



## ORIGINAL PAPER

# The Main Elements of Romania's Demographic Decline

Georgiana Virginia Bonea<sup>1)</sup>, Mihai Horia<sup>2)</sup>

### Abstract:

Romania confronts a profound demographic crisis that threatens the fundamental socio-economic structures of the country, manifesting through a sustained decline in natural population growth over the past three and a half decades. This study examines the principal components of Romania's demographic decline through quantitative secondary data analysis, utilizing national statistics from INS, Eurostat, and United Nations databases to assess population dynamics from 1990 to 2025. The research reveals a dramatic demographic transformation following the post-communist transition, characterized by the population decreasing from approximately 23 million inhabitants in 1990 to 19,053,815 inhabitants recorded at the 2021 census, the most recent national enumeration. The analysis demonstrates that Romania entered a period of negative natural increase beginning in 1992, which has persisted uninterruptedly, with the fertility rate remaining consistently below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman. Contributing factors include massive emigration of the reproductive-age population, profound socio-economic transformations, changing reproductive behaviors, economic instability, and the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated mortality rates in 2020. The study identifies an accelerated demographic aging process, with the elderly population exceeding the young population and the dependency ratio increasing from 15.6% in 1990 to 31.2% in 2024. Population projections indicate a continued decline, with Romania potentially reaching 16 million inhabitants by 2050, representing a 12.7% decrease over the 2030-2050 period, necessitating comprehensive policy interventions to address this demographic challenge.

**Keywords:** *Romania, natural increase, birth rate, mortality, aging population.*

---

<sup>1)</sup> PhD. Univ. Lecturer and Scientific Researcher III, Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy, 050711 Bucharest, Romania, Phone: 0767-401-204, Email: georgiana.bonea@gmail.com

<sup>2)</sup> PhD. Scientific Researcher, Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy, 050711 Bucharest, Romania, Email: mihaihoria96@gmail.com

## **Introduction**

Over the past three and a half decades, Romania has faced a continuous decline in natural population growth, generating a profound demographic crisis that threatens the country's fundamental socio-economic structures. This demographic transformation represents one of the most significant challenges facing contemporary Romanian society, with implications extending far beyond statistical observations to encompass fundamental questions about national viability, economic sustainability, and social cohesion.

The magnitude of this crisis is reflected in the dramatic reduction of Romania's population from approximately 23 million inhabitants in 1990 to 19,053,815 inhabitants recorded at the 2021 census, the country's most recent national enumeration, representing a loss that has fundamentally altered the country's demographic landscape and raised urgent concerns about its long-term development trajectory. By integrating multiple statistical sources, this study offers a systematic analysis of quantitative secondary data to examine the primary drivers of Romania's demographic decline. Drawing upon national statistics provided by the Romania's National Institute of Statistics (INS), supplemented by Eurostat databases and United Nations demographic projections, this research traces the evolution of Romania's population dynamics across the period from 1990 to 2025. The analytical framework encompasses multiple demographic indicators, including birth rates, mortality patterns, fertility trends, natural increase, population aging processes, life expectancy, dependency ratios, and emigration flows, enabling a multidimensional understanding of the demographic transition that has characterized post-communist Romania.

The demographic collapse that commenced following the events of 1989 marks a decisive rupture with previous population trends. Romania transitioned abruptly from a regime characterized by pronatalist policies and population growth to one defined by persistent natural decrease and accelerating demographic decline. Beginning in 1992, Romania entered a period of negative natural increase that has continued uninterrupted through the present day, representing an unprecedented duration of demographic contraction that distinguishes the country's experience within the broader European context.

This sustained negative trajectory reflects the convergence of multiple interrelated factors, including massive emigration flows particularly concentrated among the reproductive-age population, profound socio-economic transformations associated with the post-communist transition, fundamental shifts in reproductive behaviors and family formation patterns, protracted periods of economic instability, and the exacerbating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which delivered a devastating blow to mortality rates in 2020 and subsequent years.

The analytical approach employed in this study relies primarily on secondary data research, utilizing time-series statistical information to document long-term demographic trends and identify critical inflection points in Romania's population evolution. While this methodological framework provides robust empirical foundations for understanding demographic patterns, it is important to acknowledge certain inherent limitations, particularly regarding the unavailability of the most recent statistical information for certain indicators, which can affect the precision of assessments concerning the latest demographic rhythms.

Beyond documenting the quantitative dimensions of population decline, this research illuminates the accelerated process of demographic aging that has fundamentally

## **The Main Elements of Romania's Demographic Decline**

restructured Romania's population composition. The analysis reveals that the elderly population now significantly exceeds the young population, with the dependency ratio increasing dramatically from 15.6% in 1990 to 31.2% in 2024, creating mounting pressures on pension systems, healthcare provision, and social welfare structures. This demographic aging process, combined with sustained low fertility rates that have remained consistently below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman, establishes conditions for continued population decline that demographic projections suggest will persist well into mid-century.

The structure of this article proceeds through examination of the key dimensions of Romania's demographic crisis. Beginning with an analysis of population trends and natural increase patterns, the study moves to the investigation of birth rates, fertility dynamics, and mortality evolution. Subsequent sections address the processes of population aging, dependency ratio increases, life expectancy trends, and emigration patterns, each supported by empirical evidence drawn from statistical sources.

### **Current trends in Romania's demographic structure:**

#### **The demographic decline in the last 35 years**

Despite the importance of secondary data in socio-demographic research, this analysis faces major hurdles due to a lack of up-to-date statistics on Romanian population trends, making it difficult to spot ongoing patterns. Furthermore, the study is constrained by broader gaps in data continuity, timeframes, and indicator compatibility, issues that were particularly pronounced during times of political shifts and administrative restructuring. Given these constraints, this analysis draws primarily on two authoritative sources: Eurostat and INS. From Eurostat, we utilize data on life expectancy by age and sex (2024), fertility indicators including the total fertility rate (2025a), population structure with an emphasis on the old-age dependency ratio (2025b), and emigration statistics (2025c). These sources provide harmonized European-level data that ensure cross-national comparability. To complement these datasets and capture country-specific trends, we incorporate several INS publications: methodological clarifications (2015), analyses of migration phenomena (2023a), the Demographic Events Yearbook (2023b), the Romanian Statistical Yearbook (2024), the final results of the 2021 Population and Housing Census (2023c), and the most recent population estimates by domicile as of January 2025 (2025). A methodological caveat is in order: Eurostat indicators are calculated on the resident (*de facto*) population, while the INS press releases on the population by domicile (*de jure*) capture all Romanian citizens with legal domicile in Romania regardless of where they actually live. As of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025 these two figures differ by roughly 2.7 million persons (21.74 million by domicile against 19.04 million resident), reflecting the scale of post-1990 emigration; we flag the relevant figure type at each point in the analysis where the distinction matters.

