

## CHANGES IN THE SPATIAL PATTERN OF PERMANENT IMMIGRATION IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA - AN OVERVIEW

### SCHIMBĂRI ÎN CARACTERISTICILE SPAȚIALE ALE IMIGRĂRII DEFINITIVE ÎN ROMÂNIA POSTCOMUNISTĂ - O PREZENTARE GENERALĂ

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**Abstract:** Current migration processes require special assessment and attention due to their complexity and multiple socio-economic implications. The forms of international migration have only recently intensified in Romania due to the barriers imposed by the former communist regime, but their influence on population dynamics is certainly significant and the effects on national economy and demographic vitality of the country are undeniable. Although mainly recognized as an emigration country at the beginning of the post-communist period, Romania is recently going through a period of accentuated intensification of immigrant flows. Starting with the 1990s, the share of immigrant flows in the net international migration balance has changed in dynamics, motivations, structure, specialization, forms, spatial intensity and consequences etc. This research presents a territorialized analysis of immigration to Romania in the period comprised between 1990-2017, which presents a high mediatic and scientific interest, given the volume and importance of the phenomenon.

**Key-words:** *migratory flows, permanent immigration, pattern, spatial changes, Romania.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *fluxuri migratorii, imigrare definitivă, tipar, schimbări teritoriale, România.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In Romania, the post-1990 migration processes differ fundamentally from those of the communist period (as a result of closed borders) and cover different aspects in Romania as compared to other European states. The time gap between the collapse of the communist regime and integration into the European Union has produced certain changes in the mentality and motivation of both migrants and receiving countries' population, but also in the forms and intensity of migratory flows within the context of a changing role, status and image occupied by Romania in the European construct.

Managing the second longest border on the east side of the European Union (2070 km), Romania contributes to the European perspective regarding

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the EU's common migration policy, both by supporting the development of the Common European Asylum System and by implementing specific instruments in the field of migration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Romania). Although still having the European status of a primarily emigration country, however, the characteristics of the phenomenon during recent years made Romania become not only a country of origin, but also a destination country for international migration (Suditu et al, 2012; Fleşer, 2012).

As Eurostat estimates, at the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2017, there were more than 57 million foreign-born persons by country of birth in the extended territory of the EU28 (93.04% in EU15), of which 20 million (35.6%) were born in another EU member state, and 36,868,400 persons (64.4%) were born in a non-member country (Eurostat, 2017). As compared to other European countries such as Germany (12,105,400 persons), the United Kingdom (9,293,700 persons), France (8,155,700 persons), Italy (6,054,000) and Spain (6,024,700 persons), which concentrate 72.7% of the overall foreign-born population in Europe in 2017, immigration to Romania seems to be less common, namely 2.1% of the total population of our country is foreign-born in 2017 (i.e. 421,800 persons); of these, 0.9% were born in other EU member states (i.e. 180,100 persons) and 1.2% (241,700 persons) were born outside the EU (Eurostat, 2017).

In the research literature on migration, immigration is analyzed as trend and patterns of manifestation (Salt&Almeida, 2006; Kaczmarczyk&Okólski, 2005; Constantin et al., 2004), with reference to the consequences on local labor market and other socio-economic implications (Voicu et al., 2008; Neagu et al., 2010; Roman&Voicu, 2010), motivations and typology of immigrants (Fleşer, 2012).

In our national legislation, the migration issue is seen as “a process to be managed in an international context defined by change and not as a problem to be solved”, by clarifying: the strategic objectives assumed by Romania, the available financial resources, the legal implications of the phenomenon, monitoring and evaluation procedures, risk factors taken into account, making illegal immigration control measures more efficient, directions of action and responsible institutions that will take concrete measures for their implementation in practice (*National Strategy on Immigration*, 2011-2014, 2015- 2018).

The international migration is an important component of the general population dynamics and can significantly contribute to the increase or decrease of a state's population. Similar to other former communist states in Central and Eastern Europe (Salt, 2006), Romania is facing a slow but constant process of demographic aging and an overall demographic decline which can be attributed to both natural deficit, but also to the negative migratory balance (Table no. 1). Yet, during the last decade, although the decline of the natural deficit is progressive and quite predictable, there is a significant attenuation of the international migration balance due to a raising number of immigrants searching for better living conditions in a more and more globalizing and interconnected context, in terms of migration too. Thus, although the number of emigrants remains higher than

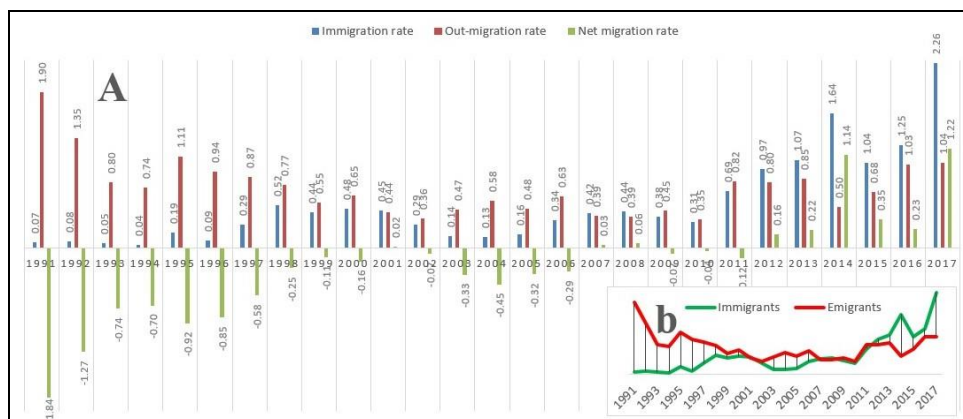
200,000 persons, the immigrants overcome 165,000 persons in 2017, causing a total annual loss of over 100,000 persons.

