing is taking place rather suddenly, and its consequences are sure to be felt over the next period. Yearly mutations (the case of Hunedoara county) are very spectacular indeed, and they could become an extremely tempting subject-matter for a geographical-social analysis. But the situation on the ground calls for urgent micro-scale approaches to detect the functioning mechanisms of common space categories, assess their geographical impact in the redistribution of human resources, capable of optimising the economic/human potential relationship on different scales.