Over the last three and a half decades, Romania's post-1989 socio-economic transition triggered significant demographic shifts, characterized by a sharp decline in natural growth; specifically, the positive natural growth of the 1980s, driven by a total fertility rate above 2.1 children per woman, quickly reversed after 1990, dropping to 1.6 (Tudorel & Ghețău, 2021). Also, the massive emigration of Romanians outside the country's borders after 1990 accentuated the demographic decline (Kiss, 2015) (Chart 12 & Chart 13). Following the December 1989 fall of communism, Romania's turbulent socio-political and economic transition triggered large-scale emigration as millions sought individual freedom, stability, and better living standards. This exodus yielded dual

consequences, improving the lives of emigrants and their families through remittances, while simultaneously fueling a demographic crisis characterized by brain drain and internal socio-economic imbalances (Sandu, 2005a; Ionescu, 2008; Cristian, Bărăgan & Mustea, 2017). Driven by a declining young population (Chart 9), fewer live births (Chart 3), and a falling fertility rate (Chart 4), the increasing share of the elderly population consequently elevates the overall mortality rate (Chart 5 & Chart 6). Therefore, Romania is facing a deep demographic crisis, with its population decreasing from approximately 23 million inhabitants in 1990 to 19,053,815 at the 2021 Population and Housing Census—the country's most recent national enumeration (INS, 2023c) (Chart 1 & Chart 2). The country is also experiencing accelerated demographic aging, which has profoundly altered its population structure (Chart 9), driven in part by a continuous increase in life expectancy (Chart 11).

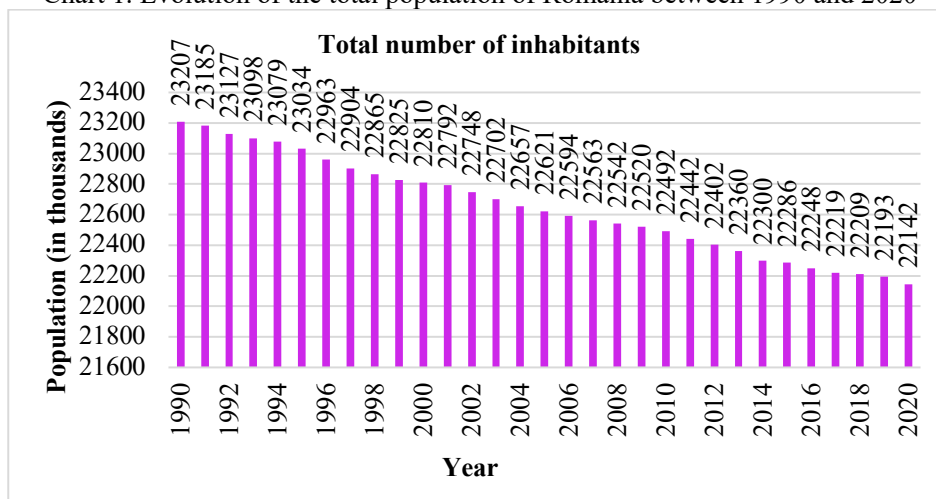
This negative evolution poses a critical long-term challenge for Romania's socio-economic development, heavily impacting pensions, the labor market, healthcare, and education. The primary drivers of this decline include the post-communist socio-economic transformations of the 1990s, incoherent pronatalist policies, and economic instability after 1989 (Ghețău, 2004; Mihalache, 2008). These factors shifted reproductive behaviors toward delayed childbearing, as both women and men prioritized career and education investments over family formation. This dynamic was further exacerbated by heavy emigration among the young, reproductive-aged population and, more recently, the devastating impact of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic (Chart 5 & Chart 6).

During the analysis, we observe that the year 2020 brought considerable changes to the population's reproductive decisions, while simultaneously registering increased mortality rates and a decrease in life expectancy (Tudorel & Ghețău 2021).

Whereas in 1990 the total population of Romania was 23,207,000 inhabitants, by 2020, it had decreased to 22,142,000 inhabitants. More precisely, the total decrease during the analyzed period is approximately 1,065,000 people. Therefore, the population of Romania has been decreasing consistently. Starting in 1993, a clear trend of demographic decline has been observed that continues uninterruptedly until 2020. This represents a decrease of over 1 million people (approximately 5%) within 30 years. The first significant decrease occurs during the difficult economic transition period of the 1990s, together with massive emigration, especially of the labor force. A second period of more pronounced decrease is observed after 2007, coinciding with Romania's accession to the European Union, which facilitated emigration even further. At the same time, the downward trend continues and is maintained in the period between 2010 and 2020 (Chart 1).

## The Main Elements of Romania's Demographic Decline

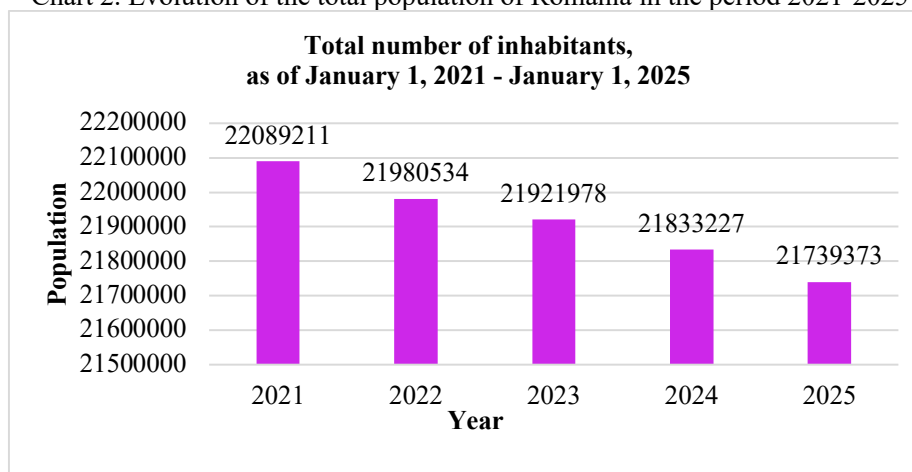
Chart 1. Evolution of the total population of Romania between 1990 and 2020



Source: Tudorel & Ghețău, 2021.

The last five years (2021-2025) are very important for observing the decreasing trend of Romania's population, especially after the negative impact left by the COVID-19 pandemic. In these last five years, Romania's population decreased by 349,838 people, which represents a reduction of approximately 1.58% of the population. The rate of decrease appears to be relatively constant, averaging approximately 70,000 people annually (Chart 2).

