

 AFCLC

EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE
FIELD GUIDE

Romania



About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.



The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 “Culture General” section provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on Eastern Europe.

Part 2 “Culture Specific” describes unique cultural features of Romanian society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training.



For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at <http://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/> or contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.



We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature

in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.



We can organize behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as “cultural domains” – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a

society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival,

although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

12 Domains of Culture



This collective perspective forms our worldview—how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.



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While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.

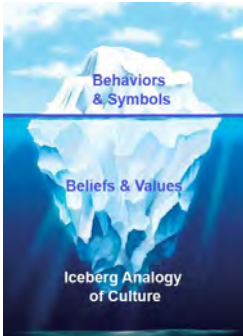
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Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model



for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective

when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.



As you travel through Eastern Europe, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.



Eastern Europe comprises 10 countries on the eastern side of the European continent: Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine. Archaeological finds suggest people inhabited the region as early as 40,000 BC. From approximately 10,000-3,000 BC, hunter-gatherers formed semi-permanent settlements, sustained by agriculture and cattle herding. Although short-lived, the Roman Empire's incorporation of much of the region's South in the early centuries AD significantly influenced culture in present-day Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovenia. Slavic tribes settled in the plains of present-day Ukraine beginning in the 6th-century AD, eventually moving west and south along the fertile basin of the Danube River.

Over the following centuries, various migratory peoples from elsewhere in Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia continued to settle in the region, expelling, conquering, or mixing with the Slavs and other inhabitants. By the 10th century, loosely aligned settlements coalesced into large, powerful kingdoms, including the Bohemian kingdom centered in present-day Czech Republic and the Kingdoms of Hungary, Poland, and Bulgaria. In the 14th century, much of the region fell to the Ottoman Empire, based in present-day Turkey, with many of the region's residents experiencing several centuries of Turkish raids.

While present-day Bulgaria and parts of Romania remained under Ottoman rule for over 500 years, in the 16th century, many regions became subject to the rule of the Austrian House of Habsburg – one of Europe’s most influential royal dynasties that later joined Hungary to form the powerful Austro-Hungarian Empire. Meanwhile, Poland formed an independent state, eventually uniting with neighboring Lithuania to control large parts of the region, including Ukraine and Belarus.

Unable to repel persistent attacks from neighbors, the Polish-Lithuanian Empire disintegrated in the late 18th century, with Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus falling under Russian control for the next nearly 120 years. During this time, Russia violently quelled nationalist movements, suppressed regional languages,



and deported thousands of native inhabitants while encouraging Russian immigration into the region.

All 10 Eastern European states experienced substantial conflict

during World War I (WWI). Immediately following the war, most states enjoyed brief periods of independence. By contrast, the newly formed Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) absorbed Belarus, parts of Moldova, and Ukraine, all of which suffered severely under communist repression. Notably, after its defeat in WWI, the Austro-Hungarian Empire splintered. Hungary consequently lost nearly 2/3 of its territory and 3/5 of its people to neighboring nations.

With the onset of World War II (WWII), all 10 states again became battlegrounds. While some immediately sided with the Axis powers, others were unable to withstand German aggression. All 10 states suffered heavy casualties throughout the war. During its occupation of the region, Nazi Germany murdered, deported, or confined most of the region’s sizeable Jewish population and other “undesirables.”

At war's end, the USSR either absorbed or heavily influenced the political, social, and economic systems of each Eastern European state. Adopting communist tenets, each state nationalized private companies, appropriated private property, and rapidly expanded industrial development. Communist leaders also encouraged Russification in the region, violently repressing national languages, religions, and cultures.

In the late 1980s, democratic movements swept across the Soviet bloc, and within a few years, all 10 states had declared independence from the USSR. Further, they removed communist leaders, transformed their governments, and adopted market capitalism. Since then, all states but Belarus largely pivoted away from Russian influence to pursue political, military, and economic integration with the West.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. All 10 Eastern European states are parliamentary republics led by an elected Prime Minister, President, and legislature. In most states, Presidential powers are largely ceremonial with executive power vested in the Prime Minister, who leads the government together with the support of a Cabinet of Ministers. In most states, political parties typically form coalitions in order to attain and maintain power.



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With most having suffered crippling dictatorial rule for much of the late 20th century, each Eastern European state emerged in the 1990s with new political, social, and economic structures. While some states have since created relatively stable, well-run democracies, others face challenges to the democratic process. Corruption is a prevalent problem in the region. In some cases, governments' inability to adequately curb widespread corruption

results in frequent public protests, causes distrust of public officials, and creates an overall skepticism of the democratic process. Moreover, weakened by overly broad and at times differing ideological profiles, ruling political coalitions and parties tend to dissolve frequently, resulting in a political landscape marked by infighting and successive changes of government.

Most states are members of strong regional alliances, such as the European Union (EU) and NATO. Although somewhat fraught with political instability, most states remain committed to improving democratic processes, serving as advocates of a democratic and pro-Western agenda in the region. By contrast, Belarus is politically aligned with Russia, while Ukraine and Bulgaria have historically attempted to balance relations between the West and Russia, at times resulting in internal tension between ideologically opposing political groups.

With the exception of Belarus, the states rely on NATO, the EU, the US, and other international support to defend against



external, state-level threats. Russia's recent aggression in the region, notably its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, has significantly heightened regional tensions and consequently dominates the states' security environment.

The region exhibits differing levels of ethnic diversity. Poland, for example, is largely homogenous, with ethnic Poles comprising 99% of the population. By contrast, the native populations of Ukraine and Czech Republic are significantly lower, 78% and 57%, respectively. Notably, the Roma and other ethnic minorities suffer significant social division, discrimination, and stigmatization across Eastern Europe.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also

create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

Early residents of Eastern Europe practiced a variety of indigenous religions, venerating multiple deities and spirits who inhabited the natural world. Romans introduced Christianity as early as the 1st century. By the 10th century, many Eastern European kingdoms had adopted Christianity as a state religion. In the early 11th century, theological differences between western and eastern branches of the Christian movement forced a permanent divide between the Roman Catholic Church centered in Rome and the Eastern Orthodox tradition of the Byzantine Empire. Over subsequent centuries, both branches of Christianity flourished in the region. Later, as the Protestant Reformation swept across Europe, some states saw the Catholic

Church reorganize under Lutheran authority. Across the region, Christianity became closely linked to national identity.

In Poland, for example, the Catholic Church became entrenched



in daily life, influencing education, social services, and remaining politically influential even today. Throughout the centuries, Judaism also enjoyed growth in the region, with among others, Polish and Czech Jewish communities growing significantly until their annihilation during WWII.

During their years of occupation and influence, the Soviets suppressed all religious institutions and activities in the states, while simultaneously cultivating atheism and encouraging the devout to abandon long-held religious beliefs. To do so, the states' communist governments carefully regulated religious affairs and deported clergy, while destroying or converting most churches and synagogues for other uses. Consequently, membership in religious organizations decreased significantly over the years. Nevertheless, most states saw a resurgence in

religiosity once religious freedom was restored following the fall of communism.

Today, some of the region's inhabitants are Orthodox Christian, while others – including the majority of Poles (85%), Slovaks (56%), Slovenes (71%), and Hungarians (30%) – are Roman Catholic. Notably, while most Eastern Europeans retain deep religious convictions, others remain religiously unaffiliated. For example, only about 78% of Belarusians claim a religious affiliation – the lowest rate in the region -- while large numbers of Slovenes, Slovaks, and Czechs are atheist. In parts of the region, small Jewish and Muslim communities are experiencing some growth. One notable exception is Bulgaria, where a relatively large Muslim community (10% of the population) traces back to the early 14th century.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called “fictive kin”).

Family life and relationships are highly valued within Eastern European societies. Residents maintain strong connections with both immediate and extended family



members, supporting them emotionally and financially and providing physical care for elderly or ailing kin if needed. While most households comprise 2 parents and their children (nuclear family), with many families choosing to have just 1 or 2 children. Nevertheless, extended kin on both sides of the family often live nearby and are significantly influential in family matters.

Rapid urbanization has changed family life in recent years, as urban inhabitants marry later or cohabit (live in long-term, unmarried partnership) and have fewer children. Consequently,

while the traditional family structure remains common in rural areas, it is more diverse in urban centers.

While historically marriage was an arranged union, today Eastern Europeans typically choose their own partners. Couples may spend several years dating, live together, and have children before choosing to marry. In some states, divorce is increasingly prevalent among younger generations, with rates comparable to the US. Still in others, the practice is relatively uncommon and carries social stigma.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

The Eastern European states' historically patriarchal culture privileged men as leaders and providers. While some of the region's inhabitants continue to adhere to traditional values – men as breadwinners and heads of household and women as mothers and wives – gender roles and responsibilities began to transform during the Soviet era and continue to change today, particularly among younger generations.



Although women hold equal rights under the law, political, social, and economic inequalities between the genders remain. For example, women often face discrimination in the hiring and promotion process, routinely receive lower wages than their male counterparts, and suffer from sexual harassment in the workplace.

Despite these barriers, the number of women serving in the political sector across the region has increased over the past few decades. Eastern European women hold a significant proportion of national and sub-national government positions, with most states maintaining similar or higher female participation rates in their national legislatures as the US.

Notably, the region's women suffer high rates of gender-based violence (GBV), particularly domestic abuse and rape. Often considered private matters, many incidences of GBV go unreported. If cases are reported, the prosecution of perpetrators is rare. Although homosexuality is legal throughout the region, homosexuals still suffer discrimination, stigmatization, and violence in some areas.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally. Most of the region's languages derive from the Slavic branch of the Indo-European language family, while Moldovan and Romanian belong to the same family's Eastern Romance branch. A member of the Uralic family, Hungarian is the region's only language not part of the Indo-European family. Notably, the Bulgarian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian languages are written in the Cyrillic alphabet. By contrast, all other state languages employ the Latin script.



Some states managed to largely avoid harsh Russification policies during the Soviet era. Others suffered years of linguistic repression when Russian became the predominant language in education, the media, and government proceedings. Today, with the exception of Belarus, Russian is no longer the region's main language. Instead, native languages have largely supplanted Russian, though some residents continue to use Russian in business and everyday life. The states are also home to native speakers of other languages, notably Romani (the language of the Roma), Turkish, German, and other regional languages. English has become increasingly popular over the last several decades and is spoken widely in business and by young, urban residents.

Generally, the region's residents demonstrate respect, privacy, and candor in their communication practices. In some states, communications reflect notable emotion and engagement. By contrast, others typically refrain from displaying strong emotions in public, feel comfortable in silence, and prefer quiet speech. Across the region, residents usually share personal information only with family or close friends and are reserved when interacting with strangers.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized

systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.



taught religion and basic literacy. Notably, while Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic had established universities as early as the 14th century, secular centers of higher academic learning were slow to develop elsewhere in the region. Nevertheless, by the late 1800s, extensive public school networks administered both religious and secular curricula to millions of students across the region.

Most Eastern European governments established free and compulsory public education systems in the early 20th century. The subsequent Soviet occupation and influence brought significant changes to schools and curricula. During that period, the education system promoted Soviet ideology and communist tenets and emphasized Russian culture and language. It also

prioritized vocational instruction, while simultaneously suppressing Eastern European languages and culture.