In terms of permanent migration, according to statistical data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, the year 2012 marks the net predominance of permanent immigrants and the beginning of a reversal regarding the net international migration trend (Fig. 1). Thus, from rates of 0.07‰ and insignificant as compared to out-migration rates in the early 1990s (1.9‰ in 1992), the net migration rate became positive for the first time in 2007 and reached 2.26 ‰ in 2017.

**Table no. 1. The share of natural decrease and net emigration in the demographical decline during the last decade in Romania**

Year	Natural demographic balance			Net migration			Total decline
	Births	Deaths	Natural deficit	Emigrants	Immigrants	Net international migration	
2008	100,382	138850	-38,468	302796	138,929	-163,867	-202,335
2009	100,524	141045	-40,521	246626	135,844	-110,782	-151,303
2010	94,348	142091	-47,743	197985	149,885	-48,100	-95,843
2011	89,575	136791	-47,216	195551	147,685	-47,866	-95,082
2012	84,513	137347	-52,834	170186	167,266	-2,920	-55,754
2013	86,320	133070	-46,750	161755	153,646	-8,109	-54,859
2014	89,647	136925	-47,278	172871	136,035	-36,836	-84,114
2015	90,368	140142	-49,774	194718	132,795	-61,923	-111,697
2016	90,260	136311	-46,051	207578	137,455	-70,123	-116,174
2017	85,304	138040	-52,736	219327	165,946	-53,381	-106,117

(Source: Romanian Statistical Yearbooks, 2008-2014)



**Fig. 1. Evolution of permanent migratory flows in Romania between 1992-2017**  
(A - net migration rate [promiles], b - volume of migration)  
(Data source: NIS, Tempo online)

## II. DATA AND METHODS

For the present study, official statistical data sources were used (databases and Tempo online data series of the National Institute of Statistics, Statistical

Yearbooks of Romania, but also European Commission documents regarding migration at European level). The flows of immigrants in Romania were identified and characterized throughout the post-communist period (1990-2017).

Changes in pace and intensity, directions and volume of migratory flows by sex, age groups, nationalities, country of origin, development regions and counties of arrival were analyzed.

This exploratory study, quantification and exploratory analysis of changes in the spatial characteristics of immigration in post-communist Romania can serve to contextualize national public policies on migration, in close correlation with other current demographic phenomena: the trend of depopulation of several areas and demographic aging, increasing rates of economic dependence, economic tertiarization, changes in the labour market and the urgent need for workforce in certain economic sectors, etc.

### **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

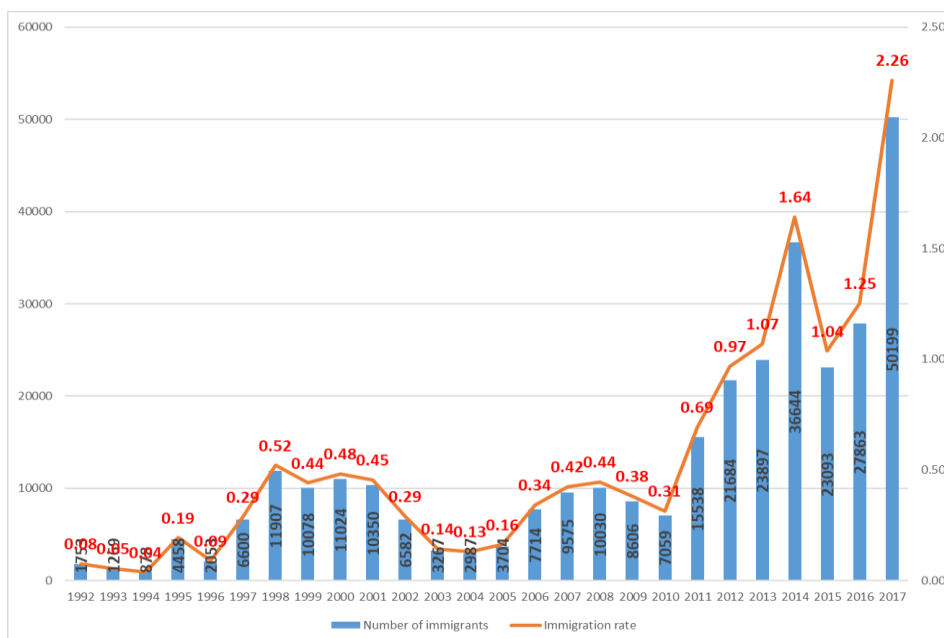
#### **3.1 Permanent immigration – dynamics and drivers**

Gradually, during the last two decades, Romania has been facing a transition, from an emigration country to a destination for immigrants; these immigrants fall into three main categories – citizens of other EU member states, citizens of non-EU member states and forced migrants (refugees and asylum-seekers). However, this phenomenon is still new in Romania, the non-nationals accounting for less than 1% of the population, the lowest share among EU-28 countries.