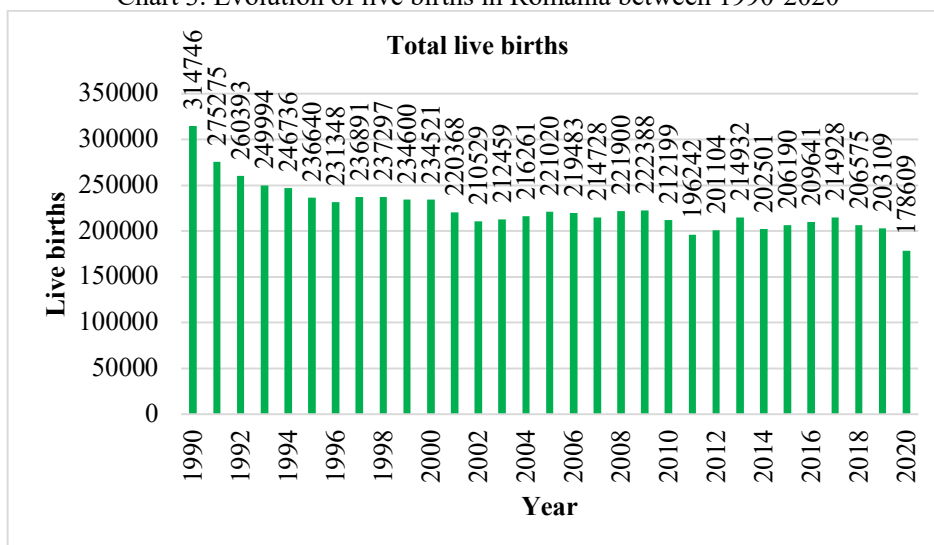
Chart 2. Evolution of the total population of Romania in the period 2021-2025



Source: INS, 2024, *Anuar statistic* and INS, 2025, *Comunicat de presă*.

Romania's birth rate has declined sharply across the analysed period. In 1990, Romania recorded a total of 314,746 live births; by 2020 the number had dropped to 178,609, a reduction of almost 43% in 30 years. The decline has been slow but continuous: 2011 marked an interim low (196,242 live births), followed by a slight recovery and then a renewed steep fall in 2020 (Chart 3).

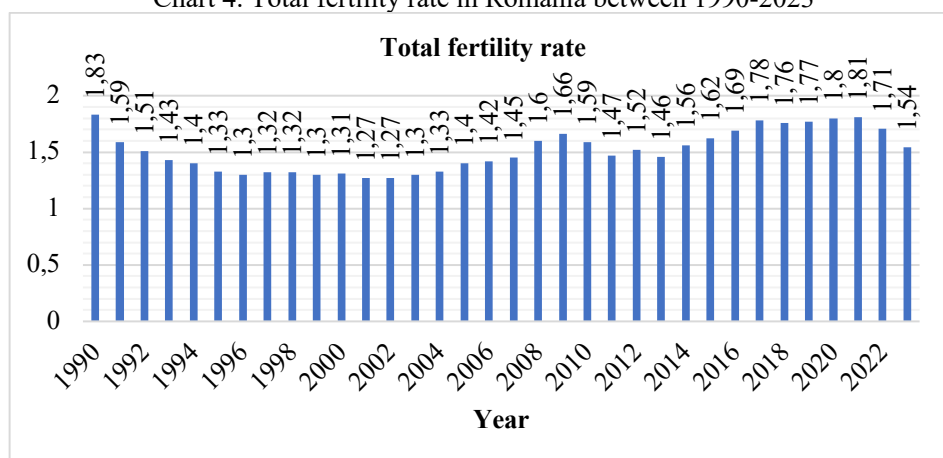
Chart 3. Evolution of live births in Romania between 1990-2020



Source: Tudorel & Ghețu, 2021.

A total fertility rate of approximately 2.1 children per woman is conventionally taken as the replacement threshold for Romania's generations (Eurostat, 2025a). Romania has remained below this threshold without exception since 1991. The period 1990–2003 was marked by a steep decline: from 1.83 children per woman in 1990 down to a minimum of 1.27 in 2001-2002. Between 2004 and 2023 the rate recovered slightly, reaching a relative peak of 1.66 in 2009, but stayed below replacement throughout, ending at 1.54 in 2023. A total fertility rate persistently below the replacement level inevitably feeds population aging and a rising old-age dependency ratio (Chart 4).

Chart 4. Total fertility rate in Romania between 1990-2023

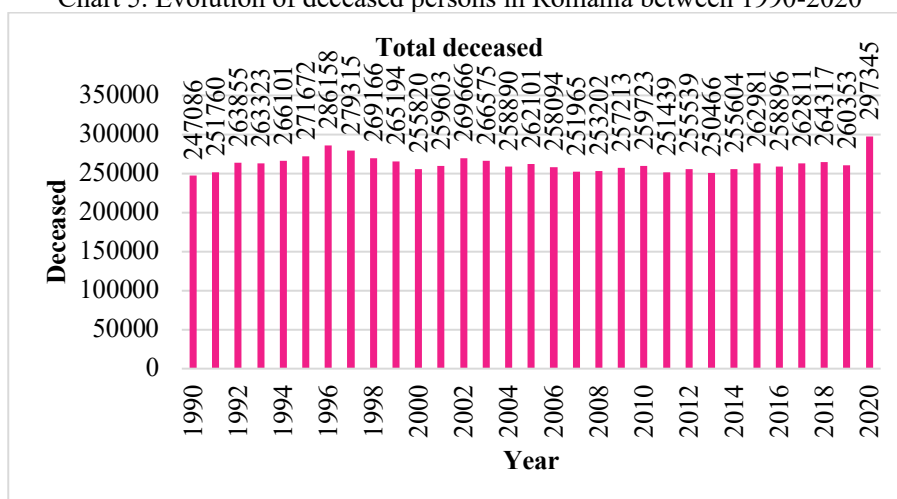


Source: Eurostat, 2025a.