Today, most Eastern European students receive free and compulsory schooling at the primary and secondary levels. School enrollment rates are high, and nearly 100% of Eastern European residents are literate. Challenges to the education systems include low teacher salaries, rural school closures, and disparities in educational attainment between majority groups and linguistic and ethnic minorities.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. As in most Western cultures, Eastern Europeans tend to be preoccupied more with time management than relationship-building. They too value punctuality, a sense of responsibility, and candid professional interactions. Within their personal lives, however, most Eastern Europeans invest significant time into establishing and maintaining relationships.

They also like to build relations before conducting business, which tends to move more slowly in Eastern Europe than in the US. Throughout the region, residents usually begin discussions with



light conversation. Most communication is explicit and direct, with frequent eye contact. Eastern Europeans generally require less personal space when conversing than is common in the US. One exception is in Slovenia, where residents maintain about the same personal distance as in the US.

Eastern European states observe a number of public holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and their respective independence day. Further, all Eastern European states commemorate both the end of World War II and the Soviet era, as well as unique seasonal or harvest holidays.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Most Eastern European forms of artistic expression – including art, architecture, dance, music, and theater – reflect the region’s rural peasant past, history of foreign presence, and modern global trends.

Traditional music and dance in Eastern Europe typically promote themes such as nature, the seasons, rural life, and love. Folk songs, festivals, and dance are particularly popular in rural areas, often utilizing traditional instruments. Most common dances are performed in pairs, circles, or lines. Under Russian and Soviet influence, classical ballet became a common form of dance across the region. Classical music and opera remain popular, as well as rock, jazz, and international pop music. Government financing for the arts largely declined after the



Soviet era, yet artistic freedom has increased significantly.

Rural landscapes and geometric designs are common themes in visual arts. Eastern Europeans also practice various traditional handicrafts

and folk art that reflect the region’s rich peasant history, along with Christian or ancient pagan motifs. Common handicrafts include pottery, embroidery, and baskets. Soccer is the most widely followed sport in the region, followed by basketball, volleyball, and gymnastics. During the winter, residents also enjoy ice hockey, skiing, and ice skating.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures, and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Eastern European dishes tend to be simple, hearty, and mildly seasoned. Most meals consist of a staple, such as potatoes, oats, or barley served with a meat, fresh salad, and various breads. While beer is the most popular alcoholic beverage, some residents enjoy unique herbal liquors or vodka. Notably, the region also has a rich history of wine production, dating back to the 1st century BC.



Health in Eastern Europe has improved significantly in recent decades, evidenced by decreased infant and maternal mortality rates and longer life expectancies. Most residents have access to free, state-funded healthcare in modern facilities.

Nevertheless, the region's healthcare systems face several challenges. The quality of care varies significantly between private/public and urban/rural facilities. Generally, public facilities concentrate in cities and are ill-equipped, overcrowded, understaffed, and plagued by corruption. Meanwhile, private facilities offer first-rate care mostly to the wealthy. Finally, a shrinking yet aging population threatens to burden already overloaded national healthcare services in many states.

Non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases such as cardiovascular, cancer, respiratory, liver, and diabetes account for the majority of deaths across Eastern Europe. In addition, the region's residents suffer from high rates of suicide and alcohol poisoning. Mostly a result of Soviet-era industrial policies, pollution is a widespread hazard throughout Eastern Europe, causing further health-related issues.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Prior to the 19th century, the Eastern European states

maintained largely agrarian economies, with residents engaging in subsistence agriculture or laboring as serfs on large elite landholdings.

During the 1800s, several states began to industrialize, while Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, and Slovenia remained primarily agrarian. Industrialization intensified throughout the region in the Soviet era, when all states followed a centrally-controlled and planned economic system, establishing large collective farms



and developing various heavy industries.

Following the end of communism, the states immediately sought to decentralize their economies and adopt liberal, free

market systems. While the transition initially caused their economies to contract, by the early 2000s, all 10 nations experienced growth. For most states, accession into the EU further spurred economic expansion. In 2008, the global financial crisis slowed investment in the region, reducing demand for exports and causing severe economic contractions in every state except Poland and Belarus.

Some of the states reacted quickly to the crisis with strict internal reforms which allowed their economies to rebound within a few years. Others were slow to respond and suffered a protracted recession. Notably, the crisis in Ukraine has hurt that country's recent economic growth, while Belarus continues to experience economic stagnation.

The economic outlook in the region is varied. Some states such as Romania, Czech Republic, and Slovenia appear poised to maintain stable growth rates. The non-EU member states of Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova are impacted the most by geopolitical events in Russia. All 10 states are vulnerable to economic fluctuations due to their export-oriented economies. Some common economic challenges include persistent corruption, aging populations, and emigration of skilled workers.

The EU is by far the region's largest trading partner, except for Belarus, which heavily relies on trade with Russia. As EU members, most Eastern European states benefit from a secure business environment and free movement of goods and services.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. All 10 Eastern European states have invested in extensive road networks and efficient public transportation systems, particularly in urban areas. While Slovenia maintains the region's best roads, Ukraine and Romania have some of the world's worst. Rural infrastructure is typically less developed, and corruption often impedes progress on road and rail projects.

Generally in better condition than roads, railways connect major cities throughout the



region, though some services are slow and inefficient. The Black Sea and major rivers, notably the Danube, host important ports. Although modern information technology is available in all states, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Bulgaria, and Romania have some of Europe's least developed networks. Internet use also varies widely, with 90% of Belarussians using the Internet at home compared to approximately 79% of Bulgarians.

While Poland relies on fossil fuels for 73% of its energy needs, nuclear fuels account for 44% of Hungary's energy production. Most Eastern European states depend on imported natural gas and oil from Russia and the Middle East. Governments throughout the region have announced their intention to increase the use of renewable resources such as hydroelectric plants, wind, and other renewables.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Eastern European society at large, we will focus on specific features of Romanian society.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Subjected to centuries of foreign occupation and control, Romania has had an eventful and often tragic history. Each of Romania's 3 main regions – Moldavia, Wallachia, and Transylvania – has its own unique stories.



While Wallachia and Moldavia achieved independence in the mid-19th century, Transylvania remained a disputed territory until after World War II (WWII). Romania's experience in WWII and the subsequent 45-year communist era left profound scars, still felt today. Since 1989, Romania has transformed into a democracy, adopted market capitalism, and joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union (EU).

Early History

Human remains discovered in Romania's *Peștera cu Oase* (Cave with Bones) date to around 40,000 years ago, making them some of the oldest ever found in Europe. Between 10,000-3,000 BC, regional inhabitants formed semi-permanent settlements where they existed as hunters, gatherers, and farmers. Of note, these people were among the world's first to extract salt from water, which they used to preserve food.

Some scientists believe that another Romanian archaeological find, small clay amulets dating to around 5,300 BC known as the Tărtăria tablets, represent the world's earliest form of writing. Beginning around 2,500 BC, members of nomadic Indo-European tribes from Central Asia began to move into the region, and after mixing with the native inhabitants, were known as the Thracians.

Beginning in the 7th century BC, Greeks set up trading colonies along present-day Romania's Black Sea coast. The 5th-century BC Greek historian Herodotus called the region's inhabitants the Getae. Meanwhile, members of the Roman Empire in central Italy referred to the inhabitants of present-day Romania as the Dacians. Historians today combine the names of these ancient people as the Geto-Dacians.

During the 2nd century BC, the Romans began to pursue expansion eastwards. Partly to counter this growing threat, Geto-Dacian King Burebista united several tribes in a large kingdom in 82 BC. This empire stretched from present-day Czech Republic to Bulgaria and from the Black Sea to the Adriatic coast. For decades, the Geto-Dacians and Romans skirmished in their bid for territorial control. While Burebista's kingdom disintegrated upon his death in 44 BC, the individual Geto-Dacian tribes remained an influential force in the region.

Roman Control

The Geto-Dacian tribes reunited as a powerful state under King Decebalus in 87 AD, enjoying several years of prosperity and vigorously challenging the Roman Empire's regional ambitions. Eventually, Decebalus' forces were unable to withstand the



invaders, falling to Roman Emperor Trajan in 106. The territory became Dacia, a province of the Roman Empire.

During their almost 170-year occupation, the Romans worked to integrate Dacia into the empire while encouraging Roman

settlement of the region. Further, the Romans introduced the Latin language and early versions of Christianity (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*), while utilizing the region as a source of precious metals, grains, and other agricultural products.

The Romans faced constant pressure from invaders along Dacia's long borders, including the Goths, Huns, Slavs, and Tatars (or Mongols), collectively referred to as the "Barbarians." By 275, Roman Emperor Aurelian had withdrawn his troops from Dacia due to these ongoing threats. While many upper class Romans departed, most Roman rural-dwellers remained, gradually mixing with the region's native inhabitants and permanently changing the region's language (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*). Historians call these people the Daco-Romans.

Centuries of Foreign Incursions

Over the next 800 years, various migratory peoples from Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia continued to invade and overrun present-day Romanian territory. Initially, the Roman Empire remained influential, allowing conquering Huns to rule Dacia as a confederate state of the Roman Empire in exchange for annual payments.

The Avars and the Slavs:

In 567, Eurasian Avaric and Slavic tribes invaded,



blocking Dacia from the Roman world and occupying much of the Balkan Peninsula. While the Daco-Romans largely assimilated the less numerous Avars and Slavs, Slavic culture and language had some influence on local life (see p. 1-2 of *Language and Communication*).

The Bulgarians: By the 9th century, neighboring Bulgarians had defeated the Avars and Slavs. Through their ties to the Byzantine Empire centered in Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), the Bulgarians facilitated the spread of Christianity in the region (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). By the 10th century, the region began to divide into small **voievodates** (dukedom) that eventually merged to form the 3 principalities of Transylvania, Wallachia, and Moldavia.

The Hungarians Gain Transylvania

The Hungarians entered Dacia in the 10th century, overwhelming many Slavic and Daco-Romanian *voievodates*. Beginning in the 11th century, the Magyars, a Hungarian ethnic group, invaded then incorporated the territory of Transylvania into the Kingdom of Hungary, ushering in almost 900 years of Hungarian dominance.

To bolster their control of Transylvania in the 12th and 13th centuries, Hungarian rulers invited foreigners to settle the region. These settlers included Hungarian Szeklers (primarily Roman Catholic or later Calvinist), who became large landowners, and German Saxons (later primarily Lutheran), who settled in market towns. These newcomers prospered, becoming society's elite. By contrast, the Romanian-speaking Eastern Orthodox native inhabitants were primarily peasants with few privileges. By the 14th century, the Saxons had established flourishing towns in Transylvania, often heavily



fortified to withstand continuing incursions by Tatars from Central Asia. Meanwhile, the Romanians faced increased discrimination that was at least partly based on their Orthodox faith (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Medieval Wallachia and Moldavia

Wallachia and Moldavia also experienced foreign domination in the medieval period but enjoyed some periods of self-rule. In the 13th century, Tatars violently conquered much of those 2 principalities. While

the details are unknown, historians believe that members of the Roma ethnic group (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*) likely entered the region during this time, many of whom were later enslaved. Moreover, large landowners known as **boyars** bound Romanian and Roma peasants in a brutal system of serfdom that persisted for centuries. Both Wallachia and Moldavia enjoyed brief periods of independence in the 14th century when powerful Romanian rulers repelled invading Hungarians and Tatars.