During the communist period, the number of foreigners moving to Romania was insignificant, immigration being a rather secretive affair (Hamberger, 2010), strictly controlled by the government. Most of them were students from African and Middle East countries, with whom Romania signed bilateral agreements (people were only allowed to enter for study purposes). Overall, we can identify three different phases, based on the intensity flows, origin and main motivations of the migrants:

- 1990-1996, when we can hardly identify immigrants;
- 1997 – 2010, with quite large fluctuations, marked by a steady increase during the first years, mainly due to people coming from the Republic of Moldova (accounting for 75%) (Neguț et al., 2010), followed by a slow decrease and again an increase after the accession to EU, but clearly marked by the economic crisis, that to a large extent was a push factor for migrants;
- 2011- onwards – a rapid increase in the number of both non-nationals coming for economic reasons and forced-migrants.

Immediately after 1990, the *flow of immigrants* was almost non-existent in Romania, the number of people who decided to settle legally in Romania ranging between 878 persons in 1994 and 1753 persons in 1992 (Fig. 2).

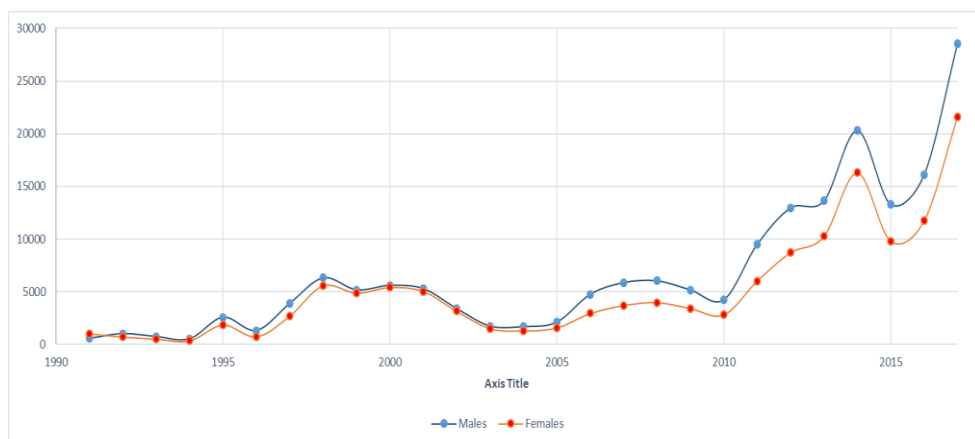


**Fig. 2. Number of immigrants and the immigration rate (per 1,000 inhabitants) in Romania between 1992-2017**

(Data source: NIS, Tempo online)

After 1995, the flow of immigration gradually intensified (1997-2002), the number of permanent immigrants exceeding 10,000 people and the immigration rate settling around 0.5‰. Still, for the first decade, immigration was generally modest and only the prospects of EU accession, economic revival and labour shortages (Chindea et al., 2008) were the main pull factors for non-nationals following 2000. Thus, the evolution is oscillating, from almost 3000 people in 2004 to 10,030 people in 2008. Since 2011, the number of total permanent immigrants is ascending, the numbers exceeding 50,000 people, while the immigration rate reaches 2.26 immigrants per 1000 inhabitants.

Regarding the *gender distribution* of immigrants during the analysed period, most immigrants are men (Fig. 3) The beginning of the post-communist period introduces a discordant note, as in 1991 only 581 people out of 1602 who immigrated to Romania were men (i.e. 36.3% of the total). Although generally higher, it can be observed that the share of men remains around 60% until 1997, then the immigration flow is balanced during the period 1998-2003 being comparable to the share of women (e.g. 50.9% men and 49.1% women in 2000), subsequently the share of men increased and returned over 60% in the years following 2004 (over 61% in 2006, 2007, 2011).



**Fig. 3. Gender distribution of permanent immigrants in Romania between 1991-2017**

(Data source: NIS, Tempo online)

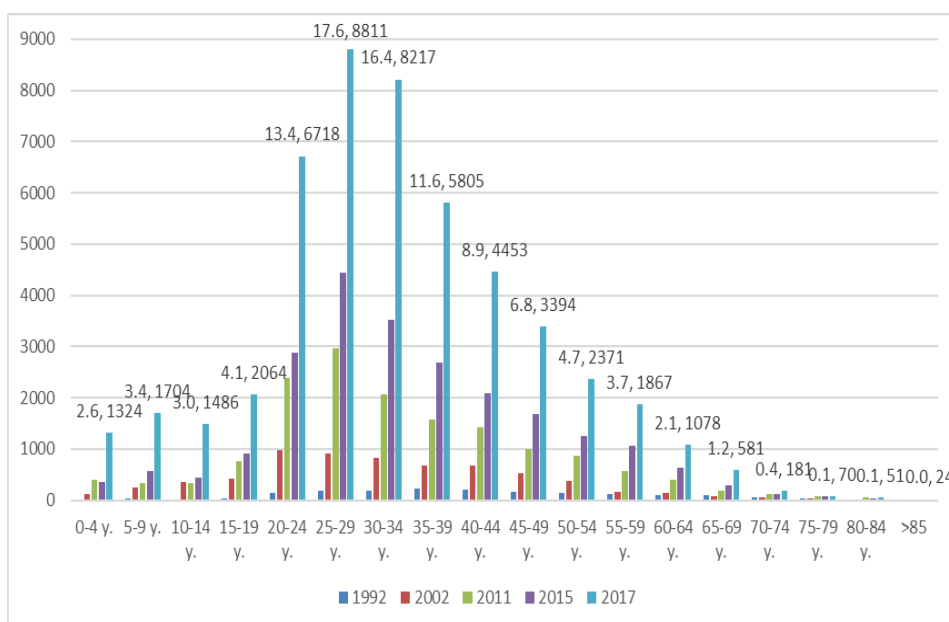
In what concerns the *distribution of immigrants by age groups*, it can be seen that people aged between 20 and 44 are the most numerous (Fig. 4), representing over 67% of all immigrants beginning with 2011 while the share of the elderly population over 65 years is much lower (from 2.8% in the period comprised between 2002-2011 to only 1.8% in 2017). Diachronically, it can be observed that the share of people aged between 45-64 and over 65 is much more significant at the beginning of the analyzed period (28.5% and respectively, 12% in 1992 as compared to 17.4% and 1.8% in 2017), while the share of the 0-19 age group is increasing (from only 5.5% in 1992, to 17.4% in 2002 and 13.1% of all immigrants in 2017).