## The Main Elements of Romania's Demographic Decline

The total number of annual deaths in Romania has remained relatively constant across the analysed period, with notable fluctuations only at the endpoints. Between 1990 and 1996 deaths rose from 247,086 to 286,158, a period that coincides with the early post-communist transition and its negative effects on living standards, access to medical services, and socio-economic stress (Neagu, 2000). Annual deaths then settled into a narrow band, 279,315 in 1997, 250,466 in 2013, 255,604 in 2014, 260,353 in 2019, reflecting relative stability against a background of population aging. In 2020, deaths jumped to 297,345, the highest figure in the entire analysed period. The principal driver was the COVID-19 pandemic: hospitals were partially or fully reorganised to treat COVID-19 patients, scheduled consultations and interventions for patients with chronic illnesses were postponed or cancelled, and a medical system already underfunded and short of human and material resources came under enormous additional pressure. Social isolation and quarantine compounded matters by aggravating sedentary behaviour and pre-existing mental health problems (INS, 2023b; Chart 5).

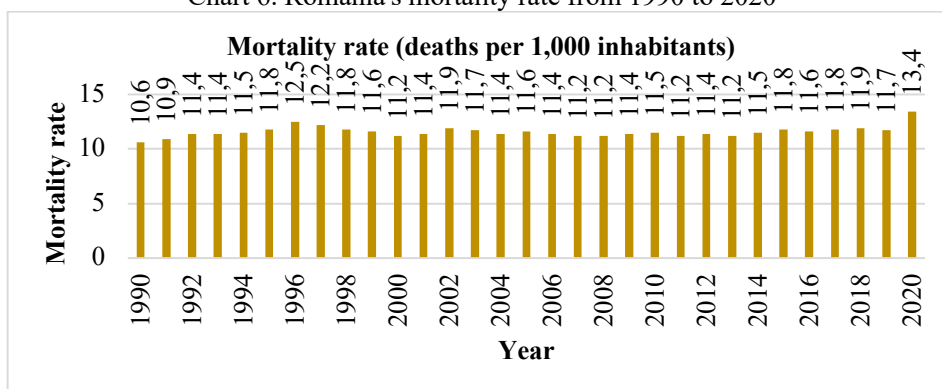
Chart 5. Evolution of deceased persons in Romania between 1990-2020



Source: Tudorel & Ghețău, 2021.

Romania's mortality rate has consistently exceeded its birth rate, producing a negative natural increase and contributing to the overall population decline (INS, 2023b). The general trend over three decades is one of slight increase with minor year-on-year fluctuations. The rate stood at 10.6 deaths per 1,000 inhabitants in 1990, the lowest value in the analysed period, rose to a local peak of 12.5 in 1996, and reached 13.4 in 2020 under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the highest level recorded between 1990 and 2020 (Chart 6).

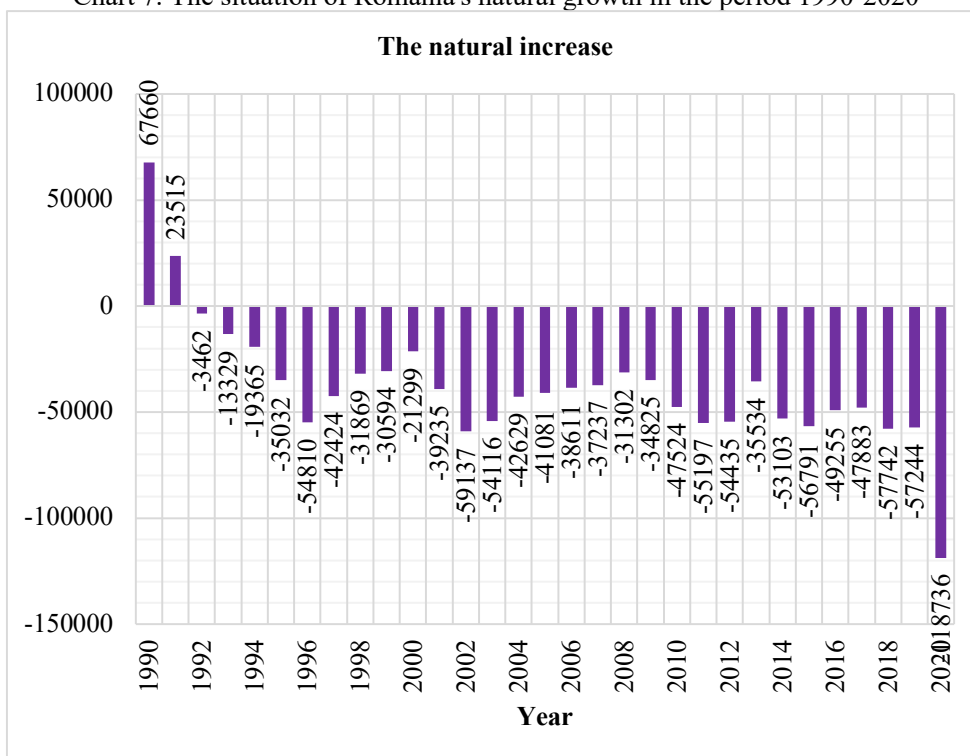
Chart 6. Romania's mortality rate from 1990 to 2020



Source: Tudorel & Ghețău, 2021.

The pattern of natural increase in Romania reverses sharply in the early 1990s. In the first two years after the fall of the communist regime, 1990 and 1991, Romania still recorded a positive natural increase (67,660 in 1990, 23,515 in 1991). From 1992 onwards the country entered a period of negative natural increase that has continued without exception ever since. The deficit deepened rapidly, reaching -54,810 in 1995, -21,299 in 2000, -47,524 in 2010, and culminated in 2020, when negative natural increase reached -118,736 inhabitants, the worst figure in the analysed period (Ghețău, 2018; Chart 7).

Chart 7. The situation of Romania's natural growth in the period 1990-2020

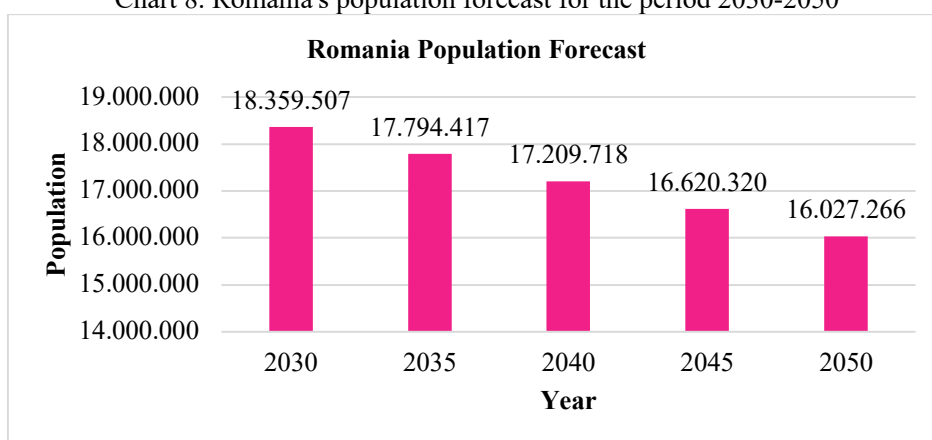


Source: Tudorel & Ghețău, 2021.

