

ROMANIAN EMIGRATION ABROAD. CAUSES AND IMPACT

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The Revolution in December 1989 represented a crucial point in the life of all Romanians from all points of view. The conflict between generations is something that takes place worldwide, but in a country that experienced a half-century communist period, it still has deep roots that can hardly be removed. It refers not only to political and economic aspects, but especially to mentality and attitude. I am sure that our parents and grandparents could hardly if ever have imagined that their children and grandchildren could someday be able to go and study, work or simply spend their holidays abroad.

In the post-war period, within the limits imposed by the socialist political system, getting an emigration visa was something very difficult, restricting very much the number of departures abroad.

Official statistics show that between **1975-1989** only **362, 463** persons left the country for good. The most preferred destinations were *RFG, USA, Israel, Austria, Canada, Hungary, France, Greece, Sweden, Italy and even Australia*. As opposed to this 23-year interval, the period between **1990-2004** (14 years) faced a larger number of

departures – **361, 692** persons, according to the Romanian National Institute of Statistics. Unfortunately, the real image and amplex of the phenomenon are highly distorted by the illegal character of the emigration, which can only be approximated but not thoroughly evaluated.

Taking into consideration the international context, the countries that have undertaken the Romanian emigrants during these 14 years, one can differentiate certain periods of time, each of them having definite characteristics.

The first period, between **1990-1995** is polarized *by Israel and Turkey*, while *Italy, Hungary and Germany* are also well represented. The dominant migration direction changes during the following period (**1996-2001**), *Italy* coming first and *Israel* second. Beginning with **2002**, Romania's access to Schengen space changed labour migration into a mass phenomenon. The two most important attractive countries became **Italy** (absorbing almost half of the emigrants' flow) and **Spain**, with nearly 25 % of the number of departures. This is linked to our cultural background, Italy and Spain being Latin countries.

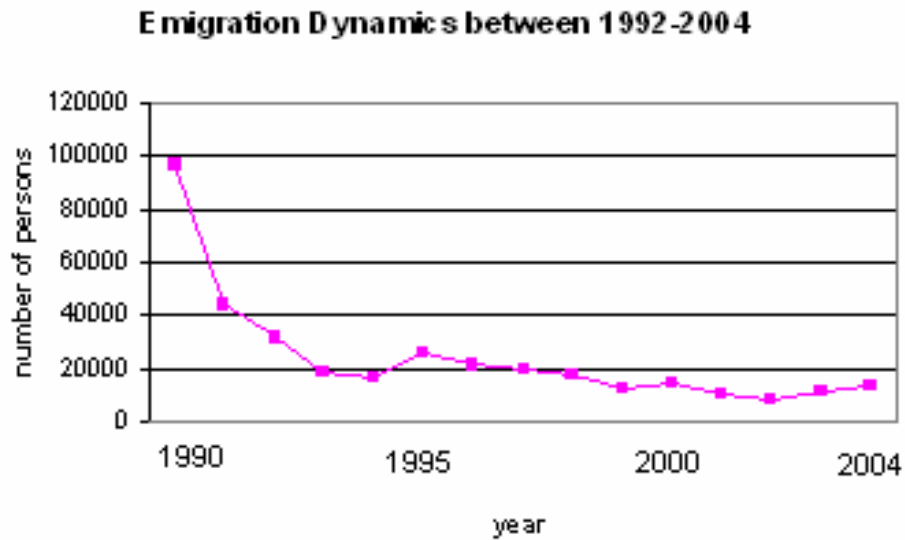


Fig. 1

As already mentioned before, the real dimension of the Romanian emigration flows is distorted by the illegal migration. Unofficial statistics vehiculate the existence of more than one million Romanians living in Italy (out of which only 300, 000 have official papers) and nearly one million in Spain. This migration mainly involves adult people, who go abroad either alone or accompanied by their partners, trying to find a solution to get rid of poverty and unemployment, of a future that seems uncertain in the local landscape.

The main fields they work in are civil engineering, agriculture and domestic housework, infirmary.

Romanian immigrants - danger or labour potential?

The attitude towards Romanian immigrants is sometimes easy to include in a pattern. "The most violent and dangerous people, ready to kill for some pocket money...These are the Romanian citizens who have been terrorizing our country for years" (Il Tempo).

Sad but true...and difficult to judge. How can one be proud of his nation when he goes to such a country where they deal with all sorts of illegal things and where local people get scared when finding out where he comes from?

And yet...this is only a minority we are talking about....many more really work hard to earn their living. There are employers who seek Romanians on purpose, knowing they are serious, hardworking employees. And the worst part takes place in countries where Romanians are not allowed to work legally, Ireland and UK among them. In order to get a job, Romanians find themselves forced to buy false papers, work permits and identity cards. Thus, they pass as Polish, Latvian, Italian, Portuguese, anything but Romanian. The disadvantage is that, if their bosses are satisfied with their job, they ignore their real nationality, something which could counterbalance the bad image that others have spread all around Europe.