Ottoman Influence

In the late 13th century, an Islamic Turkic dynasty in the territory of present-day Turkey founded the Ottoman Empire. By the mid-14th century, the Ottoman Turks were expanding rapidly to the north and would influence much of the territory of modern-day Romania until the late 19th century.

While Wallachian ruler Mircea cel Bătrân (Mircea the Elder) temporarily halted the Ottomans' advance in 1394, the Ottomans continued their expansion efforts. Considering themselves Christian bulwarks against Islamic expansion, Transylvania, Wallachia, and Moldavia delivered a fierce resistance in the mid-15th century. Important Romanian heroes still today, Wallachia's Vlad Țepeș and Moldavia's Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great) (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*) managed to keep the Ottomans at bay for a time, winning brief periods of independence.

The Real Dracula

Vlad III Draculă (meaning Vlad III, son of the Dragon) was born in Wallachia around 1431. As a child, Vlad was imprisoned by the Ottomans who sought to ensure his father's loyalty. As Prince of Wallachia, Vlad pursued revenge against the Turks, becoming infamous for his ruthless battlefield tactics. Besides decapitating, boiling, and burying his enemies alive, Vlad impaled victims on wooden stakes, avoiding all vital organs to ensure excruciating pain. This last activity earned him the nickname Vlad Țepeș (Vlad the Impaler). Accounts of Vlad's cruelty as well as Romanian folktales about vampires inspired Irish author Bram Stoker in 1897 to write *Dracula*, the infamous story of a bloodthirsty vampire.

Wallachia and Moldavia: Wallachia and Moldavia were ultimately unable to withstand the Turks' superior power. Battlefield losses to the Ottomans in the late 15th century ended the 2 regions' sovereignty for most of the next 4 centuries. Unlike many other conquered lands, Wallachia and Moldavia never

became Ottoman provinces. Instead, the Ottomans allowed the 2 regions to retain some autonomy while paying annual tributes to the Empire.

Transylvania: Meanwhile, Transylvania experienced significant peasant uprisings in the 15th and early 16th centuries that exacerbated political divisions within the ruling Kingdom of Hungary. Taking advantage of the Kingdom's fragility, the Ottomans attacked. Following a decisive 1526 battle, the Kingdom of Hungary was partitioned between the Ottomans and the House of Habsburg (one of Central Europe's most influential royal dynasties based in Vienna, Austria). Transylvania became a semi-autonomous state (still dominated by Hungarian and German elites) that paid tribute to the Ottomans. Throughout the 16th century, Transylvania flourished as a trading center between the Ottoman Empire and the House of Habsburg.

Brief Unification under Michael the Brave

Resistance to the Ottomans continued. After defeating the Turks in 1595, Prince Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave) of Wallachia overthrew the Transylvanian ruler in 1599. A year later, he seized the Moldavian throne, uniting the 3 principalities for the first time. The union was short, ending in 1601 with Mihai's assassination by Transylvanians unhappy with his rule. Subsequently, Moldavia and Wallachia returned to Ottoman domination. By contrast, Transylvania enjoyed independence from both the Habsburgs and Ottomans for a few decades.



Challenges to Ottoman Control

Beginning in the early 17th century, the Ottomans faced challenges to their control of Moldavia and Wallachia that would continue until the 2 principalities eventually won their independence in the 19th century. First, the Hapsburgs in Vienna sought to expand their holdings, seizing territory in Wallachia in 1718 and then in Moldavia in 1775. Then from the

east, Russia under Empress Catherine the Great delivered a series of defeats to the Ottomans in the late 18th century. Their battleground grew to include Moldavia and Wallachia in the early 19th century, when the Russians occupied Bucharest (the Wallachian capital) and then successfully repelled a massive Ottoman offensive. In 1812, Russia annexed Bessarabia, a region of Moldavia that it would hold for the next 100 years.

Conflict between the Russians and Ottomans flared again in the 1820s. Following heavy fighting, the Ottomans sued for peace in 1829, then signed a treaty that formally allowed Russia to occupy Moldavia and Wallachia. Russia ruled both these principalities directly from 1829-34, then allowed assemblies to elect local rulers to rule them as Russian protectorates. Many Romanian *boyars* resented the Russian presence and began to demand political reform and an end to all foreign domination.

The Phanariot Regime

Ottoman domination of Wallachia and Moldavia reached its peak with the Phanariot regime. To bolster their control, the Ottomans required local rulers to accept Phanariots (Greeks from the Ottoman Empire) as advisers. Following uprisings in the early 18th century, the Ottomans appointed Phanariots to govern directly. While Phanariot rule caused much suffering among the Romanian population, the actions of individual rulers had some positive effects, such as the abolishment of serfdom. The Ottomans ended Phanariot rule in 1822.

The Habsburgs Acquire Transylvania

Meanwhile, foreign powers continued to struggle for control of semi-autonomous Transylvania. In an effort to gain territory in central Europe, the Ottomans unsuccessfully besieged the Habsburg capital of Vienna in 1683. The conflict lingered, finally ending with a 1699 treaty which gave Habsburg-controlled Hungary direct control of Transylvania.

In the mid-18th century, Romanian intellectuals in Transylvania formed the Transylvania School, an organization that articulated a Romanian sense of identity and nationhood for the first time. While the movement was ultimately unsuccessful in bringing about any real change in Transylvania, its platform served as the basis for 19th-century Romanian national movements. Meanwhile, continuing dire conditions for Transylvania's Romanian peasants caused riots in the late 18th century. While the Romanians' living standards began to improve after the Habsburgs abolished serfdom, they remained subservient to Habsburg, Hungarian, and German elites.

The 1848 Revolutions and their Aftermath

Inspired by European Enlightenment philosophy that emphasized the dignity of the individual and the ideals of the French Revolution, Romanians in all 3 principalities sought to improve their situations in the 19th century. Schools offered Romanians new educational opportunities, such as higher education in the Romanian language for the first time in 1813 (see p. 1 of *Learning and Knowledge*). In 1828, the first newspaper in the Romanian language was published.



Revolutionary waves sweeping through Europe in 1848 also reached Romania, prompting popular democratic uprisings in all 3 principalities. While the ruling Romanian prince in Moldavia quickly suppressed the movement, more radical revolutionaries emerged in Wallachia. Known as the “forty-eighters,” these radicals

managed to establish a provisional government, though the Russians quickly suppressed it.

Meanwhile, Russia and the Ottoman Empire continued their struggle for regional domination during the Crimean War of 1853-55. In a setback for Russia, the 1859 Congress of Paris confirmed Ottoman rights to Wallachia and Moldavia.

Wallachia and Moldavia Unite as Romania

The principalities rejected Ottoman domination, preferring to strive for independence. In a show of national unity, they held elections in 1859 and named Moldavian Minister of War Alexandru Ioan Cuza their Prince and single ruler. By 1861, most European governments had recognized Cuza as the legitimate leader of the new United Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, renamed Romania a year later.

As ruler, Prince Cuza introduced a modern legal system and ambitious economic, military, social, educational, and land reforms. Exhibiting increasing authoritarianism, Cuza also adopted a new constitution giving him extensive powers. In 1866, a coalition of *boyars* and new political parties unhappy with his reforms forced Cuza to abdicate.

Hungarian Control of Transylvania Reaffirmed

Meanwhile, Habsburg control of Transylvania continued. When the 1848 wave of revolutionary ideas reached the Kingdom of Hungary (also controlled by the Habsburgs), it found immediate support. Among other demands, Hungarian reformers sought to fully absorb Transylvania into an independent Hungarian state. Within Transylvania, support for these goals split along ethnic lines: while the Hungarian Magyars desired unification with Hungary, Romanians objected, even forming guerilla units to fight the Hungarians.



Following a series of defeats by the Hungarian revolutionaries, the Habsburgs requested help from Russia. The combined Russian-Habsburg counteroffensive proceeded to crush the Hungarians and suppress the revolution. To appease the ongoing calls of Hungarian separatists, the Habsburgs re-established the Kingdom of Hungary's sovereignty within a dual Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867. In the process, Transylvania became a full province of the Kingdom of Hungary.

While Transylvania saw significant economic development in subsequent decades, its Romanian residents suffered. With its policy of Magyarization, the Hungarian rulers aimed to assimilate all non-Magyar residents of the Kingdom. Accordingly, the government made Hungarian the official language of Transylvania while banning the use of Romanian and restricting Romanians' access to education. In response, Transylvania's Romanians formed cultural associations and political parties to defend Romanian identity and rights.

The Kingdom of Romania

Just as Hungary was reinforcing its hold on Transylvania, Romanians in Wallachia and Moldavia looked beyond Romania's borders for leadership. Upon Cuza's abdication in 1866, they invited German Prince Karl von Hohenzollern to rule the country. Upon taking the oath of office, Karl became Prince Carol I of Romania.



Over the next few years, Romania experienced significant growth as a nation, adopting a constitution outlining a parliamentary system as political parties formed. When conflict between Russia and the Ottoman Empire flared again in 1877, the Kingdom of Romania joined the Russians, hoping to finally end the Ottomans' claims to Romanian

territory. Following the Ottomans' defeat, the Treaty of Berlin formally ceded the Moldavian territory of Bessarabia to Russia while granting Romania certain Ottoman territories on the Black Sea, including Dobrogea (see p. 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*). In 1881, Prince Carol I was crowned King of Romania as the international community recognized Romania's formal declaration of independence from the Ottoman Empire.

In a bid to bolster Romania's regional power in 1883, King Carol I joined the Triple Alliance, a secret mutual support agreement among Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. Despite the formal alliance, Romania experienced tensions with its allies, primarily due to Hungary's ongoing repression of Romanians in Hungary-controlled Transylvania.

During this period, the Kingdom of Romania experienced a blossoming of literature, art, and education. Although the regional economy began to grow through the export of raw materials and industrialization, most Romanians remained poor peasants. Discontent flared in 1907 when peasants across the region revolted. The army violently suppressed the movement, resulting in the deaths of thousands. While the Kingdom contemplated land reforms and universal suffrage in 1913, the onset of the “Great War” halted these developments.

World War I (WWI)

In 1914, WWI broke out between the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire) and the Allies (the US, Britain, France, and Russia, among others). Because of his association with the Triple Alliance and his personal sympathies for Germany, Carol I urged Romania to enter the war in support of the Central Powers. The Romanian government rejected this suggestion, largely due to ongoing tensions with Hungary as well as strong public support for France. Consequently, the Kingdom of Romania declared its neutrality.

Following King Carol I's death in 1914, his nephew Ferdinand took the throne. Romania bowed to Allied pressure and public preferences and entered the war aligned with the Allies in 1916. A key condition for this decision was assurance that the Kingdom would be awarded Transylvania and other territories in the event of an Allied victory.

Following Romania's strong initial offensive, the Central Powers counterattacked and invaded on multiple fronts, soon occupying 2/3 of the country. The situation became dire in 1917 when the distraction of the



Russian Revolution forced Russia to withdraw its support to Romania. To prevent any further loss of territory, Romania was forced to sign a humiliating treaty with the Central Powers.

Nevertheless, the war continued. When the Allies launched an offensive into the Kingdom, Romania resumed military operations in their support. When the Allies won the war, Romania nullified the previous treaty with the Central Powers and participated in new treaty negotiations as a victor.