## The Main Elements of Romania's Demographic Decline

The population forecast for Romania is quite grim. In 2030, the country's population could reach 18,359,507 inhabitants, and five years later, it could decline to around 17,794,417 inhabitants. In 2040, the population would reach 17,209,718 inhabitants, while in 2050, only 16,027,266 inhabitants would remain. This forecast indicates a total decrease of around 2.33 million inhabitants, representing 12.7% over the period 2030-2050. The rate of decrease seems to be relatively constant, with an average loss of around 116,000 inhabitants per year. Romania already has a low birth rate, while the mortality rate is high, and emigration remains high as well. The process of population aging will become increasingly pronounced in the coming years. The demographic challenges caused by the dramatic population decline are multiple and will have long-term socio-economic consequences (Chart 8).

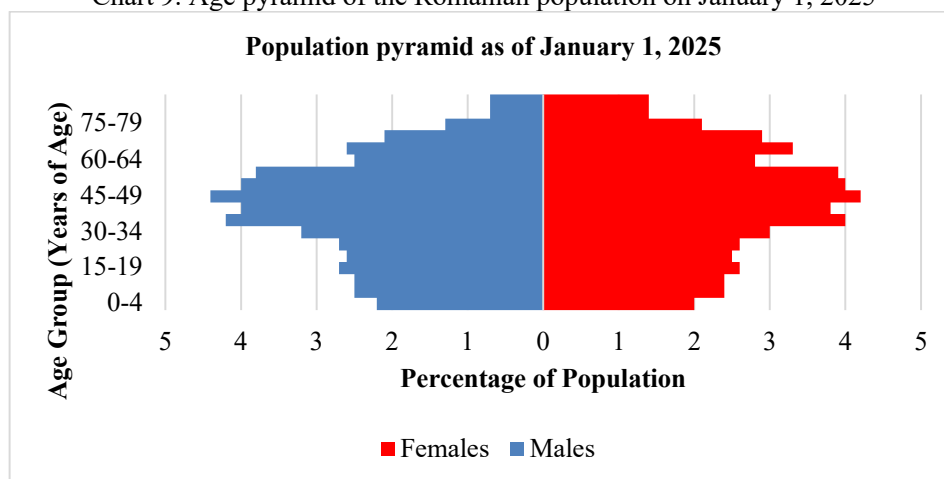
Chart 8. Romania's population forecast for the period 2030-2050



Source: United Nations, 2025.

The age pyramid of the Romanian population by domicile (de jure) as of January 1, 2025 highlights a pronounced demographic aging trend, characterized by a declining population and an unbalanced distribution by age groups. At that date Romania had a population by domicile of approximately 21.74 million inhabitants, against a resident (de facto) population of approximately 19.04 million, both down on the previous year. The largest share in the total was held by the 45–49 age group, representing 8.6%. The young population (0–14 years) declined to only 14.0% of the total, while the elderly population (65 years and over) rose to 18.6%, exceeding the young population by over 32%. The mean age was 42.9 years, up by 0.4 years on January 1, 2024. The median age reached 43.7 years, an increase of 0.5 years over the same period, indicating general aging. The demographic aging index increased to 132.4 elderly persons per 100 young persons, against 126.8 in the previous year. The challenges posed by population aging include labour shortages and mounting pressure on the public health and pension systems (Chart 9).

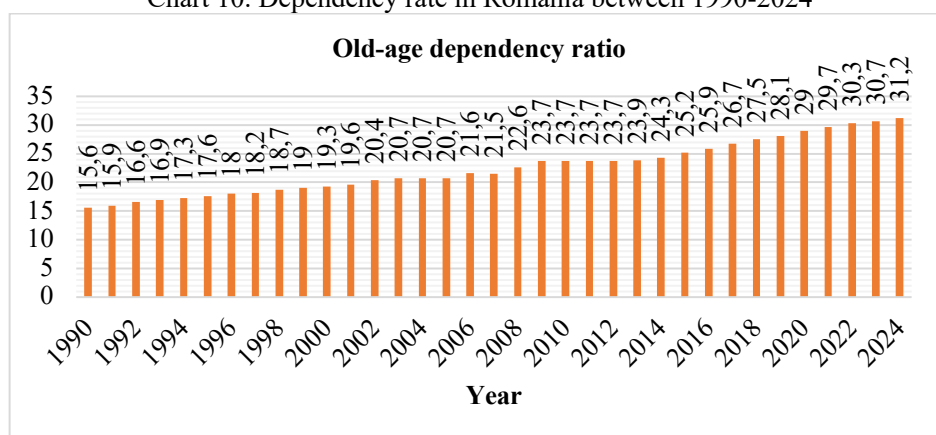
Chart 9. Age pyramid of the Romanian population on January 1, 2025



Source: Processed after: INS, Comunicat de presă, 2025.

The old-age dependency ratio — the ratio of the population aged 65 and over to the population aged 15 to 64 (INS, 2015; Eurostat, 2025b) — has risen steadily across the analysed period. Between 1990 and 2008 the increase was relatively slow and gradual, from 15.6% to 22.6%. After 2008 it accelerated sharply, reaching 31.2% in 2024. Across the entire period 1990–2024 the ratio recorded a constant rise without any significant period of decrease. A higher old-age dependency ratio means more pensioners per active taxpayer, forcing the Romanian state to readjust its welfare redistribution system; a smaller active population relative to dependants will also make tax collection structurally more difficult (Chart 10).

Chart 10. Dependency rate in Romania between 1990-2024



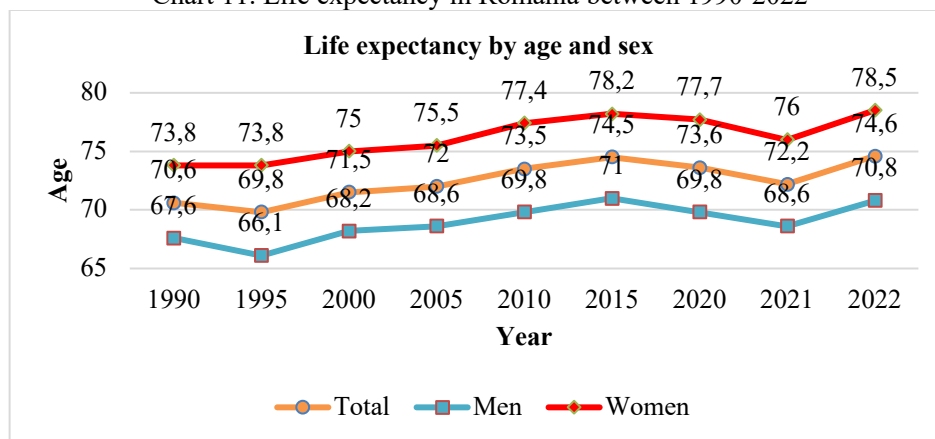
Source: Eurostat, 2025b.

