



# **Internal migration transition in Romania?**

Horváth, István

Babeş-Bolyai University

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**István Horváth**

Babeş-Bolyai University,  
Cluj-Napoca, Romania  
E-mail:  
ihorvath66@hotmail.com

This paper is an overview of the shifts in the internal migration patterns in Romania for the last six decades. In the first part a literature-based brief overview of the trends and patterns of internal migration during communism will be presented. In the second (more extensive) part, a statistical-data based analysis of the internal migration trends and patterns over the last 25 years will be provided.

**Keywords:**

Romania,  
internal migration,  
international migration,  
communism,  
market-transition,  
regional differences,  
demography

### **On internal migration during communism**

The breakdown of the Romanian communist regime (in December 1989) was the beginning for a major change in the general demographic and socio-economic context of the internal migration and regime of the Romanian internal migration control.

In terms of the demographic context, the period of the communist regime was characterised by relatively high (though territorially significantly differentiated) fertility rates and overall population increase. In socio-economic terms, industrialisation and the subsequent urbanisation give rise to a significant and dynamic context of migratory opportunities and subsequent flows of internal mobility. Nevertheless the migratory processes emerged in this particular demographic and socio-economic context were to large extent controlled by the state, and, since external migration was very limited, occurring within the national territory.

### **The means of internal migration control during communism**

During the communist period, the state closely controlled the labour market, and via economic investment policies and by various administrative procedures, not just stimulated but to some extent pointed the tracks for the internal mobility paths. Especially in the initial phase of the communist industrialisation process, major industrial settings were established in regions with existing infrastructure. Since these customarily were not located in regions with high fertility rates, substantial migratory movement from less developed to more prosperous regions were induced (Turnock 1970).

Beside industrial investments, migration management used other administrative tools too. The flux towards some of the major cities was limited by administrative means (by restraining the possibility to administratively relocate there). In addition, for new graduates of universities, a system of compulsory first-job allocation was implemented, compelling many to relocate to (and compulsorily spend a four-to-five-year period in) places to which they never intended to move. Thus, the state selectively directed certain categories towards remote rural areas or small cities. Therefore, is not an exaggeration that the control of internal mobility processes was part of a larger set of tools of social engineering, pursuing various economic, administrative and also ideological goals promoted by the regime (Turnock 1991, p. 256).

On the other hand, possibilities of external migration were very limited, though (especially during the 1980s) the propensity for external migration was considerably high (Horváth–Anghel 2009). In due course, special mobility processes occurred mostly within the national boundaries. This situation dramatically changed beginning with 1990, when migration became an intricate interplay of internal and external spatial mobility processes.

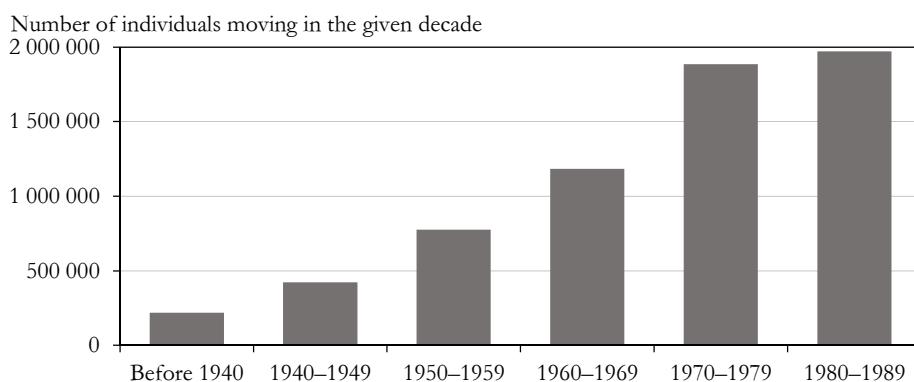
### The extent of internal migration during communist period

In assessing the magnitude and dynamics of internal migration during communism, we rely on stock data and analyse data from the 1992 census regarding the previous residence of the population.

At the time of the 1992 census, approximately more than one-third of the resident population declared having a previous place of residence other than their place of domicile in 1992. Thus 7.7 million persons declared that they moved before 1990 from another locality to their current locality of residence.