As to the **causes** that push Romanians to emigrate, they are not very many, but clearly defined and strong enough to make them pass over all sorts of barriers. After all, it is not at anyone's hand to leave his / her family and make a new start somewhere else, many times not even knowing the language. Another point that is to be

discussed is the difference between “low skilled jobs” and “low skilled workers”. Romanian newspapers frequently draw our attention as regards the thousands of teachers and engineers that leave their qualified jobs in order to become simple workers in various fields, such as civil engineering, food industry, domestic activities or agriculture. Migration brings about a depreciation of the labour force qualifications.

Poverty and unemployment are the main reasons that chase Romanians away. Unemployment is an unquestionable reality Romania has been facing since 1990. At the same time, it represents a new element, triggered by the transition to a market economy, a completely unknown issue for a former communist country, with a planned, super-centralized economy. The inheritance of this system has left its mark on the labour force of this country, which had to find various openings to earn its own living.

Unemployment represents a negative phenomenon, having negative consequences upon the economic, social, population mobility level. The evolution of this indicator can be seen in **figure 2**. Analyzing this graph, one can notice that its evolution partly overlaps the political changes Romania has undergone during this period. It indicates a strong increase of unemployment up to 11% until 1994. During the next period, the indicator's value decreases to 7.8%, as a consequence of the attempt of creating new jobs under the impulse of the nearing elections, as a consequence of the measures taken at the last moment by the government at that time, which in fact lost the elections. This trend cannot be kept for a long time and between 1999-2000 we deal with the maximum values of this indicator

throughout the whole analyzed period (11.4%, 11.2% respectively). After this year, with one exception (in 2002), unemployment rate has experienced a diminishing tendency, up to 5.9% in 2005. This situation can be explained by the economy's enhanced ability of consolidating the present jobs and of generating some new ones, offering staffing opportunities for the people in search of a job, as a consequence of the economic growth of the past 2 years. On the whole, one can notice that unemployment rates in Romania are smaller as compared to the situation in the neighbouring countries, having rather high unemployment rates, nearing or even exceeding 20%. This context is largely due to the counter-reforming attitude of the governments, especially of the left wing, who tried to reform a too centralized economy by refusing to privatize a series of heavy industrial plants, although these ones had a low productivity; even on these conditions, they continued to subsidize their production, even keeping the monopolies in certain cases.

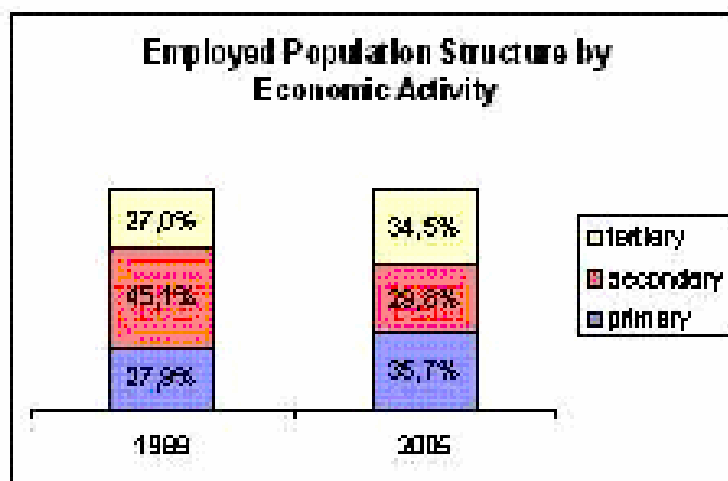


Fig. 2

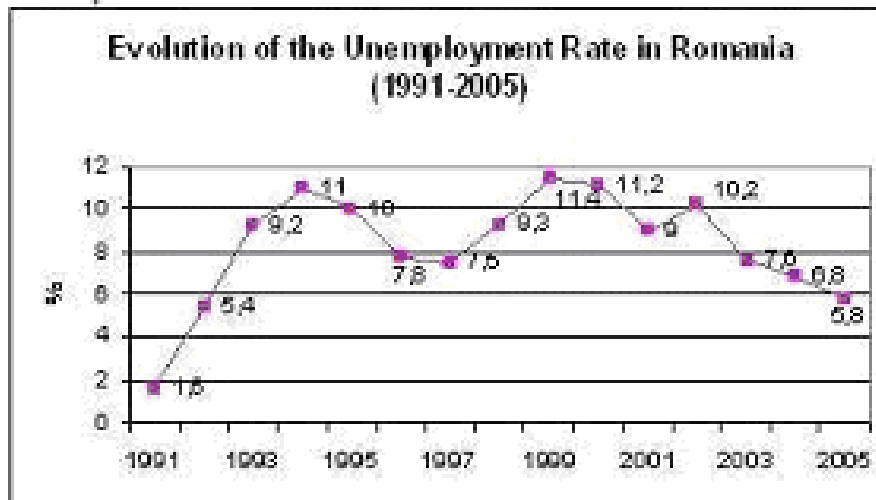


Fig.