The evolution of life expectancy in Romania between 1990 and 2022 shows a constant and significant gender gap of roughly 7–8 years in favour of women. In 1990, total life expectancy stood at 70.6 years (67.6 for men, 73.8 for women). Two periods of more pronounced decline for men stand out, 1995–2000 and 2015–2021; the male minimum of

## The Main Elements of Romania's Demographic Decline

66.1 years was reached in 1995. The maximum for women, 78.5 years, was reached in 2022. The 2021 decline is attributable to the mortality impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although Romania has made significant progress in increasing life expectancy between 1990 and 2019, it remains among the lowest in the European Union (Eurostat, 2024; Mărginean, 2016), and the gender gap points to specific issues of lifestyle and unequal access to health services (Chart 11).

Chart 11. Life expectancy in Romania between 1990-2022



Source: Eurostat, 2024.

After the fall of socialism, starting in 1990, Romania's borders opened and Romanians were able to leave their country, most of them in search of a better life (INS, 2023a).

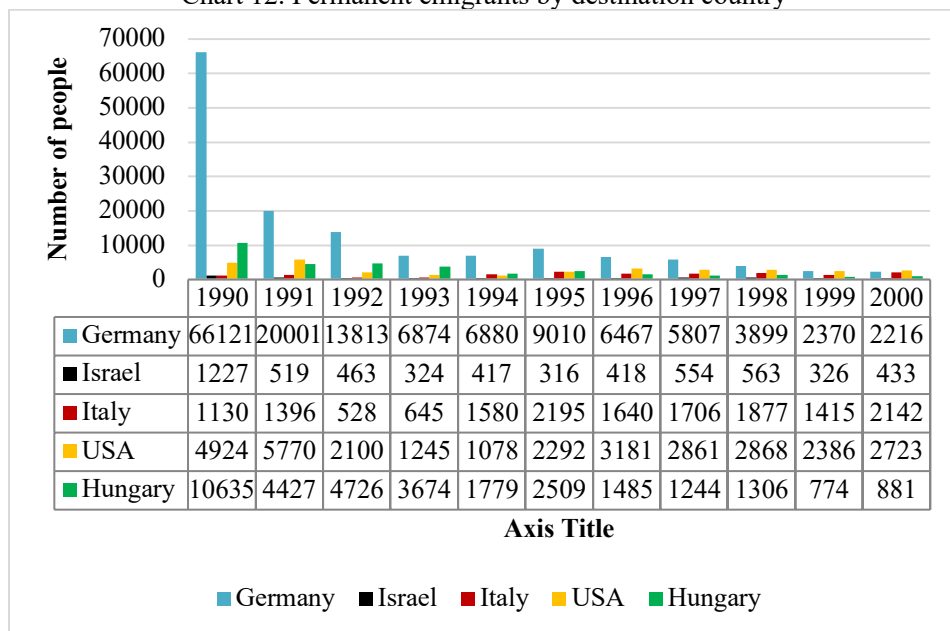
Chart 12 reveals a dramatic transformation in Romanian permanent emigration patterns between 1990 and 2000, characterized by the dominance and subsequent collapse of Germany as the primary destination alongside the gradual emergence of Italy as an increasingly significant migration corridor. Germany received an exceptional 66,121 permanent emigrants in 1990, representing the overwhelming majority of total emigration flows and reflecting a consistent initial exodus that declined to just 20,001 emigrants in 1991 and continued falling to 2,216 by 2000. Hungary similarly experienced a decline from 10,635 emigrants in 1990 to 881 by 2000, suggesting the exhaustion of ethnically motivated migration flows. In contrast, Italy had a different trajectory, rising from modest levels of 1,130 emigrants in 1990 to 2,142 by 2000, with notable growth particularly evident from 1994 onward when Italian emigration exceeded 1,580 annually and maintained relatively stable levels thereafter. The United States represented a third distinct pattern, receiving between 1,078 and 5,770 emigrants annually with no clear upward or downward trend, while Israel maintained small but consistent flows ranging from several hundred emigrants per year.

Between 1990 and 1993, Romania experienced a substantial compensatory migration wave constituted predominantly by citizens of German ethnic origin who had been prevented from emigrating before 1989, alongside movements toward Israel, Turkey, and Hungary, particularly among ethnic minorities (Sandu, 2005b). This initial phase recorded exceptionally high emigration volumes, with annual outflows ranging between 30,000 and 100,000 individuals, reflecting both the pent-up migration pressure accumulated during the communist period and the sudden liberalization of border controls following the regime change. The subsequent period from 1994 to 1996 witnessed a substantial

moderation in emigration intensity, with annual flows declining to approximately 20,000 emigrants per year, suggesting a normalization following the initial post-revolutionary exodus. This was followed by an even more pronounced reduction between 1997 and 1999, when emigration flows diminished to roughly 11,000 persons annually, representing the lowest levels of the decade (Dospinescu & Russo, 2018). However, this apparent stabilization proved temporary, as the late 1990s marked the beginning of a fundamental reorientation in Romanian migration patterns.

From 1996 onward, westward migration began to predominate, with Italy and Spain emerging as increasingly significant destination countries for Romanian emigrants. This shift reflected both the gradual liberalization of European migration policies and the development of migration networks that facilitated access to Western European labor markets (Sandu, 2005a). The transformation of migration destinations during this period laid the groundwork for the massive flows that would characterize the post-2000 era, particularly following Romania's eventual accession to the European Union in 2007 (Chart 12).