Figure 1

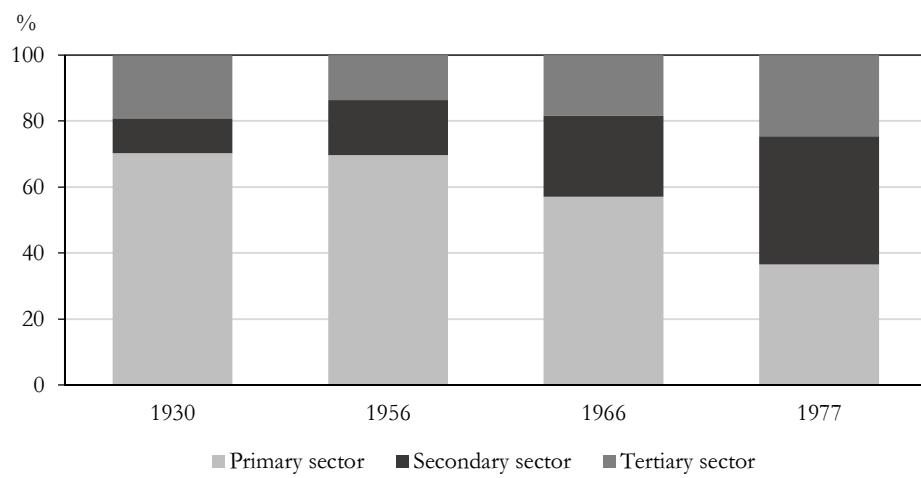
### Movement to the current locality of residence from another locality at the time of the 1992 census (number of individuals moving in the given decade)\*



\* Compiled by the author. Census data extracted from the data portal of the Romanian National Institute for Statistics *Population and Households Census Application* (<http://colectaredate.insse.ro/phc/aggregatedData.htm>) Table: POPULATIA CARE SI-A SCHIMBAT DOMICILIUL, DUPA PERIOADA STABILIRII IN LOCALITATEA DOMICILIULUI ACTUAL (accessed 12.04.2016).

The bulk of these residence changes occurred in the period 1970–1989, and this is in relation to the industrialisation policies initiated during the 1960s (Chirot 1978, Ronnås 1984). In just one decade (1966–1977), the economy, overwhelmingly dominated by the agrarian sector, turned into one slightly dominated by industry.

**Share of employed population in the different sectors of the Romanian economy 1930–1977**



Data source: Ronnås 1984, p. 143.

Consequent to the rapid industrialisation, a large-scale urbanisation process emerged (see Figure 3), marking the trend of internal mobility, both in terms of yearly values of rates and patterns of internal migration.

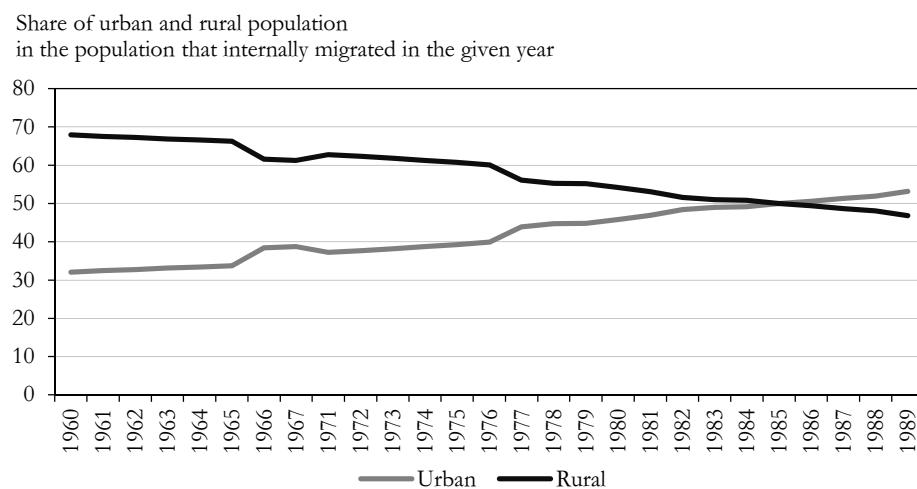
The rate of internal migration significantly rose during the seventies from 14.5% in 1970 reaching its peak (for the period of communism) in 1973 when gross internal migration was 375 thousand and rate of internal migration was 18%. In spite of such ascending dynamic and notable peaks, compared with international and regional trends, Romania had relatively low rates of internal migration (Brown–Neuberger 1977). However, starting with the second half of the 1970s until the end of 1989, a slow, unsteady decrease of the yearly gross migration (and internal migration rates) began.