Greater Romania

The 1920 Treaty of Trianon formally ending WWI aimed to punish Austria-Hungary for its aggressive role in the war. Consequently, Romania acquired Transylvania – home to about 2.8 million Romanians, 1.6 million Hungarians, and 250,000 Germans – and additional Austrian territory. Further, Romania officially gained the Moldavian region of Bessarabia from Russia. The addition of these territories more than doubled Romania's size and population while dramatically altering its ethnic composition.

Now known as "Greater Romania," the country appeared poised to evolve into a stable constitutional monarchy. But despite democratic progress, such as a 1923 constitution guaranteeing equal rights, tensions persisted. With about 28% of the population consisting of minorities, the majority Romanians largely mistrusted the minorities' efforts to maintain their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness. Further, Romania's Jewish inhabitants, some 4.2% of the population in 1930, were subject to pervasive anti-Semitism and discrimination.

Initially, Greater Romania's economy strengthened. Industry developed rapidly, particularly in the oil, coal, and steel sectors. Although the government enacted long-awaited land reforms, agriculture largely remained inefficient with peasants toiling on small plots with outdated techniques and tools.

Political Instability: In 1926, King Ferdinand died. Because his son, Carol II, had renounced the throne in 1928 in order to pursue a relationship with his common-law wife in France, Carol II's son Mihai (Michael) inherited the throne. Since Mihai was only 6-years-old, a 3-member regency



was appointed to reign in his place. Free and fair elections that year brought Transylvanian Iuliu Maniu of the National Peasant Party to office as Prime Minister (PM).

Carol II's absence from the throne was brief. Following the 1929 New York stock market crash and subsequent economic instability, Maniu overthrew the elected government and asked Carol II to retake the throne. Political stability proved uncertain. Between 1930-38, Carol II replaced the PM 11 times. Further, the collapse of agricultural prices and widespread unemployment further undermined confidence in democratic governance, while facilitating the growth of extremist nationalistic and anti-Semitic political movements.

The largest of these far-right political movements was the fascist Iron Guard, which in the 1937 elections won almost 16% of the vote. Carol II tried to contain the political situation, spying on opponents and becoming increasingly authoritarian. In 1938, he dissolved Parliament, banned all political parties, and declared a royal dictatorship. Meanwhile, political instability continued, with Carol II directly appointing 6 different PMs in 2 years.



Moreover, violence between the authorities and fascists increased, resulting in the murders of 4 PMs between 1938-40.

As part of its war preparations in early 1939, Nazi Germany

demanded a monopoly on Romanian exports, in return guaranteeing Romania's borders would remain intact. Romania's economy grew rapidly, but it still feared losing the territory gained after WWI, especially to Russia, now known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

World War II (WWII)

When Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler invaded Poland in September 1939, officially beginning WWII, Romania remained neutral. In June 1940, the USSR invaded Romanian territory, reclaiming Bessarabia and other lands. A few months later,

Hitler reneged on the earlier agreement, forcing Romania to transfer parts of Transylvania and other territories to Hungary and Bulgaria, reducing Greater Romania's territory by 1/3.

Facing widespread popular discontent with these territorial losses, King Carol II asked General Ion Antonescu to assume control of the country. Antonescu then forced Carol II to abdicate and pass the throne to his son, 19-year-old Mihai. As King, Mihai accepted Antonescu's efforts to establish a military government. While not a member of the Iron Guard himself, Antonescu used it to rally support for his so-called "National Legionary State," a fascist dictatorship. As one of his first steps, Antonescu formally aligned Romania with Nazi Germany's Axis alliance, which also included Italy, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Japan.

Under Antonescu, Romania implemented harsh anti-Jewish laws and policies as anti-Semitic violence increased. Because the Iron Guard's activities severely disrupted Romanian social and economic life, tensions between the Guard and the government developed. In early 1941, the Iron Guard attacked governmental forces. During 3 days of violence, the Iron Guard carried out a massacre in Bucharest that resulted in the brutal murder of dozens of Jewish citizens. Antonescu's army finally managed to defeat and dismantle the Iron Guard. Despite the Iron Guard's collapse, the persecution of Romania's Jews continued.



As an ally to Nazi Germany, Romania under Antonescu entered WWII in 1941 with the goal of regaining territory from the USSR. Combined Romanian and German forces invaded the USSR, swiftly regaining Bessarabia and other territories. Against the wishes of King Mihai and other Romanian leaders, Antonescu ordered Romanian troops to continue supporting the German campaign as it moved further into the USSR. As a reward, Hitler granted Romania control of captured territories in present-day Ukraine and Transnistria, now part of the present-day Republic of Moldova.

The Holocaust in Romania: On their way to invade the USSR, German and Romanian troops massacred around 10,000 Jews in Iași, Moldavia's regional capital. As they moved into Bessarabia and other Soviet territories, Romanian and German forces committed further atrocities. They murdered thousands of Jews outright while deporting many others to concentration camps and ghettos in Transnistria. These activities resulted in the deaths of some 150,000-250,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews. Romanian troops also committed the single worst massacre of the Holocaust in Odessa, Ukraine, killing some 100,000 Jews. Meanwhile, Hungarian occupiers in Transylvania deported some 150,000 Romanian Jews to the Nazi death camp in Auschwitz, Poland.

While Jews in Romania faced severe persecution during the war years, the Romanian government did not systematically deport them to Nazi camps. Instead, it deported only those Jews identified as political prisoners. Nevertheless, these activities



resulted in some 20,000 deaths. By the war's end, Romania's Jewish population had shrunk from about 800,000 to less than 315,000. Further, German and Romanian forces had killed some 36,000

Roma, also deemed "undesirable" by the Nazi regime.

Defeat at Stalingrad: Romanian and German troops continued their campaign into the USSR through 1942, reaching the southern Russian city of Stalingrad (Volgograd today) in late summer. Through the fall and winter, a fierce battle raged that included nearly 2.2 million troops. After experiencing heavy casualties, the Germans and Romanians were forced to retreat in February 1943. Over the next months, the Soviets pushed steadily westward and were soon threatening Romania's borders. Although opposition to the war mounted, Antonescu continued to support the German efforts into 1944.

Romania Switches Sides: As it became clear that Germany would lose the war, King Mihai and Antonescu's political opponents scrambled to avoid Soviet invasion. Consequently, Mihai and Maniu tried to negotiate their surrender to the Allies. Unable to attain Antonescu's support, they carried out a coup, removing Antonescu from power and arresting him in August 1944. Romania then signed an armistice with the Allies that placed Romanian forces under Soviet army control. The armistice also returned Transylvania to Romania while allowing the USSR to retake Bessarabia and other territories that Romania had gained in 1941, thus drawing Romania's current borders.

Romania subsequently severed ties with the Axis Powers as German troops withdrew.

Within days, the Soviet army entered Romania and occupied Bucharest. Besides paying reparations to the USSR, Romania contributed forces to support Soviet



advances further west. At war's end in May 1945, Romania was devastated. Besides war casualties estimated at 625,000 and the deaths brought by the Holocaust, Romania lost significant territory and infrastructure. The 1945 Yalta Agreement among the Allies confirmed Romania's place within the Soviet sphere of influence. In 1946, a Romanian military firing squad executed Antonescu following a brief trial overseen by the Soviets.

Transition to Communist Rule

When the Soviets entered Romania in 1944, local communists began to organize after years of repression during the 1920s and 1930s. As Secretary General of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP), Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, collaborated with the Soviets to pressure King Mihai to appoint a pro-communist PM to head the government. The Soviets used all means to extend their control, notably tapping the security apparatus to suppress opposition. By 1946, the communist government controlled all cultural activities, the press, and the military as Gheorghiu-Dej became Minister of the National Economy.

The Romanian People's Republic

In 1947, the communists continued to dismantle all political opposition, arresting and imprisoning democratic leaders like Maniu. The Soviets ensured communism's place in Romania by forcing King Mihai to abdicate in December 1947 and proclaiming the Romanian People's Republic.

Gheorghiu-Dej Takes Control: In 1948, the RCP became the Romanian Worker's Party (RWP), the sole legal political party.



As Secretary General of the RWP and leader of the government, Gheorghiu-Dej worked in subsequent years to convert Romania into a totalitarian communist state modeled after Stalin's brutal regime in the USSR. In 1949, the RWP abolished private land ownership and began a campaign to collectivize all farmland. The government sent over 180,000 opponents to labor camps or to exile in Siberia, USSR. Tens of thousands of laborers died building the Danube-Black Sea Canal, a Soviet-led project

that was eventually abandoned.

Stalin's death in 1953 initiated a change in Romania's relationship with the USSR. Gheorghiu-Dej rejected certain reformist trends in the USSR such as the USSR's preference that Romania scale back its industrialization efforts to become a supplier of agricultural products and raw materials to the USSR. Instead, Gheorghiu-Dej continued to adhere to Marxist-Leninist policies such as rapid industrialization based on centralized planning (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*).

Despite tensions between the 2 countries, Romania joined the Soviet-led collective defense treaty known as the Warsaw Pact in 1955. Further, it allowed Soviet troops to traverse Romania to suppress a Hungarian uprising in 1956. To show appreciation for Romania's compliance, the USSR withdrew all remaining troops from Romania in 1958.

By 1964, Romania had achieved a level of political and social autonomy from the USSR, although it continued to accept

technical and economic assistance. When Gheorghiu-Dej died in 1965, his protégé, Nicolae Ceaușescu, became Secretary General of RWP, again named the RCP, while a group of party leaders assumed control of the country. By 1969, Ceaușescu had consolidated power and assumed sole control of Romania, establishing a dictatorship that would last for the next 20 years.

The Ceaușescu Dictatorship

Like Gheorghiu-Dej, Ceaușescu sought to decrease the country's association with and dependence on the USSR while continuing Stalinist policies of repression and heavy industrialization. Ceaușescu also developed a foreign policy independent of the USSR while establishing political, economic, and diplomatic relations with the West. For example, Romania was the only Warsaw Pact country that refused to support the USSR's suppression of popular uprisings in Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1968. It also defied the USSR's boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

Ceaușescu successfully manipulated anti-Soviet sentiment to win popular support and increase his grip on power. Despite some cautious economic liberalization



in the early 1970s, the regime became increasingly oppressive in the late 1970s and 1980s. Ceaușescu intensified the repression of dissidents, making Romania a police state controlled by brutal secretive security forces known as the **Securitate**. No communication was secure: the *Securitate* relied on a network of informers to cultivate an atmosphere of constant suspicion and fear.

By the late 1970s, the economy began to falter, causing added hardships. In 1982, Ceaușescu introduced food and energy rationing to reduce Romania's growing foreign debt, causing severe shortages and widespread misery. In the late 1980s, Ceaușescu stepped up his plans for "systematization," a scheme to bulldoze thousands of villages and move their residents to new, centralized communities. While ordinary people suffered,

Ceaușescu built lavish palaces across the country and razed 1/6 of downtown Bucharest to construct the Palace of the Republic, the world's second largest administrative building after the Pentagon.



An Opening

Beginning in 1985, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev introduced a series of reforms that eventually resulted in the

dissolution of the USSR. These reforms – most notably **glasnost** (openness) and **perestroika** (restructuring) – introduced market forces into the struggling Soviet economy and increased individuals' freedom of expression. Although the reforms were largely unsuccessful at propping up the Soviet economy and state, they helped ignite democratic movements in Eastern Europe.