Chart 12. Permanent emigrants by destination country

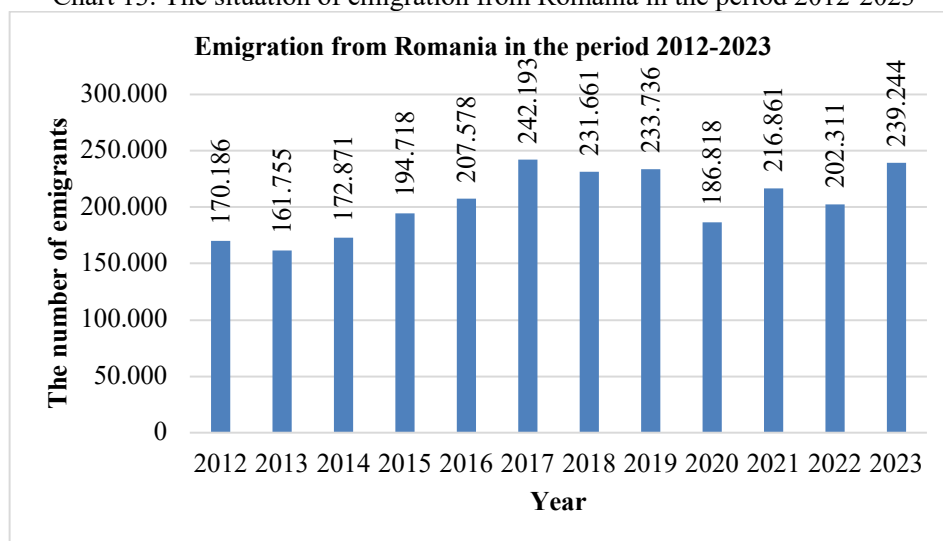


Source: INS Tempo, 2025, data series POP309D.

The number of emigrants increased significantly from 170,186 people in 2012 to 239,244 people in 2023, representing an increase of approximately 40%. A considerable decrease occurred in 2020, with 186,818 emigrants, probably influenced by travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. After 2020, the emigration flow gradually increased, reaching 239,244 in 2023 (Chart 13).

## The Main Elements of Romania's Demographic Decline

Chart 13. The situation of emigration from Romania in the period 2012-2023



Source: Eurostat, 2025c.

### Conclusions

The comprehensive analysis of Romania's demographic evolution over the past three and a half decades reveals a profound and sustained demographic crisis that fundamentally threatens the country's socio-economic foundations and long-term sustainability. The evidence presented demonstrates an unequivocal pattern of demographic decline that commenced following the post-communist transition and has persisted with concerning consistency through 2025.

This demographic transformation represents one of the most significant challenges facing contemporary Romanian society, with implications that extend far beyond mere statistical observations to encompass fundamental questions about national viability and social cohesion. The demographic trajectory initiated in 1990 has resulted in substantial population decline from approximately 23 million inhabitants to 19,053,815 by the 2021 census, the country's most recent national enumeration, representing a loss of over 4 million people within a single generation. This reduction reflects not merely temporary fluctuations but rather a structural transformation that has fundamentally altered Romania's demographic landscape. The acceleration of this decline in recent years, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, underscores the vulnerability of an already fragile demographic system to external shocks and suggests that without decisive intervention, the trajectory toward demographic decline will continue unabated.

The systematic analysis of birth rates reveals a precipitous decline in reproductive capacity that constitutes the primary driver of Romania's demographic crisis. The reduction from 314,746 live births in 1990 to 178,609 in 2020 represents a decrease of nearly 43% over three decades, indicating a fundamental shift in reproductive behavior and family formation patterns.

This decline transcends temporary economic adjustments to reflect deeper structural changes in Romanian society, including evolving lifestyle preferences, career prioritization, and changing perceptions of family obligations. The persistence of this downward trend, even during periods of relative economic stability, suggests that the

factors influencing reproductive decisions have become deeply embedded in contemporary Romanian culture. Complementing the birth rate decline, the fertility rate analysis demonstrates Romania's persistent inability to achieve demographic replacement levels, with the total fertility rate remaining consistently below the critical threshold of 2.1 children per woman since 1991. The nadir reached in 2002-2003, when fertility dropped to 1.27 children per woman, illustrates the severity of Romania's reproductive crisis. Despite modest improvements in subsequent years, the fertility rate has stabilized at levels insufficient for generational replacement, condemning Romania to continued demographic decline unless dramatic changes occur in reproductive behavior or immigration patterns compensate for natural increase deficits.

The mortality patterns observed throughout the analyzed period reveal concerning trends that exacerbate Romania's demographic challenges. While mortality rates remained relatively stable through most of the post-communist transition, the dramatic spike in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of Romania's demographic equilibrium.

Perhaps the most alarming finding concerns the uninterrupted negative natural increase that has characterized Romania since 1992, representing over three decades of demographic decline without a single year of natural population growth. This unprecedented duration of negative natural increase distinguishes Romania from other European countries experiencing demographic transitions and suggests that the country has entered a phase of serious demographic decline. The progression from modest negative values in the early 1990s to the significant -118,736 recorded in 2020 illustrates the accelerating nature of this crisis and the compounding effects of sustained demographic imbalances. The population forecasts extending through 2050 paint an increasingly concerning picture of Romania's demographic future, projecting a continued decline to approximately 16 million inhabitants by mid-century. This represents a total population loss of nearly 30% from 1990 levels, placing Romania among the most demographically challenged countries in the global context.

The demographic aging process revealed through age structure analysis represents a parallel crisis that compounds the challenges posed by overall population decline. The transformation from a relatively young population in 1990 to a society where elderly persons outnumber youth by a ratio of 127.5 to 100 illustrates the rapidity of Romania's demographic transition. The median age increases to 43.2 years and the average age of 42.5 years position Romania among the most aged societies in Europe, with profound implications for economic productivity, innovation capacity, and social dynamism. The escalating dependency ratio, which has doubled from 15.6% in 1990 to 31.2% in 2024, represents perhaps the most immediate threat to Romania's economic sustainability. This dramatic increase means that each working-age individual must support an increasingly larger dependent population, creating unsustainable pressures on pension systems, healthcare provision, and social services.

The emigration patterns documented since 2012 reveal the loss of human capital that further compounds Romania's demographic challenges. The emigration of over 200,000 individuals annually, primarily from younger, educated demographic cohorts, represents not only immediate population loss but also the depletion of reproductive potential and economic productivity. This brain drain effect creates a vicious cycle whereby demographic decline reduces economic opportunities, encouraging further emigration and accelerating the demographic crisis. The gender disparities in life expectancy, while reflecting improvements in healthcare and living standards, also

## The Main Elements of Romania's Demographic Decline

highlight the disproportionate impact of demographic aging on social systems. The 7-8 year gap between male and female life expectancy creates additional complexities for pension planning and healthcare provision while contributing to the feminization of aging in Romanian society.