#### Patterns of rural-urban migration

At the beginning of the 1960s, the rural areas represented the prevalent area of origin of internal mobility processes. However, in terms of the destination of the streams originating from rural areas, the urban areas were only slightly overrepresented. A considerable segment of the internal migrants were engaged in rural-rural,

customarily short-distance mobility (Kupiszewski, et al. 1997, p. 5.). Thus, the patterns of internal migration before the 1970s were only slightly dominated by the attraction of the urban areas. This pattern changed at the beginning of the 1970s, and the prevalent stream of the internal migration in the 1970s–1980s was rural to urban migration, with a significant increase in long-distance (between counties or even regions) migration (Kupiszewski, et al. 1997, p. 6.).

Figure 3  
Changes in the share of urban and rural population during 1960–1990



Compiled by the author. Data source: INS (2006) p. 44.

Regarding the territorial patterns of internal migration, it was already mentioned that only somewhat less than half of the migration occurred within the county level. With the emerging industrialisation beginning in the 1960s, county, distant and intraregional mobility increased. Such development was heavily influenced by differentiated regional fertility rates and territorial inequalities of the economic development. At the beginning of the communism in the least industrialised regions of Romania (mostly the Eastern region), 38% of the population lived in a region where only 12% of the entire industrial capacity was located (Turnock 1970, p. 552.). Although some efforts towards a more balanced territorial distribution of the industrial manufacturing facilities were made, regional imbalances persisted during the whole period of communist rule. This aspect was doubled due to the differentiated fertility rate of the regional population; in the most-industrialised areas, a decline in fertility was observable at the beginning of the 1960s. The antiabortionist measures only temporarily stopped this decline. Whereas in less industrialised regions, the fertility levels barely decreased significantly in this period. In due course, the territorial patterns of internal migration in regional terms were predominantly from

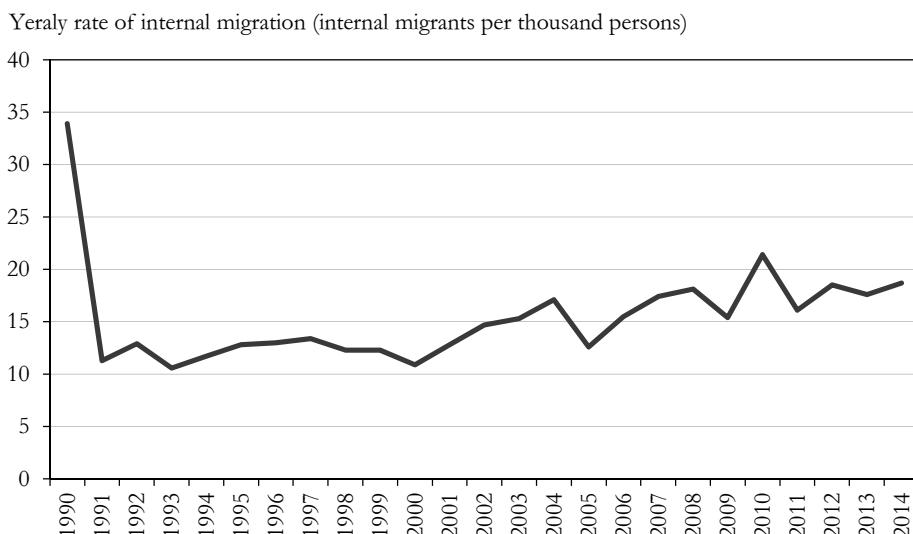
East to West (from the historical province of Moldova to Southern Transylvania and Banat) and partially from East to South (from Moldova to the capital city of Bucharest and partially to the other industrialised zones of Wallachia).