This statistical situation definitely reflects the predominance of the working age population among immigrants in Romania, possibly young families with children (hence the share of minors in total number of immigrants) and in recent years, a significant increase in young immigrants aged 18-25 years, which distinguishes the category of young students in university training in Romania (from only 152 people and 8% of all immigrants in 1992 to 6718 persons and 13.4% in 2017).

The analysis immigrant flows dynamics by *country of origin* confirms certain geopolitical and socio-cultural affinities, as well as the significant contribution of certain key moments in Romania's post-communist history, such as the opening of borders in the 1990s, but also integration into the European Union in 2007.

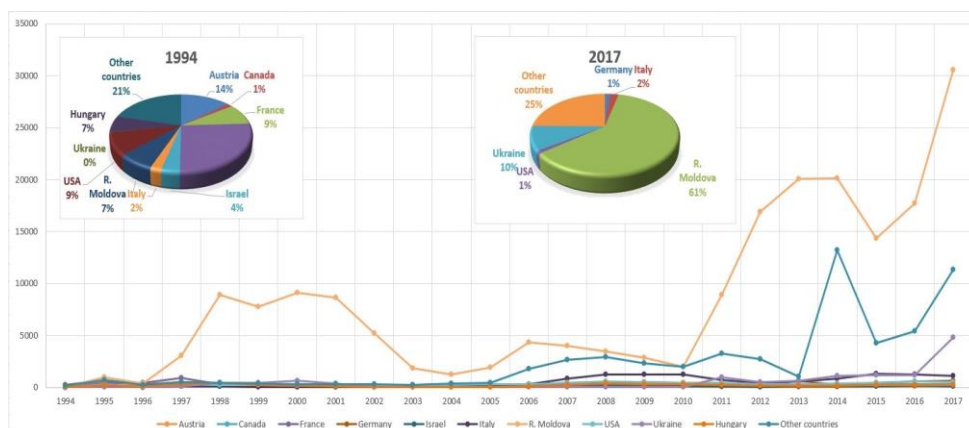
While in 1994 the distribution of immigrants according to origin is much more heterogeneous, important and also comparable shares of immigrants coming from France, Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Israel, Italy and a much larger share from Austria (14%), in 2017 the vast majority of immigrants is represented by citizens of the Republic of Moldova (over 60%), a moment when the share of

immigrants from other countries also increases significantly due to the important contribution of citizens from non-European countries (Fig. 5). Although at the beginning of the 2000s countries such as Germany, USA, Italy, Canada, Austria represented important countries of origin of Romanian immigrants (mostly carrying out commercial activities, taking advantage of permissive legislation and favourable foreign investments and setting up businesses), in the following years both motivations and directions of migratory flows suffered major changes. Romania's integration into the European Union in 2007, the conflicts generated by the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa since 2010, the escalation of geopolitical instability in Ukraine in 2014 and later, the major humanitarian crisis in Syria led to significant intensification and diversification of immigrants' countries of origin.



**Fig. 4. National distribution of immigrants by age groups between 1992-2017**  
(Data source: NIS, Tempo online)

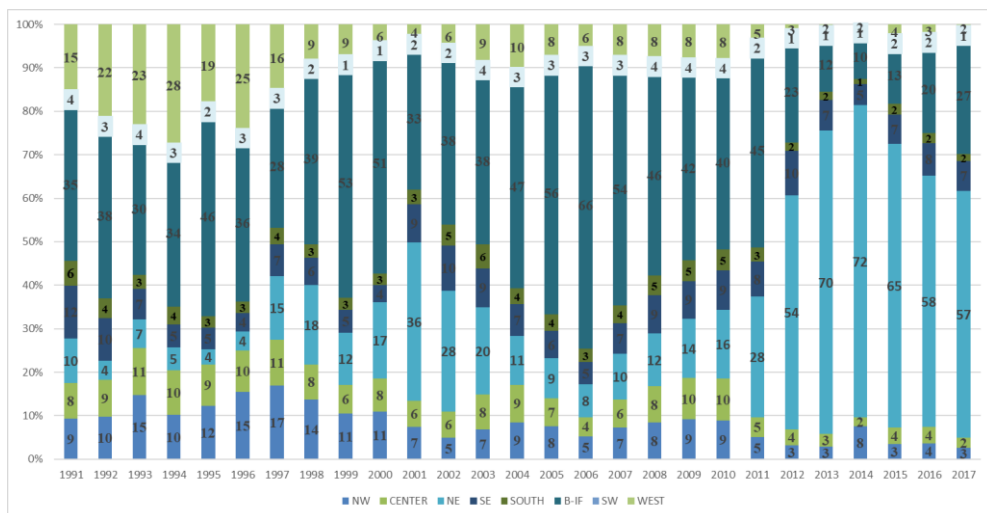
Thus, while at the beginning of the post-communist period, Romania has kept its character of mainly a country of transit, the number of immigrants was relatively low and the majority of immigrants were coming from Syria, Jordan, Iran, Egypt, China and Turkey, during recent years, the three main communities of foreigners are represented by the young students from the Republic of Moldova, along with the Chinese and Turkish immigrants.