Romania's demographic crisis represents a multifaceted challenge that demands comprehensive policy responses addressing reproductive incentives, healthcare system strengthening, economic development strategies that retain human capital, and immigration policies that can partially compensate for natural increase deficits. The window for effective intervention is rapidly closing, as the momentum of demographic decline becomes increasingly difficult to reverse once critical thresholds are crossed. The demographic decline documented in this analysis constitutes not merely a statistical phenomenon but an existential challenge that will define Romania's trajectory throughout the twenty-first century and beyond.

### Authors' Contributions:

The authors contributed equally to this work.

### References:

- Cristian, E. R., Bărgăan, L. G. & Mustea, Ș. R. (2017). *The Criteria Underlying the Romanians Emigration Intent*. Ovidius University Annals, Economic Sciences Series, 17(1), 150-154, accesible at: <https://stec.univ-ovidius.ro/html/anale/ENG/2017/Section-III/6.pdf>, last accessed on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 2025.
- Dospinescu, A. & Russo, G. (2018). *Romania Systematic Country Diagnostic - Background Note: Migration*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.
- Eurostat. (2024). *Life expectancy by age and sex*, accesible at: [https://doi.org/10.2908/DEMO\\_MLEXPEC](https://doi.org/10.2908/DEMO_MLEXPEC), last accessed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2025.
- Eurostat. (2025a). *Fertility indicators. Demographic indicator: Total fertility rate*, accesible at: [https://doi.org/10.2908/DEMO\\_FIND](https://doi.org/10.2908/DEMO_FIND), last accessed on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 2025.
- Eurostat. (2025b). *Population structure indicators at national level. Old-age dependency ratio 1st variant (population 65 years or over to population 15 to 64 years)*, accesible at: [https://doi.org/10.2908/DEMO\\_PJANIND](https://doi.org/10.2908/DEMO_PJANIND), last accessed on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July, 2025.
- Eurostat. (2025c). *Emigration*. Available online at: <https://doi.org/10.2908/TPS00177>
- Ghețău, V. (2004). Declinul demografic al României: ce perspectivă?. *Sociologie românească*, 2(2), 5-41, accesible at: <https://www.revistasociologieromaneasca.ro/sr/article/view/962/866>
- Ghețău, V. (2018). Declinul demografic și componentele sale. *Academica*, 9, pp. 38-47, accessed at: [https://academiaromana.ro/academica2002/rev2018/pag\\_acad2018\\_nr335\\_sept.pdf](https://academiaromana.ro/academica2002/rev2018/pag_acad2018_nr335_sept.pdf)
- INS. (2015). *Precizări metodologice*, accesible at: [https://insse.ro/cms/files/statistici/comunicate/com\\_anuale/populatie/precizari%20ometodologice%20ian2015r.pdf](https://insse.ro/cms/files/statistici/comunicate/com_anuale/populatie/precizari%20ometodologice%20ian2015r.pdf), last accessed on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 2025.

- INS. (2023a). *Fenomenul migrației*, accesibile at: <https://insse.ro/cms/files/newsletter/2023/fenomenul-migratiei.pdf>, last accessed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2025.
- INS. (2023b). *Evenimente demografice. Anuar statistic*, accesibile at: [https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/evenimente\\_demografice\\_in\\_anul\\_2023.pdf](https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/evenimente_demografice_in_anul_2023.pdf), last accessed on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2025.
- INS. (2023c). *Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor 2021. Rezultate definitive: caracteristici demografice ale populației*. București: Institutul Național de Statistică. Populație rezidentă: 19.053.815 persoane (la 1 decembrie 2021), accesibile at: <https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive/>, last accessed on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 2025.
- INS. (2024). *Anuarul statistic al României*, accesibile at: [https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/anuarul\\_statistic\\_al\\_romaniei\\_carte\\_ed\\_2024\\_ro.pdf](https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/anuarul_statistic_al_romaniei_carte_ed_2024_ro.pdf), last accessed on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2025.
- INS. (2025). *Populația după domiciliu la 1 ianuarie 2025*. Comunicat de presă, nr. 103 din 28 aprilie 2025, accesibile at: [https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/com\\_presa/com\\_pdf/popdomliian2025r.pdf](https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/com_presa/com_pdf/popdomliian2025r.pdf), last accessed on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 2025.
- Ionescu, I. I. (2008). Migrația romanilor în Uniunea Europeană [The migration of Romanians in European Community]. *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială*, 23, 23-36, accesibile at: [https://www.rcis.ro/images/documente/rcis23\\_02.pdf](https://www.rcis.ro/images/documente/rcis23_02.pdf)
- Kiss, I. H. T. (2015). Depopulating semi-periphery? Longer term dynamics of migration and socioeconomic development in Romania. *Demografia*, 58(5), 91-132, accesibile at: <http://ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/14906/1/231.pdf>
- Mărginean, I. (2016). Mișcarea naturală a populației. România în contextul statelor membre ale uniunii europene. *Calitatea vieții*, 27(2), 118-126, accesibile at: <https://www.revistacalitateavietii.ro/journal/article/view/363>
- Mihalache, F. F. (2008). O analiză transversală asupra declinului demografic al României în profil teritorial. *Sociologie Românească*, 6(03-04), 58-73, accesibile at: [https://revistasociologieromaneasca.ro/sr/article/view/2008\\_3\\_4\\_mihalache/157](https://revistasociologieromaneasca.ro/sr/article/view/2008_3_4_mihalache/157)
- Neagu, G. (2000). Reflectarea problemelor sociale în presa scrisă. *Calitatea Vieții*, 11(1-4), 183-199, accesibile at: <https://revistacalitateavietii.ro/journal/article/view/1058/890>
- Sandu, D. (2005a). Dynamics of Romanian emigration after 1989: From a macro-to a micro-level approach. *International Journal of Sociology*, 35(3), 36-56, accesibile at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207659.2005.11043153>.
- Sandu, D. (2005b). Emerging transnational migration from Romanian villages. *Current Sociology*, 53(4), pp. 555-582.
- Tudorel, A. & Ghețău, V. (2021). *Serii istorice de date: populația României: 1860-2020*. INS. București, accesibile at: <https://insse.ro/cms/files/publicatii/Populatia-Romaniei/populatia-romaniei-1860-2020-serii-istorice-de-date.pdf>, last accessed on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2025.
- United Nations. (2025). *Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Population Prospects: The 2024 Revision. (Medium-fertility variant)*, accesibile at: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/romania-population/>, last accessed on the 21<sup>th</sup> of March 2025.

---

### Article Info

*Received:* May 28 2026

*Accepted:* August 20 2026

---

### How to cite this article:

Bonea, G. V., Horia, M. (2026). The Main Elements of Romania's Demographic Decline. *Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques*, no. 91, pp. 79-95.