## Internal migration from 1989 to 2014

### Intensity of internal migration

The intensity of measured internal migration, the crude internal migration rate, had a particular dynamic during approximately the last quarter of the 20th century. It is measured as the total number of internal migrants in a given time period as a percentage of the resident population (Bell, et al. 2002); here expressed as internal migrants per thousand residents, it was rather fluctuant (see Figure 4).

Figure 4  
Internal migration rate in Romania for 1990–2014 (%)



Compiled by the author. Data source: INS TEMPO-online database. Accessed 10. 03. 2016.

The first remarkable aspect is the incredible peak of the value of the indicator for 1990, when the gross internal migration value reached the unprecedented volume of 786.5 thousand and the internal migration rate was 33.9%. As a term of comparison in 1989, the gross internal migration was 193 thousand. An increase of almost four times the gross internal migration can be explained by the radical change in the regime of internal migration after the breakdown of communism. Various administrative constraints that imposed or limited the movement of certain categories were abolished, and those that were affected sought to relocate to more desirable locales.

The administrative limitations to relocate to larger cities were abolished, and persons compelled by the system of compulsory first workplace allocation to serve in certain settlements for a considerable period of time were exempted from fulfilling the obligations imposed upon them.

After this exceptional peak, during the 1990s, the rate of internal migration was somewhat similar to the trends (in terms of intensity at least) of the 1980s and somewhat below the average values of the 1970s (a peak decade after the end of the Second World War). Still, the first decade of the new millennium brought a somewhat hectic, but in a larger perspective, a definitely increasing tendency of the dynamic of the Romanian internal migration. Starting with 2006, the value of the rate of internal migration has been constantly above 15%. For the last five years analysed, it seems that the intensity of the phenomenon is comparable with the intense internal migration of the 1970s generated by the large-scale urbanisation process. Such high rates are persisting in spite of the radical decrease in fertility starting with the very beginning of the 1990s (Ghețău 2007) and very high volumes of external migration.

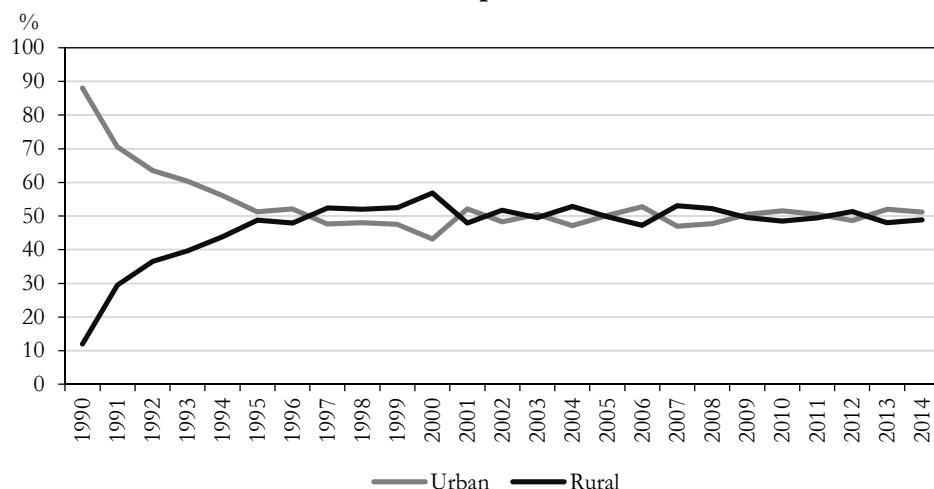
It is noteworthy to highlight the relationship between the intensity of internal migration and intensity of international outmigration. The stock of registered foreign residents with Romanian citizenship was 287 thousand in 1990, increasing to approximately 470 thousand in 2000 and 2.8 million in 2010 (Horváth 2012, p. 214.). Major increases in flows were registered starting with 2002 (when Romanian citizens where exempted visas in the Schengen area) and in 2007 (when Romania joined the European Union). The parallel increase of both internal and external migration in the first decade of the new millennium reveals an unprecedented economic and social transformation in Romania. Based on the figures revealing the magnitude of both internal and external migrations (based on a minimalizing estimate), a minimum of 4 million Romanian citizens can be identified as being ‘on the move’ (engaged in some form of spatial mobility). Thus, only in this decade (2000–2010) one out of five Romanian citizens relocated, mostly (though not exclusively) in search of a more adequate place in an increasingly expanding and dynamically restructuring world of labour opportunities. Just as term of comparison, in the seventies, the number of persons engaged in (internal and rather reduced external) mobility processes barely reached two million, meaning that one out every 11 persons was involved in a territorial mobility process.