**Fig. 5. The evolution of immigrants by country of origin between 1994-2017**  
(Data source: NIS, Tempo online)

### 3.2. Territorial distribution of immigrants within Romania

The analysis of the immigrant population based on the territorial distribution confirms the importance of geographical and cultural proximity, but also the significant contribution of migratory flows to more economically developed regions in Romania (Fig. 6).



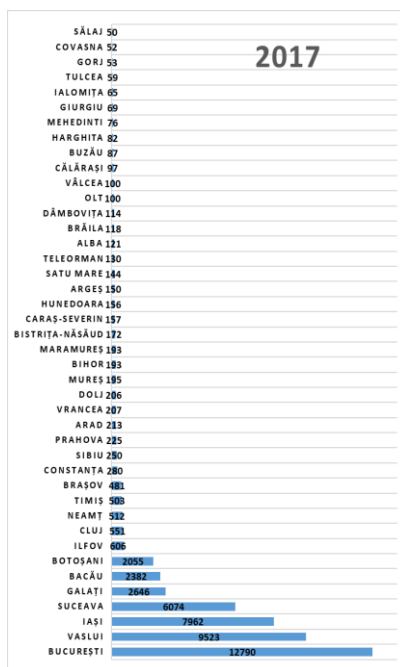
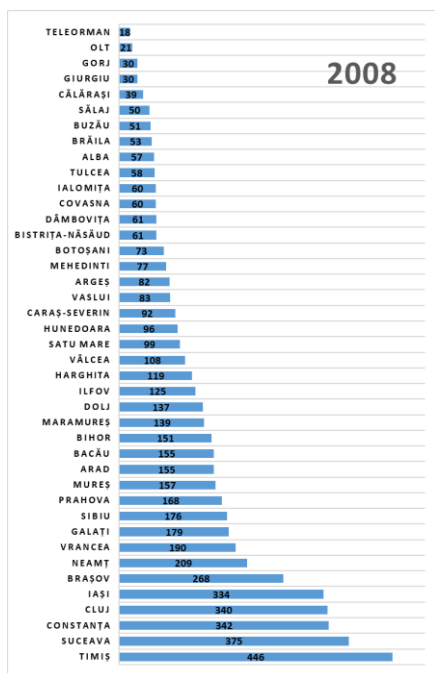
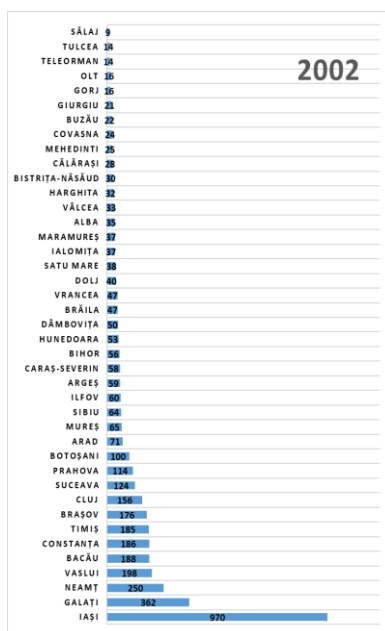
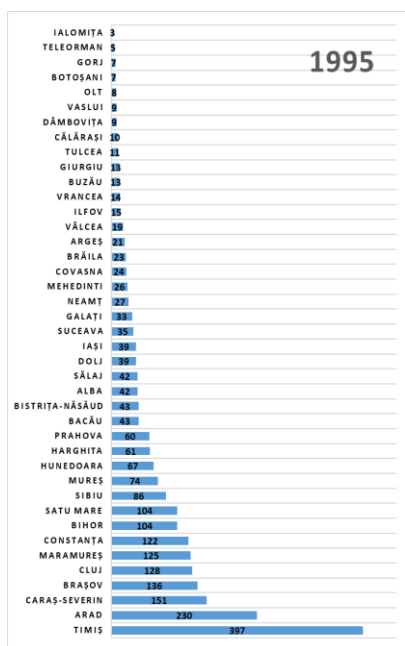
**Fig. 6. Development regions in which immigrants settled between 1991-2017 [%]**  
(Data source: NIS, Tempo online)

Hereby, at the beginning of the analysed period (1991), economic motivations prevailed as the main region in which immigrants chose to settle was Bucharest-Ilfov (35%), which is characterised by a higher level of socio-economic development that offered important opportunities, but also numerous and well-prepared workforce for foreign investors. The West (15%), South-East