3

Compared to the EU unemployment rate, the Romanian value is a little bit smaller. But the cause must be searched in the spectacular evolution experienced by the population structure by the three main economic activities: primary (agriculture, forestry), secondary (industry, civil engineering) and tertiary. This structure emphasizes the extremely strong impact that the changing of the political and economic system had upon the country economy, by passing from a centralized to a market one (**figure 3**).

Thus, in 1989, as a consequence of the political support offered to the industrial field, by setting up “industrial giants” that provided jobs for even 10 or 20 thousand people, the industrial field represented about 45%, much more than it was the case in the industrialized countries in West Europe. The percentages of the other two fields also differed from those in the West European world. Although the communist government did its best in trying to industrialize as much as possible an obviously rural territory, the

percentage of the population employed in primary activities was rather large, of about 28%, much more than in the EU states, where that value was below 10 or even 5%. The tertiary industries (27%) was much underdeveloped, also illustrating the population's low purchasing power.

The privatizations of the great industrial plants, the massive economic restructurings have left hundreds of thousands of people without a job, once they were dismissed from their urban, mainly industrial working places. Thus there took place a reversal of the rural exodus in the communist period, when the urban mirage and the attraction offered by its modern conveniences uprooted a huge mass of labour force from the rural areas, finally forcing the authorities to close the boundaries of the large towns and to set up some new small ones, which unfortunately didn't manage to develop their own polarizing force. Consequently, in order to be able to survive, many of them have returned to the villages they once came from, causing the primary sector to increase at about 36%. But the type of agriculture they practise is very little productive on medium and long periods and this is the reason why many of them choose to go and work abroad. If we also take into consideration the insufficient development of the tertiary industries (whose percentage, although it has increased with almost 8% is much smaller than the average of 60-70% characteristic to the developed countries), one can notice an employed population economic structure that takes Romania away from the EU states.

As to the **impact** of population migration abroad, there are both positive and negative consequences.

Among the **positive effects** we can mention *the important financial inputs* - emigrants send to the members of their families in the country important amounts of money, much of it being invested in the estate field, and contributing to the general increase of the living standard of the ones who have remained at home. Statistics say that one household out of ten receives money from abroad, as a result of the international migration.

Working abroad people *change their mentality for the better*, concentrating more on work, taking risks, acquiring new professional abilities and skills. At the same time they seem to be more optimistic about the future of Romania, because they come back with superior aspirations.

Nevertheless, if we think that in one third of the households there is at least one person who worked or works abroad (after 1989) and at least 10 % of the adult population have worked abroad during the last 17 years, one can easily understand that this situation triggers significant family and community dysfunctions: the number of divorces had increased, many children are left alone, assuming all the risks associated to loneliness. So the **negative consequences** cannot be left aside.

The population structure by age groups has been also changed, with serious consequences upon the future potential of labour force. The process of population ageing is something real and palpable, especially in certain rural areas which have almost been

deserted. The percentage of the aged people is already larger than that of the young population (19.3 compared to 16.1%). The future is far from being bright, as long as the natality and fertility rates also suffer the consequences of migration, since the categories that largely participate to this mobility are the young and adult persons.

Paradoxically, emigration flows leave behind a *deficit of labour force*, more and more covered by immigrants coming from even poorer countries (such as The Republic of Moldavia, Ukraine etc).

The most dramatic episode is reserved to the thousands of *children left home alone*, or in the care of their grandchildren, relatives or simple acquaintances, who seem to be surpassed by the new cultural, social and economic problems. Such children develop all sorts of emotional disorders, they become abnormally shy and frightened. Children aged more than 10 can have behavioural disorders – aggressive verbal and physical behaviour, lies, addiction to alcohol and smoking, weak results at school. The number of the children affected by this situation is evaluated at 39, 896 at national level.

Many families end up by splitting apart as a result of migration and, as a consequence, *divortiality rate* has constantly increased. Generally, the man is the one who leaves, while the woman remains in the country. She assumes her loneliness, isolating herself from her friends and refuses any other relationships. She must play both the part of the mother and of the father and at the same time she must go to work. Sometimes she breaks down and very often there is just one step until they decide to break up with each other.

As a conclusion, the Romanian emigration flows are far from coming to an end especially now, when we are part of the European Union and subject to face the lack of qualified people, attracted by the larger wages they can get abroad.