### **Dynamic patterns of rural-urban migration**

The intensity is the only element similar to that period, because the structure of migration in terms of source and destination (rural or urban) types of settlement significantly changed in the last 25 years. Early 1990s was characterised by high rates of urban destinations originating both from rural and other urban sources. However, starting with mid-1990s (1995), flows heading towards rural and urban areas become roughly equal (see Figure 5 and Figure 6).

Figure 5

**Distribution of internal migrants according to destination: urban or rural settlements in the period 1990–2014**



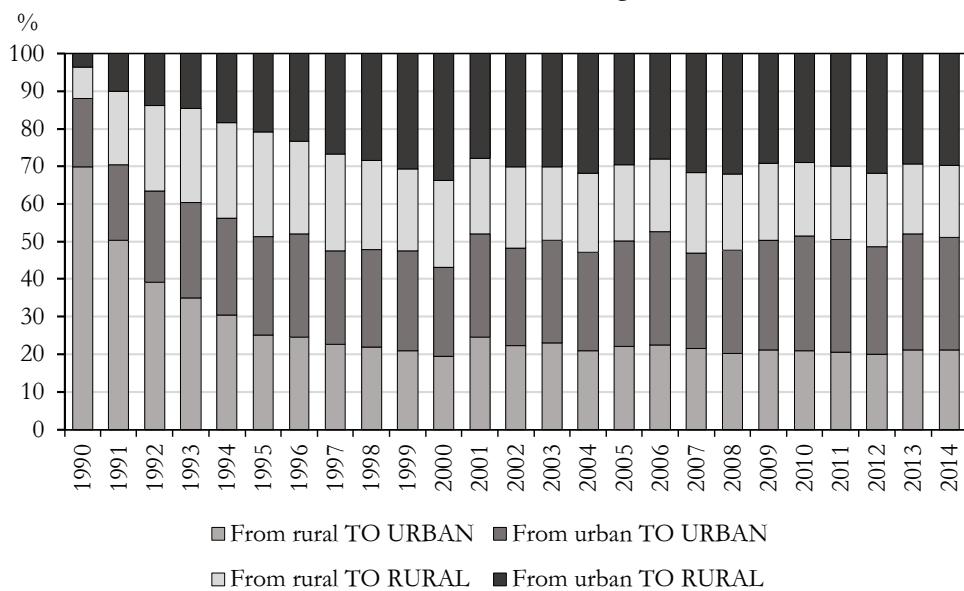
Compiled by the author. *Data source:* INS TEMPO-online database. Accessed 10. 03. 2016.

The equalisation of the flows heading to urban and rural areas had a varying causality for different periods in the last 25 years. The increase of the urban to rural flows is to be judged against the market transition processes. During the 1990s, in the context of rather hesitant and prolonged market transition (Dăianu 2001, Earle 1997), the labour market, and especially the industrial sector, decreased drastically. Within a decade, almost three million jobs vanished from this sector, resulting in genuine deindustrialisation of the Romanian economy (Berevoescu–Stănculescu 2003, Horváth 2008, 2012). On the other hand, in the same period, the process of land restitutions was started, and transformation of the property structure of the land opened some windows of opportunities in farming (Rizov, et al. 2001, pp. 1259–1261.). In due course, many people who had migrated to cities during 1970s–1980s, after losing their industry jobs during the 1990s, viewed the process of land property restructuring as an opportunity and ‘re-migrated’ to the rural regions from which they originated and became engrossed in the expanding strata of subsistence farmers (Ghețău 2009, pp. 36–37.).