Ceaușescu's Fall: In November 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, marking the collapse of the Soviet bloc state of East Germany and the beginning of the end of communism across Eastern Europe. In mid-December, small demonstrations began in the western city of Timișoara when government officials tried to oust a Protestant pastor from office (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*). On December 20, the rallies swelled as thousands gathered to protest food shortages and the actions of the Ceaușescu regime generally. When security forces fired on the protestors, killing hundreds, outrage spread across Romania.

Some 100,000 people gathered in Bucharest a day later. As police and security forces again opened fire on the unarmed protesters, some military forces refused to do so. Consequently, Ceaușescu ordered the defense minister shot, causing more military units to join the protestors. As protestors and the army battled security forces on December 22, Ceaușescu fled Bucharest. The military subsequently captured him and his wife some 100 mi outside of the city. On December 25, a military tribunal tried the couple for economic destruction and genocide.

They were convicted and executed on live television that same day. In all, about 1,000 Romanians died in the revolutionary violence of 1989.

Post-communist Romania

Upon the fall of the Ceaușescu regime, Communist Party members immediately regrouped as the National Salvation Front (NSF). In 1990, NSF leader Ion Iliescu was elected President in Romania's first democratic election in over 50 years. While the election was generally free and fair, unrest continued, which Iliescu quelled with force.



In 1991, Romania adopted a new constitution granting equal rights to all citizens while protecting liberties such as free speech, religion, and private ownership. The constitution also formally established Romania as a republic with a semi-presidential system of government, whereby the President shares power with a PM. Iliescu was reelected in 1992, following violent suppression of opposition parties.

Despite Iliescu's grip on power, by 1993 Romania had 159 registered political parties. Although a new liberal democratic government took power in 1996, the late 1990s were marked by political infighting, corruption, and an unstable economy. The government introduced economic reforms and began accession talks with the EU in 1999, yet slow growth, rising unemployment, high inflation, and rampant corruption meant the many Romanians' standard of living declined. Nevertheless, political parties continued to alternate in power, helping to cement Romania's budding democracy.

Contemporary Romania

In 2004, Traian Băsescu was elected President on an anti-corruption platform. He presided over an era of rapid economic growth and relative stability as Romania joined NATO in 2004 and the EU in 2007. Nonetheless, the global financial crisis of 2008-09 caused an economic contraction, prompting the

government to cut pensions and public sector wages. While growth slowly returned in 2011, many Romanians were increasingly discontent with their economic, political, and social situations. Public protests escalated, eventually prompting the resignation of the ruling coalition and allowing a new, leftist government led by PM Victor Ponta to assume control in 2012.

Upon taking office, Ponta attempted to impeach Bănescu, now in his 2nd presidential term. Although popular support for Bănescu ultimately thwarted Ponta's efforts, Ponta went on to lead one of the most corrupt governments in recent history. In 2014, Ponta attempted to extend his political control by running for President. Following an election controversy in which the government blocked 3-4 million expatriates from voting,



opposition candidate Klaus Iohannis won. A Protestant of German background from Transylvania, Iohannis is Romania's first ethnic minority President.

After years of allegations, Ponta was charged with corruption in mid-2015. While he initially refused to quit his PM post, a fire at a Bucharest nightclub killed dozens, prompting massive anti-corruption protests and forcing

Ponta to resign. President Iohannis subsequently named Dacian Cioloș, an independent, as interim PM.

In the 2016 elections, Ponta's leftist former party once again assumed control of the Parliament, briefly bringing Sorin Grindeanu to power as PM until his ouster and replacement by fellow party member Mihai Tudose in June 2017 (see p. 7 of *Political and Social Relations*). While the economy remains stable, the country still grapples with persistent corruption. In 2015, former President Iliescu was charged with crimes against humanity for his role in suppressing the 1990 protests. Other recent corruption indictments, such as one against Bănescu for money laundering in 2016, show some progress in Romania's transition to a more transparent and liberal democracy.

A Romanian Origin Myth

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. They have played an especially important role in maintaining Romanian identity through centuries of foreign domination.

A well-known Romanian origin story tells of an endless ocean called Apa Sâmbetei where a god named Fîrtat roamed alone. Upset and uncertain how to end his solitude, Fîrtat threw his staff into the water where it sprouted a tree with a black serpent wrapped in its roots. When Fîrtat asked the serpent its identity, the snake opened its mouth to reveal a god named Nefîrtat inside, who said, "I am your brother!" to which Fîrtat replied, "I have no brother, but we can be friends."

Representing good and evil, Fîrtat and Nefîrtat proceeded to create the world. When Nefîrtat complained of having nothing to rest on, Fîrtat instructed him to dive into the sea to retrieve some mud, which then formed into an island. When Fîrtat fell asleep, the serpent told Nefîrtat to kill his friend by pushing him into the water. But every time Nefîrtat pushed Fîrtat, new land appeared to save him.

When Fîrtat awoke, the 2 friends molded the earth into mountains and lakes. Fîrtat and Nefîrtat then created the sky, which they rested on the tree's highest branches and decorated with jewels. Soon, the weight of the jewels began to sink the land, so the friends erected 4 pillars on top of 4 fish to prop up the sky. In the light of the jewels, the tree bore fruit, which Fîrtat and Nefîrtat sculpted into humans and animals. Peace reigned for some time until Nefîrtat's creatures became monsters as evil seeped into the world.



2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name

Romania
România

Political Borders

Ukraine: 373 mi
Moldova: 424 mi
Coastline: 140 mi
Bulgaria: 376 mi
Serbia: 329 mi
Hungary: 263 mi

Capital

Bucharest

Demographics

With a population of about 18.15 million, Romania is the 6th most populous European Union (EU) member. Significantly, Romania's population is aging, with about 23% of Romanians aged 65 or older. The population is also declining at an annual rate of -0.94% as families choose to have fewer children (see p. 4 of *Sex and Gender*) and many Romanians leave for education and employment opportunities abroad. About 55% of the population lives in urban areas, primarily in the capital city of Bucharest.



Flag

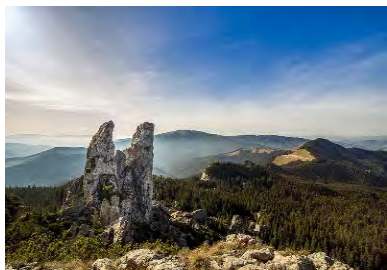
The Romanian flag consists of 3 equal vertical blue, yellow, and red stripes, the colors of Wallachia in 1848. The current

flag was adopted in 1989 and modeled after the French flag. The blue and red bands symbolize Moldavia while the yellow and red represent Wallachia, the 2 principalities that united to form Romania in 1861 (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). In another interpretation of the flag's significance, the blue band represents bravery and valor, the yellow generosity, and the red truth, loyalty, and justice.

Geography

Situated on the northern edge of the Balkan Peninsula in southeastern Europe, Romania borders Ukraine to the north and east, Moldova and the Black Sea to the east, Bulgaria to the south, and Serbia and Hungary to the west. Romania's total land area is about 89,000 sq mi, making it slightly smaller than Oregon and about the same size as Italy.

The Eastern Carpathian Mountains dominate Romania's North, forming an arc that circles and separates the central



Transylvanian Basin from the Moldavian Plateau in the East and the extended Wallachian Plain in the South. Also known as the Transylvanian Alps, the Southern Carpathians extend west into Serbia from the center of the

country. Romania's highest point is Moldoveanu, which rises to about 8,346 ft in the Southern Carpathians. Rolling, sub-Carpathian hills eventually give way to low, fertile plains along Romania's southern and eastern edges. The Danube, the EU's longest river, follows Romania's western and southern borders, forming a large delta in the East before emptying into the Black Sea. Forests cover about 30% of the country.

Climate

Romania experiences a mixed temperate and continental climate with 4 distinct seasons. Summers tend to be brief but warm, while winters are long, cold, and wet. Spring and fall are the shortest seasons. Temperatures in the summer month of July average 77°F. By contrast, in the winter month of January, temperatures average 27°F. Generally, coastal and southern regions experience warmer temperatures, while Romania's northern and mountainous areas tend to be cooler. Snowfall typically occurs December-March and can be severe. Showers and thunderstorms are common during summer months. Spring tends to be the driest season.

Natural Hazards

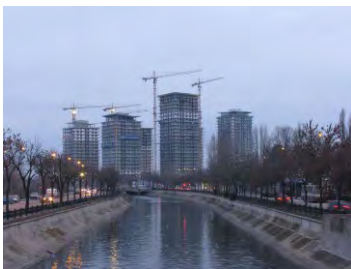
Romania is vulnerable to several types of natural hazards, including earthquakes, floods, and landslides. Located at the junction of 3 tectonic plates, Romania is particularly prone to earthquakes, which tend to be most severe in the South and Southwest. In 1977, Romania experienced one of its most devastating earthquakes, killing more than 1,500 and injuring over 11,000 people. It also caused widespread damage to Bucharest and the surrounding region. Since then, 14 more earthquakes (including one in 2023) have caused further loss of life and damage to infrastructure.

Recently, deforestation and the clearing of land from illegal logging (see “Environmental Issues” below) has left some regions vulnerable to occasional but disastrous flooding and landslides. The country also intermittently experiences droughts, which are intensified by careless farming practices and are most prevalent in the South.

Environmental Issues

Many of Romania’s environmental issues stem from unsafe and damaging industrialization activities performed by the communist government throughout the second half of the 20th century (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*). Detrimental activities, including the improper disposal of industrial waste, mismanagement of agricultural runoff, and the dumping of untreated sewage into groundwater reservoirs, caused significant water and air pollution. Recently, the government has attempted to resolve these problems by cleaning up coastal and inland waters, developing safer industrial processes, and regulating industrial and agricultural waste.

Despite some progress, these efforts are deficient. Consequently, many cities, rivers, and lakes remain heavily polluted, particularly in the South and along the Danube River delta.



Urban waste proliferates while the government struggles to maintain recycling programs that meet EU standards. Illegal logging, timber production, and land clearing results in deforestation, degrading and eroding the soil. In Bucharest, vehicle emissions contribute to poor air quality, helping make it the 10th most polluted capital in Europe.

Government

Romania is a democratic republic with a semi-presidential system of government. The country divides into 41 counties (*județ*) – each administered by federally appointed prefects, elected mayors, and community councils – and 1 municipality (*municipiu*) consisting of the capital Bucharest. Adopted in 1991 and amended in 2003, Romania's constitution separates power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches while outlining the fundamental rights and freedoms of Romanian citizens.

Executive Branch

As head-of-state and commander-in-chief of Romania's Armed Forces, the President is directly elected by popular vote to serve up to 2 consecutive 5-year terms. By contrast, the Prime Minister (PM) is head-of-government and is appointed by the President with the consent of Parliament. A 22-member Council of Ministers supports the PM. Historically, the PM is the leader or prominent member of the political party or coalition that holds the

most seats in the Parliament.

Executive power is vested in both the President and the PM who share executive duties, such as overseeing the country's day-to-day affairs,

exercising domestic and foreign policy, appointing positions in government, and making declarations of war and states of emergency. The current President, Klaus Iohannis, took office in



2014, and Romania's PM, Marcel Ciolacu, in 2023 (see p. 21 of *History and Myth*).

Legislative Branch

Romania's legislature is a 2-chamber Parliament (**Parlament**), composed of a 136-seat Senate in which 2 seats are reserved for the diaspora and a 330-seat Chamber of Deputies in which 4 seats are reserved for the diaspora.

In 2016, the elections returned to a party list vote-proportional representation voting system. All Parliament members serve 4-year terms.