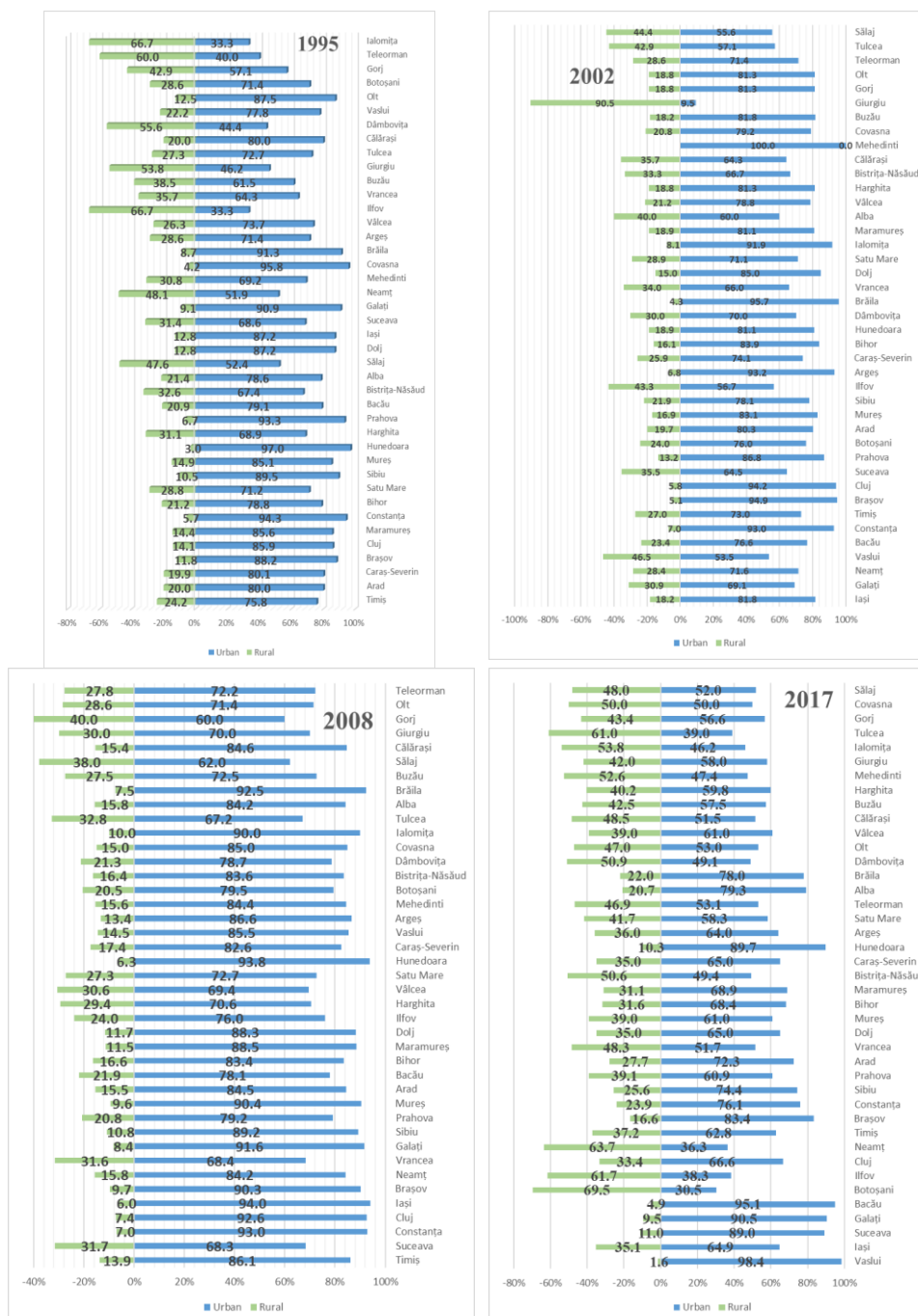
(12%) and North-East (10%) regions had a medium degree of attractiveness at the moment, due to their positioning on main migratory flow entrylines and including important entrypoints represented by well-developed cities: Timișoara, Iași, Constanța. The North-West (9%), Center (8%), South (6%) and South-West (4%) regions registered less than 10% of the immigrant flows, being the least attractive development regions as a result of their lower social and economic development. Beginning with 2011, immigrants mainly settled in the North-East development region, located in the vicinity of the Republic of Moldova (with shares ranging from 28% in 2011 to 72% in 2014) and Bucharest-Ilfov region, both receiving most of the population that chose to immigrate to Romania (83% in 2017). This surprising evolution on the one hand confirms the importance of Romania's accession to the European Union, but also of the overall linguistic and cultural affinities with the former Romanian province beyond the Prut river, Bessarabia. Consequently, during the entire post-communist period (1991-2017), 42.9% of the total number of immigrants who settled in Romania chose the North-East region and 29.6% of them settled in Bucharest-Ilfov region, the South and South-West development regions remaining the least attractive for immigrants (only 2,6% and respectively, 1.7%).