Even though in the first decade of the new millennium, the patterns of migration between rural and urban areas were not significantly altered, in reality, the driving causes had significantly changed. Opportunities for external migration radically changed in 2002 when Romanian citizens received visa exemption for the Schengen area, and the stock of Romanian citizens registered as foreign residents in various European Union countries ran high (Horváth 2012, p. 214.), many originating from the rural areas of the economically backward regions (Sandu 2005). Various segments

of the workforce, upon becoming unneeded after the deindustrialisation processes of the 1990s, migrated to rural areas and, in the new millennium, turned towards external migration.

Figure 6  
**Distribution of internal migrants according to source and destination types of settlement (urban and rural) during 1990–2014**



Compiled by the author. Data source: INS TEMPO-online database. Accessed 10.03.2016.

On the other hand, at the end of the 1990s, the Romanian economy stabilised and a slow and steady growth started. In 2004, for the first time after the collapse of the communist regime, the gross domestic product exceeded that of 1989. However, the economic growth was rather uneven in terms of territorial distribution, being regionalised and concentrated in several major cities and envisioned by analysts and policy planners as poles of Romanian economic growth (Ionescu-Herou, et al. 2013). Such changes again resulted in a different structural context for internal mobility. Besides these growth poles attracting internal migration, their urban development was increasingly characterised by a process of urban sprawl (suburbanisation), which involved considerable segments of population relocating to the rural areas surrounding these cities (Grigorescu, et al. 2012). For example, in the period 2002–2011, in six rural municipalities directly neighbouring one of the major ‘poles of growth’, the city of Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár, the population increased by 6.1% even though there was a general decrease by 2.7% in the population of Cluj county and 7.2% decline in the country’s overall population.

Thus, the decline of the internal migration pattern of the rural areas being the dominant source and urban areas being the dominant destination region of internal migration surfaced (in mid-1990s) and continued in the new millennium in two rather different socio-economic contexts. In the first phase, the economic decline and deindustrialisation induced a remigration to rural areas by those who had relatively recently migrated (one or two decades before) to urban centres. However, starting with the mid-2000s, in the context of expanding economies of some major urban centres, heading to (some selected) rural areas became an option because of cheaper housing and/or a different quality of life.