The Parliament controls all federal legislative powers, such as amending the constitution, approving declarations of war, and passing the national budget.



Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes a High Court of Cassation and Justice, a Supreme Constitutional Court, Courts of Appeal, a system of lower courts which oversee minor cases, and military and arbitration courts. As the topmost court, the High Court of Cassation and Justice oversees civil, penal, commercial, and business cases and consists of 111 judges appointed by the President to serve renewable 6-year terms. The Supreme Constitutional Court consists of 9 members, each serving one 9-year term. The President appoints 3 justices, while the remaining 6 are elected by the Parliament. Of note, allegations of corruption plague the judiciary, with justices often criticized for dishonesty and vulnerability to bribery.

Political Climate

Romania's political landscape is characterized by a multi-party system in which coalitions of parties compete for power. Generally, those parties and coalitions, which hold the majority of seats in the Parliament, also occupy the bulk of government leadership positions and retain considerable political control.

The majority (52%) of Romania's current Parliament is held by a newly formed, center-right coalition comprised of the National Liberal Party (PNL), the Save Romania Union – Freedom, Unity and Solidarity Party (USR-PLUS) Alliance, and the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR). The leftist Social-Democratic Party (PSD), plagued by rampant charges of corruption in recent years, is the largest single party in



Parliament holding 34% of seats. While the PSD remains the largest political party in the Parliament, its vote share decreased by a third in the 2020 elections. The PSD also maintains its political influence

in local and county elections, holding the largest number of mayoral seats and the second largest number of local and county seats.

Of note, while Romania's current PM Ciolacu is leader of the PSD, President Iohannis, who shares executive powers with the PM, is an independent with a reputation for honesty and reliability. Representing the center-right, Iohannis advocates political and social reform, pro-business policies, the modification of judicial and voting processes, and stringent anti-corruption measures.

Although peaceful and fair general elections have recently strengthened political and social stability, the Romanian government still faces significant challenges to maintaining the democratic process. Corruption permeates all levels of government and engenders widespread distrust of public officials. Since the creation of the National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA), an agency charged with purging high-level corruption and led by Laura Codruța Kövesi, thousands of officials have been indicted, including dozens of mayors, 5 members of Parliament, 20 judiciary members, and a former PM. Significantly, over 90% of those indicted have been convicted.

Despite these efforts and President Iohannis' pledge to fight corruption, allegations of unfair or unlawful practices continue to plague government officials, even some from the ruling GCDD coalition. For example, within days of taking office in January 2017, former PM Grindeanu, a PSD member, proposed a contentious mass pardon of thousands of prisoners, prompting many Romanians, including President Iohannis, to protest in the largest demonstrations since the fall of communism in 1989. Parliament consequently ousted Grindeanu after less than 6 months into his tenure as PM, replacing him with Tudose.

Ongoing corruption scandals, combined with their experience during Romania's communist era (see p. 16-20 of *History and Myth*), make many Romanians both skeptical of and somewhat apathetic to the political process. As a result, Romania experiences a relatively low level



of community political participation. For example, voter turnout has declined in recent years, reaching only about 40% in the last 2 parliamentary elections.

Defense

The Romanian Armed Forces (RAF) are a unified military force consisting of primarily ground forces with smaller maritime and air branches, supplemented by a sizeable paramilitary force. With a joint strength of 69,900 active duty troops, 55,000 reserve personnel, and 57,000 paramilitary troops, the RAF are charged with defending against external and domestic threats, supporting disaster relief efforts, and protecting infrastructure. Romanians may voluntarily enlist in military service at age 18.

The RAF receives considerable military support from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – a political and military alliance among 32 nations (including the US) that promotes its members' security through collective defense. The RAF is

currently in the process of modernizing, notably to a Western-equipped Air Force, though much of its equipment is still from the Soviet era.



Army: The Romanian Army is a well-trained force of 35,500 active-duty troops, comprising 2 command divisions, a special forces brigade, 11 maneuver brigades, battalions, and

regiments (including reconnaissance, mechanized, light, and mountain), 14 combat support brigades, battalions, and regiments, 3 combat service support battalions, and 3 air defense regiments.

Navy: Consisting of 5,200 active-duty personnel, the Romanian Navy is the smallest of the branches. It is equipped with 3 principal surface combatants, 22 patrol and coastal combatants, 11 mine warfare and countermeasures vessels, 8 logistics and support vessels, and includes a naval infantry battalion.

Air Force: The Romanian Air Force consists of 11,700 active-duty personnel, with 4 fighter and ground attack squadrons, 2 transport



squadrons, 2 training squadrons, 4 transport helicopter squadrons, an air defense brigade, and a combat service support regiment. The Air Force has 44 combat capable aircraft and 61 helicopters.

Paramilitary: The Romanian Paramilitary forces consist of 57,000 Gendarmerie servicemen.

Romanian Air Force Rank Insignia



Marshal



General



Lieutenant
General



Major
General



Brigadier
General



Colonel



Lieutenant
Colonel



Major



Captain



Lieutenant



Sub
Lieutenant



Command
Chief
Master
Sergeant



Chief
Master
Sergeant



Senior
Master
Sergeant



Master
Sergeant



Technical
Sergeant



Staff
Sergeant



Master
Corporal



Corporal
First
Class



Corporal



Airman
First Class



Airman

Foreign Relations

Since the end of the communist era in 1989 (see p. 20 of *History and Myth*), Romania has sought to improve its international standing by rewriting undemocratic laws, attempting to battle crime and corruption, and building relations with Western European neighbors. Although Romania joined NATO in 2004 and the EU in 2007, rampant corruption, political instability, and economic woes hamper Romania's full political, economic, and social integration with the West.

International Cooperation: As a NATO member, Romania has regularly contributed to multinational operations and participated in various multinational military exercises. Looking to support shared NATO security interests, Romania has engaged in military activities in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Kosovo. Significantly, in 2015 Romania created a NATO Force Integration Unit to facilitate the rapid deployment of NATO troops in the region and in 2016 stood up a NATO command and control center in Bucharest.



In addition to its active participation in NATO, Romania also contributes to both the EU's and United Nations' (an intergovernmental organization established in 1945 to promote international cooperation) security, humanitarian assistance, and peacekeeping missions. Finally, Romania is a member of numerous international organizations. These include the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization.

Relations with the EU: The EU is a political and economic partnership among 27 nations located in Europe. Although Romania's record of organized crime, corruption, and social inequities initially delayed EU membership, Romania joined the

EU in 2007 on the condition that it would address these issues. Since then, the EU has reproached Romania for not adequately



curbing its rampant corruption, on multiple occasions threatening economic sanctions and blocking Romania from joining the Schengen passport-free zone in 2011. Romania's recent political controversies

(see p. 21 of *History and Myth*) have further strained relations with the EU.

Despite these tensions, EU membership remains popular among Romanian citizens who remain hopeful that full integration with the EU will positively influence Romania's social, economic, and political landscapes. Of note, in 2019 Romania held the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU, an institution that determines and steers the EU's general political direction and priorities.

Relations with Hungary: The relationship between Romania and Hungary was historically contentious due to Hungary's oppression of Romanians in Transylvania (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*). Then in 1996, the 2 nations signed a treaty formally establishing diplomatic relations and guaranteeing the rights and equal treatment of ethnic Hungarians living in Romania. The treaty successfully alleviated fears that the Hungarian government would incite social unrest among Romania's sizeable and historically segregated Hungarian population (see "Social Relations" below). Consequently, tensions between the 2 countries subsided. As Europe's migration crisis recently escalated (see "Security Issues" below), Hungary has considered erecting a fence along its Romanian border, creating new friction between the 2 nations.

Relations with the US: While relations between the US and Romania were occasionally strained during the communist era (see p. 16-20 of *History and Myth*), both nations have worked

diligently to develop and deepen ties over the last 3 decades. In 2011, the US and Romania formally entered into a strategic partnership to fortify political and military relations, foster trade and investment opportunities, cooperate on energy security, and address transnational crime. As a result, Romania has become an important regional advocate for the US, promoting stability, democracy, and pro-Western policies in the Black Sea region.

Today, the US provides Romania substantial defense assistance (see p. 5 of *Economics and Resources*) to bolster Romanian military capability and improve its interoperability with US and NATO forces. In addition to financial assistance, the US provides military training and equipment and maintains 6 joint military facilities in Romania which house hundreds of US military personnel and provide the US with vital strategic access to the Black Sea region.



The US and Romania have also signed several bilateral trade and investment agreements which protect intellectual property and allow goods, services, and capital to move more freely between the 2 nations.

Security Issues

After enjoying close to 3 decades of regional peace and stability, Romania has been preoccupied by an increasingly aggressive Russia over the last several years. In addition, a recent influx of migrants from Africa and the Middle East presents some security challenges.

Illegal migration: Thousands of refugees and migrants fleeing political unrest in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan illegally pass through Romania before moving onto northern and western Europe. In response, Romania has tightened its border security. While Romania has remained comparatively less affected by the migrant crisis than other European nations, it committed to

receiving over 6,000 refugees as part of a mandatory EU relocation plan in 2017. Due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Romania now hosts some 83,765 Ukrainians.

Relations with Russia: Russia's 2014 occupation of Crimea and subsequent ongoing unrest in eastern Ukraine, followed by invasion, have sparked tensions between Russia and Romania. Sharing a border with Ukraine, Romania views Russia's expanding presence there as both an immediate national security risk and destabilizing to the entire region. Of particular concern are Russia's on-going conflict with Ukraine and its bolstering of Russian military capacity along the Black Sea.

Relations substantially deteriorated in mid-2016, when the US installed and activated a missile defense system in southern Romania. This system is part of a larger NATO-operated defensive shield that stretches across Europe. Accordingly, Romania asserts that it serves to counter threats to NATO originating in the Middle East.

Threatened by the move, Russia claims that NATO intends to use the system to neutralize Russia's offensive capability in the event of war and its growing presence along the Black Sea.



Following the system's activation, Russia has threatened to retaliate against Romania, keeping tensions high.

Amid this friction, there also exists some apprehension that the Russian

government aims to weaken Romania's social and political alignment with the US and Western Europe by encouraging social unrest within the Romanian population. Experts assert that Russia is waging an information warfare campaign that erodes public faith in the EU, Romania's democratic institutions, and the government's recent anti-corruption and reform initiatives.

Ethnic Groups

Historically a crossroads for different ethnic groups, Romania today is a relatively homogenous country. Although Soviet troops occupied Romania from 1944-58, few Russians permanently settled in Romania like they did in many Soviet republics and Soviet bloc countries. According to the 2022 census, around 89% of the population is ethnically Romanian.

Hungarian Magyars and Szeklers have occupied Transylvania for centuries (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*). Today, Hungarians make up Romania's largest minority group, comprising almost 6% of the total population or 1 million people. Within Transylvania, Hungarians account for around 20% of the population.

Because Hungarians make up over 80% of the residents in Transylvania's central Harghita and Covasna counties, this area is often called "Székely Land." While some Hungarian communities are insulated from other groups, most Hungarians are integrated into Romanian society.



The 2022 census reports 569,500 Roma or "Gypsy" residents, equivalent to 3% of the population, though the actual number is likely over 1 million. An ethnic group of northern Indian origins, the Roma probably first arrived in the region during the 12th century. Many Roma were subsequently forced into slavery. Today, the Roma live across Romania but often concentrate in small, secluded communities on urban peripheries. Most Roma live highly segregated from Romanian society (see "Social Relations" below).