The evolution of immigrants' number *by counties* first of all demonstrates a net predominance of Bucharest in the total flow of immigrants from Romania, with two periods of upward evolution, from 657 people in 1992 to 5469 in 2000 and from 1225 in 2003 to 12790 in 2017. Secondly, in all Romanian counties, the dynamics of the number of immigrants shows a greater attractiveness of better economically developed counties, but also of counties bordering the Republic of Moldova, intensified especially recently (Fig. 7). Thus, in 1995, the counties that received the largest number of immigrants were situated in the western part of the country (Timiș (397), Arad (230) and Caraș-Severin (151), in 2002 in the eastern part - Iași (970), Galați (362) and Neamț (250), while in 2008 they are scattered throughout the country Timiș (446), Suceava (375) and Constanța (342), and in 2017 again in the eastern part - Vaslui (9523), Iași (7962) and Suceava (6074). At the other extreme of the ranking system, the counties that received the lowest number of immigrants are mainly included in the south and southwest of Romania, but overall reunite less economically developed counties, which unfortunately keep this economic lagging throughout the period: Ialomița (3) and Teleorman (5) in 1995, Sălaj (9) and Tulcea (14) in 2002, Teleorman (18) and Olt (21) in 2008, Sălaj (50) and Covasna (52) in 2017.

If analyzing the immigrants' dynamics *by area of residence*, we can see a clear predominance of the immigrants' preference for the urban settlements in Romania (Fig. 8). Until 2008, the preference of permanent immigrants for urban areas is increasing in most counties (when more than 50% of immigrants in all Romanian counties chose the urban environment), but there are also cases with over 90% of immigrants choosing the cities of the respective counties: Brăila, Brașov, Cluj, Constanța, Galați, Hunedoara, Ialomița, Iași, Mureș.



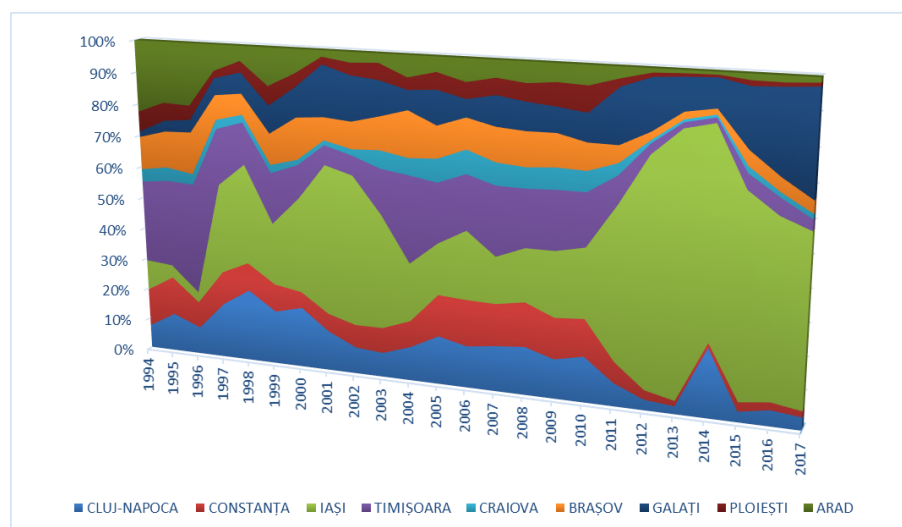
**Fig. 7. Dynamics and spatial distribution of permanent immigrants between 1995-2017 in Romania – NUTS 3 level-counties (Data source: NIS, Tempo online, 2017)**



**Fig. 8. Urban/rural residence and spatial distribution of permanent immigrants between 1995-2017 in Romania – NUTS 3 level-counties**  
(Data source: NIS, Tempo online)

In 2017, a net decrease of the immigrants' preference for the urban environment can be observed in some economically less developed counties (Botoşani - 30.5% urban, Neamţ - 36.3%, Tulcea - 39%, Ialomiţa - 46.2%, Mehedinţi - 47.4%, Dâmboviţa - 49.1%, Bistriţa-Năsăud - 49.4%) - with a lower degree of urbanization than the one registered at the national level, or having a special geographical (surrounding the capital) and favourable economic situation (Ilfov - 38.3%).

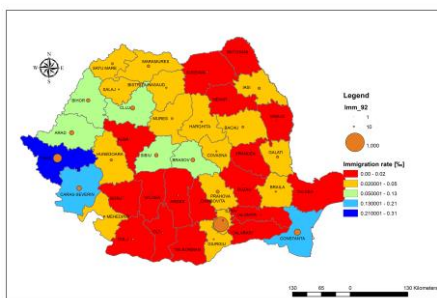
According to the NIS, the number of permanent immigrants in the largest urban settlements between 1994-2017 in Romania clearly shows an exponential increase in the number of immigrants in certain cities depending on the period: Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca at the beginning and respectively, the end of the analysed period, an overwhelmingly higher number of immigrants in Iași or a decreasing number in cities such as Constanța or Ploiești (Fig. 9).