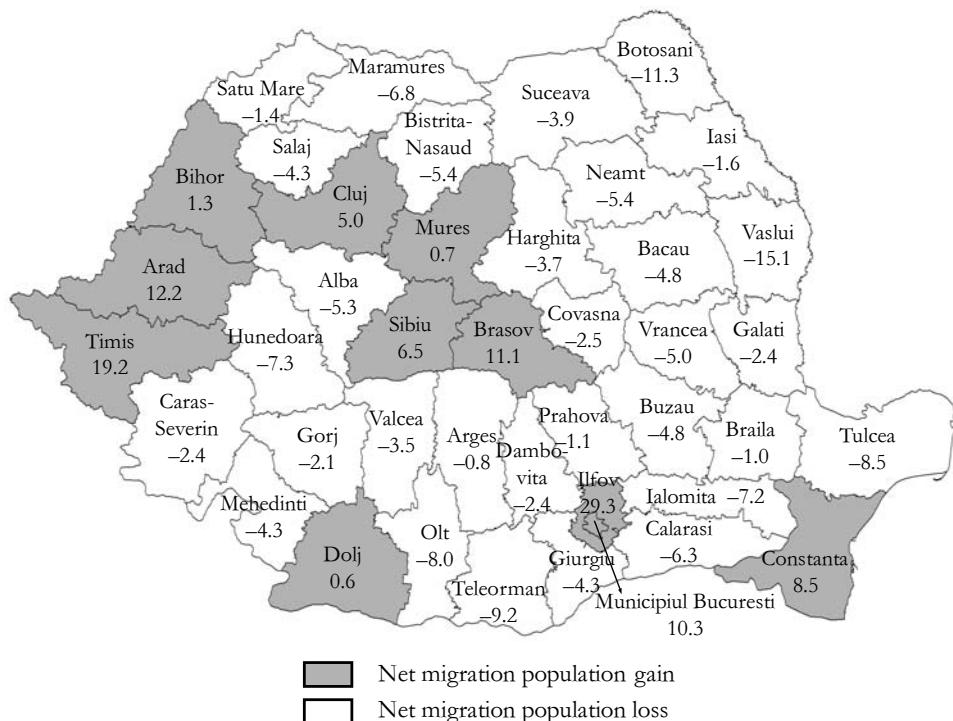
## Regional patterns

The regional patterns of internal migration in Romania during the communist period were in relation to the existing regional disparities in terms of economic development. In spite of the efforts of the communist regime to induce a more balanced regional distribution of economy, regional economic differences persisted. Moreover, this path dependency resurfaced in the new millennium. The successful economic recovery and development was specific to regions having an above-average economic situation. In the last 25 years, these regions attracted internal migrants and they were successful in upholding some demographic stability (both in terms of volume and age structure of the population) in spite of the nationwide demographic decline (Ghețău 2007) and lower fertility rates of the given region compared with the economically less successful areas. The prevailing share of the post-1989 internal migration was intercounty, long-distance migration (especially during the 1990s), and after 2000, the short-distance, regional migration rate increased. This was in relation to the fact that starting with 2002, with the liberalisation of the entrance of Romanian citizens to the Schengen area, migration from the traditional source regions, especially from Eastern Romania, shifted the spatial horizon: from internal to external migration (Sandu 2006, p. 16.).

The regional trends in terms of source and destination regions of internal migration are well reflected by the available data as well. The cumulated county (NUTS 3) level yearly net migration data (for 1990–2014) was measured against the given county's population, resulting in an indicator at the county level for internal migration-related population gain or loss, expressed as a share (%) of the county's population as registered in the 2002 census (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

**County level, cumulative (1990–2014), internal migration-related population gain or loss, expressed as share (%) of the county's population as registered in the 2002 census**



Compiled by the author. Data source: INS TEMPO-online database. Accessed 10.03.2016.

Example of reading: The cumulated net migration of the Harghita county was -3.7%. This means that the gathered net migration values for the period 1990–2014 resulted in a population loss that represented 3.7% of the county's population, as registered in the census from 2002.

The regional directions of internal migration persisted in time. There is the attractive capital city region largely benefitting from internal mobility processes (originating especially from Southern and North Eastern regions). Constanța county, both an industrial and maritime centre at the Black Sea was successful in attracting a significant volume of internally mobile persons. The South Western region of Banat (Arad and Timiș counties) represented other significant regions of attraction (attracting internally mobile persons from both the neighbouring counties and the North East), in line with Romania's centrally positioned counties of Sibiu and Brașov and the core region of the historical province of Transylvania: Cluj county. Most of the Northern, Eastern and Southern peripheries of Romania were source counties for internal migration. Some counties such as Vaslui and Botoșani lost a significant share of their populations in the last 25 years (15.1% and 11.3%, respectively).

## Conclusions

The post-1989 system of the Romanian spatial mobility was marked by four major processes: a) shift of the political regime in 1989, b) market transition of the 1990s, c) incorporation of Romania in the European Union and free movement of the labour force and d) economic stabilisation and growth beginning in the first decade of the new millennium.

The shift of the political regime ended the administratively regulated internal mobility system promoted by the communist regime, resulting in a process of readjustment mobility (giving rise in 1990 to the highest internal mobility rate ever recorded in Romanian mobility statistics).

The market transition and subsequent deindustrialisation of the 1990s determined a slow yet steady and prolonged remigration to rural areas of a considerable segment of the population that had moved to urban areas during 1970s–1980s. However, such movement proved to be a transitory coping strategy, as the legal opportunities of working in the European Union were unlocked (in 2002 and 2007) and many people engaged in various forms of external migration.

The high rates of external migration did not lead to a decrease in the internal migration. The economic growth started at the mid-2000s, and in late 2000s, showed results that were rather uneven in spatial terms. The regional disparities of economic development, conjoined with a general demographic decline (boosted by the demographic consequences of high external migration), resulted relatively high rates of internal mobility and various regional poles of development sustaining at least two types of internal mobility processes: immigrants from outside their region and urban sprawling (suburbanisation).

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