Once common in Transylvania, Germans now comprise about 0.1% of Romania's population. Other small minority groups include Ukrainians, Serbs, Croats, Russians, Greeks, Jews (see p. 15 of *History and Myth*), and primarily Muslim Turks and Tatars (see p. 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*), among others.

Social Relations

Romanians generally identify with 1 of 4 ethnographic regions (Wallachia, Moldavia, Transylvania, and Dobrogea) or with sub-regions such as Muntenia or Crișana. While cultural differences were more pronounced in the past, some variance in language, dress, and the arts remains (see p. 2 of *Language and Communication* and p. 1 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Romanian society divides along rural-urban, male-female, rich-poor, and generational lines. Urban dwellers, males, and the wealthy typically enjoy greater access to educational and economic opportunities and hold the most prestige. Women are more likely victims of domestic violence and face discrimination in the workplace (see p. 1-2 of *Sex and Gender*). Further, generational divisions exist between more conservative and skeptical older Romanians who experienced the communist era and younger people who did not.

Tensions sometimes arise among Romania's Hungarian minority. In particular, the issue of Székely Land autonomy and Hungarian political representation are contentious, occasionally causing demonstrations. Further, Romania has been slow to implement EU-recommended policies permitting the use of Hungarian in the courts and schools (see p. 3 of *Language and Communication* and p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge*).



Romania's Roma population suffers systemic societal harassment that affects their access to adequate education, housing,

healthcare, and employment opportunities. These shortfalls result in high poverty and low educational attainment rates. Under EU pressure, the Romanian government has set goals to improve Roma health and welfare and promote Roma language and culture. Because of uneven implementation, poverty and unemployment remain serious problems (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*).

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

With over 95% of its inhabitants identifying as Christian, Romania is one of Europe's most religious countries. According to the 2022 census, over 85% of the population claim membership in the Romanian Orthodox Church, some 5% are Roman Catholics, around 4% Protestants, and fewer than 1% identify as Greek Catholics.



Romania's constitution protects freedom of religion, while guaranteeing state support to 18 recognized religious denominations. Besides the traditions mentioned above, recognized denominations include other Orthodox churches, Judaism, and Islam. By law, these 18 groups retain some rights and privileges not granted to other religious groups. These include the right to hold religious classes in public schools, establish private schools, and receive government funds to build places of worship, pay clergy, broadcast religious programming, and minister to military personnel.

Romania's Early Spiritual Landscape

Present-day Romania's early inhabitants, the Geto-Dacians (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*), had a rich spiritual life. A 5th-century BC Greek historian known as Herodotus recorded that Geto-Dacians worshipped a divine being called Zalmoxis and believed in the immortality of the soul. Other sources suggest Zalmoxis was not a god but a priest and follower of Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras. Archaeological research has revealed that the capital of 1st-century Geto-Dacian King Decebalus included several temples and a large sanctuary (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*), though scholars know few details about the intended use of such structures.

The Arrival and Spread of Christianity

Although the Roman Empire relinquished control of the area of present-day Romania around 275 AD, its culture and language continued to influence the region for centuries (see p. 2-3 of *History and Myth*). Consequently, Christianity came to the area through the Romans who introduced early forms of the new religion in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. In the 4th century, the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as its official religion, facilitating its spread. It found further support when Christian Bulgarians conquered the region in the 9th century.

Between the 8th-9th centuries, a dispute over the use of icons in worship rocked the Christian world. In subsequent years, philosophical and theological differences between western and eastern branches of the Christian movement resulted in greater estrangement. In the Schism of 1054, the leaders of the 2 branches, the Pope in Rome and the Patriarch in Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), excommunicated each other. The end result was a permanent division between the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox tradition.

In subsequent centuries, Wallachia and Moldavia became religiously and culturally aligned with the Eastern Orthodox



tradition of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire. Gradually, Romanians in Transylvania also became adherents of this branch of Christianity.

Religion in the 3 Principalities

In contrast to Wallachia and Moldavia, Transylvania became more religiously diverse beginning in the 12th century. To bolster their control of the region, Hungarian rulers invited Roman Catholic Hungarians and Protestant Germans to settle the region (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*). Beginning in the 14th century, the predominantly Orthodox Romanian population experienced discrimination under Hungarian rulers that persisted for centuries.

During the medieval period, the rulers of Moldavia and Wallachia saw themselves as Christian buffers against the expansion efforts of the Muslim Ottoman Turks (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*). Besides fighting the Ottomans in the mid-15th century, Moldavian leader Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great) also built monasteries and churches that still stand today.



While the Muslim Ottomans dominated the 2 principalities until the 19th century, they never tried to impose their religion on the region. As a result, the Orthodox Church flourished. Of note, a sizeable influx of Jews occurred between

the 15th-17th centuries, although they were denied citizenship for centuries.

In the 18th century, Hungarian rulers sought to integrate multi-ethnic and multi-religious Transylvania into the Roman Catholic Habsburg Empire (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*). Consequently, the rulers successfully persuaded some Orthodox clergy to accept the authority of the Roman Catholic Pope. In doing so, these clergy were forced to leave the Orthodox Church and in the process founded a new church, the Greek Catholic Church (GCC). While never spreading far beyond Transylvania, the GCC was influential in articulating a sense of Romanian national identity for the first time.

Religion in Romania before World War II

In the 19th century, Wallachians and Moldavians borrowed the GCC's ideas concerning Romanian national identity. Seeking to replace the historic regional identities and unify all Romanians, they interwove nationality and religion in a new way, connecting Romanian identity to Romanian Orthodoxy. When Moldavia and Wallachia united as the new country of Romania in the mid-19th century, the constitution gave the Romanian Orthodox Church

(ROC) a privileged status. In this way, the ROC and the Romanian state became closely enmeshed. While Romania did grant Jews citizenship rights in the late 19th century, the Romanian Orthodox majority largely mistrusted them. Anti-Semitism grew, especially in the years between the World Wars (see p. 12-14 of *History and Myth*).

World War II (WWII)

While Romania's participation in WWII as an ally to Nazi Germany had devastating consequences to its entire population, its Jewish residents suffered most (see p. 15 of *History and Myth*). Emigration, deportation, death from starvation and disease, and murder reduced the Jewish community's population by almost 500,000. At war's end in 1945, just 315,000 Jews remained in Romania, their property confiscated and many places of worship destroyed.



Religion during the Communist Period

When the communists assumed control at the end of WWII, they brought significant changes to Romania's spiritual landscape. The communist worldview included atheism, or the disbelief in deities and the rejection of religion. Consequently, the Romanian communist state persecuted or outlawed many religious organizations. While the ROC was allowed to continue functioning, its activities were strictly supervised by the communist government.

In the immediate post-war years, the communists tried in various ways to increase their control of all religious activities. In 1948, the communist government tried to dissolve the GCC by confiscating many of its churches and turning them over to the ROC. In 1950, the government ordered the Baptists, the Seventh-day Adventists, and the Pentecostals to unite as the Federation of Protestant Cults.

Realizing that the ROC could be useful to the regime in pursuing its communist goals, the government focused most of its control efforts on the ROC. First, the government purged the clergy of the independent-minded, then closely controlled access to the ROC's theological schools and seminaries. The authorities also heavily censored ROC publications and denied it a role in educational and charitable activities.

The state closed monasteries, jailing thousands of monks and nuns. To retain their positions, some priests became informers (see p. 18 of *History and Myth*) or worked as police spies, even disclosing the contents of confessions. Through it all, the government controlled the ROC hierarchy, appointing a series of patriarchs (leaders) who at the least turned a blind eye to discrimination and religious persecution and at worst were staunch defenders of communism.



The government increased its anti-religion activities again in the 1970s and 1980s under dictator Ceaușescu (see p. 18-19 in *History and Myth*). In contrast to earlier decades,

Romanians began to publicly object to these infringements on religious freedom. In response, the government demolished or relocated more churches and monasteries while jailing dissidents. Protests against government efforts to remove Protestant pastor László Tökés from his post helped trigger the 1989 fall of the communist regime (see p. 19-20 of *History and Myth*).

ROC collaboration with the communist regime persisted until Ceaușescu's downfall (see p. 19-20 of *History and Myth*). The ROC patriarch even sent a telegram to the dictator offering support following anti-communist demonstrations in December 1989. While cooperation with the communists allowed the ROC to survive throughout the communist era, it did not emerge unscathed, with many observers rejecting the ROC as morally compromised.

Religion Today

Romanians are in general a spiritual people. In a recent survey, over 97% of Romanians claimed to believe in God while over 95% agreed that religion was important to them. Despite these high rates of spirituality, respondents reported significantly lower rates of attendance at religious services. Some 38% reported attendance only on major holidays, while 25% reported weekly attendance. Church attendance also varies by geography and age. In rural areas where the church still plays an important social role, attendance is typically high, especially among older inhabitants.

ROC: Since the collapse of communism and establishment of religious freedom in 1990, the ROC has enjoyed a resurgence of interest yet must confront new challenges. Monasteries and convents have resumed operations and now support over 8,000 monks and nuns. Some 14 new theology faculties and seminaries have opened. Further, the ROC has resumed its missionary activities as well as its outreach to other religious traditions. In 1999, Romania welcomed Pope John Paul II, the first time the head of the Roman Catholic Church visited a predominantly Orthodox country. Meanwhile, the ROC must adapt to the presence of other denominations, some of which are trying to convert ROC members to prevailing secularism within the EU.

Islam: According to the 2022 census, almost 66,000 Romanians or 0.4% of the population are Muslim, mostly adherents of the Hanafi sect (considered the oldest and most liberal) of the Sunni branch. Most Romanian Muslims live in Dobrogea, a territory bordering the



Black Sea that Romania acquired from the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*). While most Muslim Romanians are ethnically Tatar or Turk, a few are Albanian, Roma, or recent immigrants from Asia or the Middle East.

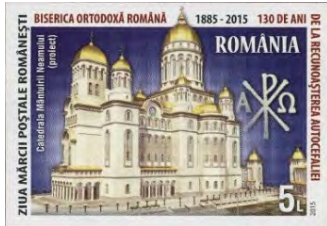
Judaism: At the end of WWII, Romania's Jewish population decreased dramatically. By the 1960s, some 200,000 Romanian Jews had settled in Israel with another 80,000 moving to other countries. During the Ceaușescu era (see p. 19-20 of *History and Myth*), the communist government allowed Jews to migrate to Israel in exchange for cash payments. The Jewish population continued to shrink throughout the communist era, falling to about 70,000 by 1977. Today, Romania's Jewish population ranges between 9,000-15,000.

In the early 2000s, several Romanian politicians, notably President Iliescu (see p. 20 of *History and Myth*), denied the Holocaust had taken place in Romania. Following international outcry, a government commission conducted investigations. Among other findings, they revealed that some 40,000 claims for Jewish property forcefully taken before and during the war were still unanswered. In response, Parliament passed a law in 2016 prioritizing Jewish property restitution claims.

Religion and the State

While the historically strong connection between the Romanian state and ROC continues today, the government has made progress toward freedom of religion, though not without some controversy. Although the government reinstated the GCC's legal status, it has been slow to restore properties taken from that church during the communist era. Further, anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic speech and incidents regularly occur.