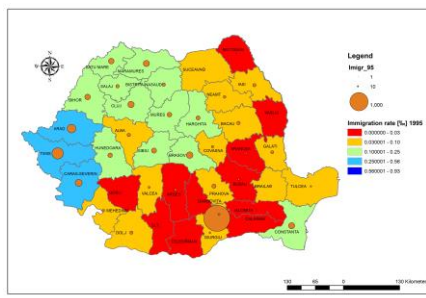
**Fig. 9. Number of permanent immigrants in Romania's largest urban settlements, between 1994-2017**

(Data source: NIS, Tempo online)

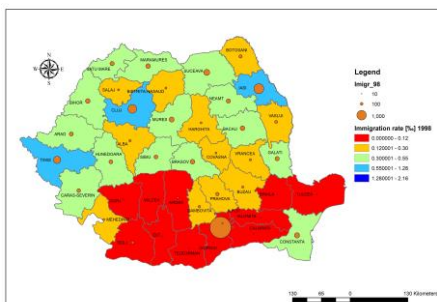
In what concerns the dynamics of *net international migration rate between 1992-2017 at NUTS 3 level* in Romania, there is a clear shift of the immigration pole from the Western part of the country in 1992 (Timiș, Caraș-Severin, Sibiu) to the North-Eastern counties (Vaslui, Iași, Suceava, Botoșani) in 2017 (Fig. 10). The two undeniable constants throughout the post-communist period are: (1) the south and southwest counties permanently represented the least attractive areas for immigrants because of their accentuated rurality and socio-economic backwardness and (2) the capital, Bucharest, received most permanent immigrants, regardless of year or context, due to the high primacy index of the Romanian urban system.



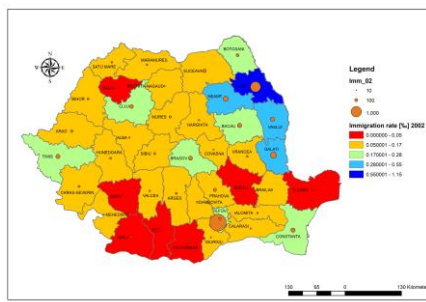
1992



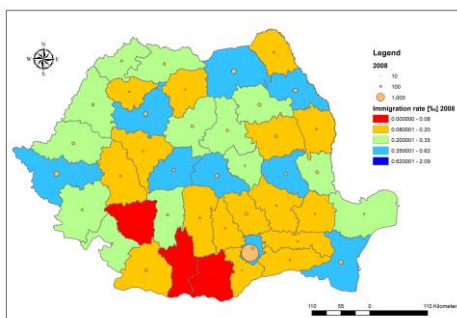
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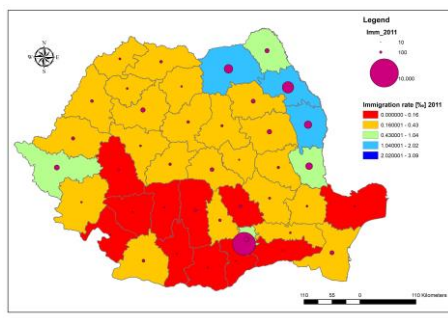
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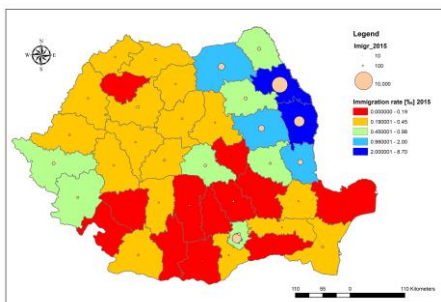
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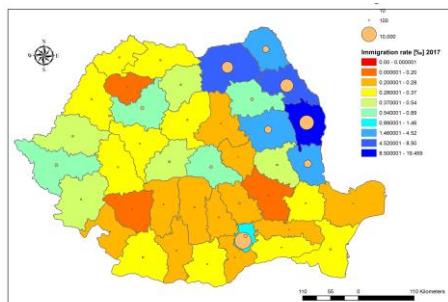
2008



2011



2015



2017

**Fig. 10. Net international migration between 1992-2017 in Romania (NUTS 3 level - counties)**

Taking into account its evolution during the post-communist period and the years selected for a suggestive comparative analysis (1992, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2008, 2011, 2015, 2017), 3 distinct periods can be delimited in terms of changing spatial patterns of permanent immigration rate:

a) the period comprised between 1992 and 1998 - characterized by opening borders consequences, very low values of the immigration rate at the beginning (between 0.01‰ registered in several counties such as Teleorman, Valui, Neamț, Ialomița, Dâmbovița, Buzău, Botoșani and 0.31‰ in Timiș, in 1992) and the arrival of a significant number of immigrants in better developed counties of Romania (Timiș, Cluj, Iași, Constanța);

b) a transition period between 1998 and 2008, that brings together large flows of immigrants both in counties attractive in economic opportunities and counties located near the border with the Republic of Moldova;

c) 2008-2017, which highlights a phase of explosive increase in immigration flows in all counties of the North-East Region, mainly as a result of their proximity to the Republic of Moldova; e.g. in 2017: 19.46‰ in Vaslui, 8.5‰ in Iași, 8.08‰ in Suceava, 4.52‰ in Botoșani, 4.2‰ in Galați.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

In the context of deepening economic, social and political disparities, but also under the impact of a globalized and increasingly open world, immigrant flows are undergoing major changes globally. Countries in Southeast Europe have traditionally been important emerging areas over time, but lately, states like Romania have become a target for immigrants.

During the post-communist period, the immigrant flows in Romania experienced significant changes in intensity and direction, but the Republic of Moldova and less developed Asian countries are the ones that have been important sources of immigrants during recent years. Their main location and residence options were focused on the capital, the economically well-developed counties and the counties of Moldova, highlighting cultural preferences and affinities, but also a growing need for financial stability and security.

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