For many, the election of Protestant Klaus Iohannis as President in 2014 signaled a break in ROC-government collaboration. Nevertheless, the government still provides significant financial support to the ROC. The government's role in funding construction of a new ROC cathedral in Bucharest has been especially controversial. Opened in 2018, the new Cathedral for the Salvation of the Romanian People will be the world's tallest Orthodox church when completed in 2024.



4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

Romanians typically have a strong sense of family and community. Due to economic hardships at home, some Romanians choose to work abroad, sending large portions of their earnings to family members still in Romania.

Residence

Rural residences are usually larger than their urban counterparts but may lack modern conveniences, such as indoor plumbing. As of 2023, 45% of Romanians live in rural areas.

Rural: Romanians traditionally lived on farms averaging 12 acres or less. Early in the communist era, the government abolished private land ownership (see p. 17 of *History and Myth*) in an attempt to transform villages into collective farms called “agro-technical centers.” Despite some changes, these efforts did not permanently transform rural housing traditions, and many Romanians still occupy rural farmhouses.

A rural Romanian farmhouse normally contains 2-3 bedrooms. Grounds usually include a garden, orchard, and outbuildings. The home interior is often decorated with handmade carpets, paintings, and religious icons. Some houses contain 2 cooking

areas – a winter kitchen in the farmhouse and a summer kitchen elsewhere on the property.



families live in older, historic houses, most urban residents live in multi-story apartment buildings constructed during the communist era (see p. 19 of *History and Myth*).

Urban: Slightly more than half of Romanians live in urban areas. Although some

Apartments typically have 2-3 rooms, 1 often pairing as both the living room and a bedroom. With the privatization of the housing market following the end of communist rule, apartment prices in cities skyrocketed. Urban residents today still struggle to find affordable housing while homelessness, all but nonexistent during the communist era, is a growing issue. Due to these challenging urban conditions, many Romanians prefer to live in newly-constructed apartment buildings in suburban areas.

Family Structure

Romanians typically prefer to live with or near their extended family. This tradition often continues in rural areas, where 3 generations may live on the same property. While some urban households are limited to nuclear families (2 parents and their children), many families also include grown children or 3 generations, often due to a lack of space or high housing costs. Traditionally, the father was the head of the household and primary breadwinner, though this custom has not reflected reality for decades. Instead, many women also work outside the home while maintaining responsibility for household chores and childrearing (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*).

Children

Since some parents work away from home, either in other Romanian communities or outside the country, their children sometimes live with relatives. Children typically live with their parents or relatives until their education ends, or until they become financially independent. While children in rural areas often hold responsibility for household tasks, urban children usually focus exclusively on their schoolwork. Adult children frequently support their parents financially, also providing care when they are no longer self-sufficient. Romania's government continues to encourage childbearing (see "Romania's Orphans" below and p. 4 of *Sex and Gender*) to reverse the country's negative population growth (see p. 1 of *Political and Social Relations*).



Romania's Orphans

In an effort to increase the birth rate and expand the workforce during the communist era, the government outlawed abortion and contraceptives. These policies, referred to as “pro-natalist policies,” resulted in many thousands of children ending up in underfunded institutions plagued with neglect and abuse. After the fall of the communist regime, the appalling conditions of Romanian orphanages provoked global outrage and sympathy as the new democratic government vowed to overhaul its services for orphans and the disabled. Today, many institutions have improved significantly, though some are still marked by overcrowding, substandard medical treatment, and the absence of appropriate psychological therapy.

Childhood Ceremonies

Birth: Following a child's birth, Romanian parents appoint godparents who typically provide significant moral and financial support to the child throughout his life. Around 40 days following the birth, a christening ceremony is held to name the baby. Traditionally, the godparents named babies after other family members or Orthodox Christian saints. Today, many new parents prefer to name their babies themselves, often choosing modern names.

Baptism: The godparents also play an important role in a child's Orthodox baptism, demonstrating their responsibilities as the child's spiritual guides. The godparents typically carry the baby to church and hold him during the ceremony. The festivities following the ceremony may include hundreds of guests and often last for hours.

First Birthday: A child's first birthday is typically a festive event in which the godparents follow a ritual called *ruperea turtei* or *taierea motului*. They cut a lock a hair from the back of the child's head and then place a small piece of bread above the

head and break it into the shape of the cross. While the specifics of the ritual differ slightly across the country, it generally symbolizes luck and prosperity.



Coming-of-Age: To celebrate a child's 18th birthday and passage to legal adulthood, many

families host a special party called a **majorat**. Festivities often continue until dawn.

Dating and Marriage

Boys and girls typically interact from a young age and may begin casual dating around age 14. Popular activities for young couples include taking walks, dancing, and going to movies or parties. Increasingly, Romanians rely on the Internet to meet potential partners.

The legal age of marriage in Romania is 18 years, though some girls marry as young as 16. Most Romanians marry in their 20s. While unmarried cohabitation is increasingly common, this practice arouses mild stigma in urban areas and strong disapproval in rural areas. Of note, some Roma communities (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*) practice arranged child marriage. A 2019 study estimates 39% of Roma women married as minors.

Weddings: Weddings in both rural and urban areas tend to include both civil services and religious ceremonies, though rural versions usually involve more traditional practices. In both areas, the civil service takes place at the local mayor's office. During the service, an official informs the couple of their rights and obligations followed by the bride and groom signing the required documents.

During the religious ceremony, usually Romanian Orthodox, Greek Catholic, or Roman Catholic (see p. 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*), a priest sanctifies the union while the bride and

groom speak their vows then exchange rings while wearing special wedding crowns. Ceremonies are generally followed by large, long-term parties that include feasting, dancing, and special traditions. For example, friends may pretend to kidnap the bride in exchange for a ransom, usually money or alcohol.

As in childhood events, godparents play a major role during courtship and marriage. For example, the godmother usually helps the bride dress before the wedding ceremony. In a traditional ritual, the godmother breaks bread above the bride's head then gives it to the bride's unmarried friends to eat. This act demonstrates that the bride's meals will always bring luck to those who enjoy them.

Divorce is relatively uncommon and carries some social stigma. In 2022, Romania's divorce rate of 1.2 per 1000 inhabitants was significantly lower than the US rate of 2.4 per 1,000 people. Urban regions are generally more tolerant of the practice than rural regions, though divorced women generally face more negative consequences than divorced men.

Death

Orthodox Romanians typically engage in 3 days of mourning rituals following a death. First, the deceased is dressed in clothes, sometimes having special significance. For example, if the deceased was young and unmarried, clothing might include wedding attire. Mourners typically gather in the deceased's house, where the coffin is displayed. On the 3rd day, a priest reads prayers at the home then accompanies the coffin to a church for a funeral service. Afterwards, mourners accompany the coffin to a cemetery for burial.



The family may hire professional mourners called **bocitoare** to wail during the procession to the cemetery.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Romanian society was traditionally patriarchal, whereby men held most power and authority. While Romanian women and men have equal rights before the law, women continue to face some barriers to full socioeconomic and political inclusion.

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Work: Romanian women traditionally held primary responsibility for all household chores, childcare, and the care of elderly parents. Even during the communist era, the state did not provide childcare for youth under the age of 3, assuming mothers would be their caretakers. Despite an attitudinal shift regarding gender roles in recent years, women in the workforce generally remain solely responsible for most household duties.

Labor Force: As of 2023, about 42% of Romanian women work



outside the home, lower than the US rate of 57%. That same year, more Romanian women than men pursued higher education (see p. 6 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Nevertheless, women work mainly in jobs requiring low education levels. While relatively concentrated in service occupations, women also participate in large numbers in agriculture and manufacturing. Of note, they typically receive lower wages than men having comparable work experience and education. As of 2022, women earned

4.5% less than their male counterparts. Further, as of 2023, women's employment rate is 20% lower than men's.

Gender and the Law

Romania's constitution guarantees equal treatment before the law, and legislation includes provisions related to gender equality. Laws support affirmative action while penalizing harassment and discrimination and mandating equal opportunities across gender in diverse areas. While some political parties have gender quotas, the Parliament as a whole does not.

Women and men enjoy equal rights in marriage, divorce, and their authority over their children. In addition, the



constitution recognizes a female head of household and provides equal inheritance rights to wives and daughters. It also guarantees equal land access and property rights and grants equal access to credit and loans.

Nevertheless, gender laws are not always enforced, resulting in some women facing pervasive discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace. The Romanian government provides certain resources, such as the National Council Combating Discrimination, to help affected women. However, few women make use of them, either due to fear of retaliation or ignorance. Similarly, the governmental Department of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men is underfunded and lacks the authority to act as an effective watchdog agency.

Gender and Politics

Women's political participation has improved since the end of communist rule, though progress has been irregular. While the 2004 government had 5 female Cabinet ministers, the next Cabinet was entirely male. Further, women occupying Cabinet positions over the last 2 decades have worked primarily in health and education. Romania had its first female PM from 2018 to 2019, Viorica Dancila.

Today, about 19% of lower house representatives and 18% of senators are female. This participation rate is higher than neighboring Hungary's and significantly lower than most other EU countries. It is also lower than in the US, where some 29% of Congress members are female. Women's participation rates



are even lower in local government, where just 14% of local deliberative bodies were female in 2023.

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

In a 2022 survey, nearly 24% of Romanian women reported having

experienced gender violence. While domestic violence was criminalized in 2000 and Romania ratified an international convention against GBV in 2016, society generally tolerates GBV. Further, many Romanians consider it a private matter: some 29% of surveyed Romanians indicated that government should play no role in stopping GBV. Consequently, women in need of support have few options. For example, Bucharest houses just 2 battered women's shelters, neither receiving any government funding. Victims are often unaware of their rights to protection or are reluctant to seek help. Even if GBV cases are reported, indictment and prosecution of perpetrators is rare. For example, of the 57,851 cases of domestic violence reported in 2023, 71% of victims were women. Of the 40,956 cases involving women as the victim, only 52% went before a court with the request for a protection order.

Trafficking: Romania is a source, transit point, and destination for sex and labor trafficking. The Roma (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*) are particularly vulnerable to trafficking. Although trafficking is illegal, prostitution was decriminalized in 2014 and is fairly commonplace. The government has made significant efforts to eliminate trafficking, though their efforts do not meet minimal international standards. While many victims are rescued, a lack of subsequent support services means nearly 2 of 3 are vulnerable to re-trafficking.

Sex and Procreation

During the communist era, public displays of affection and discussions of sexuality were largely socially unacceptable. Despite some religious conservatism (see p. 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*), this attitude has changed somewhat since then. Passionate public displays of affection, including kissing and holding hands, are now common.

Because the state outlawed contraception and abortion during the communist era, (see p. 3 of *Family and Kinship*), Romania's birthrate was significantly higher than today, reaching a high of 3.6 children per woman in 1967. With the fall of communism, the contraception ban was lifted and the birthrate fell dramatically. Today, the rate is just 1.63 births per woman, well below the rate required to maintain the population and among the world's lowest rates. To reverse this trend, the government has created positive incentives, including a generous parental leave policy providing up to 2 years paid leave to the primary caregiver, regardless of gender. Of note, nearly 1 of 3 babies is born to an unwed mother. Along with contraceptives, Romania legalized abortion in 1990. Today, about 22% of reported pregnancies end in abortion.

Homosexuality

Romania decriminalized homosexual activity in 2002 and recognized homosexuals as a protected class in 2006. Nevertheless, Romania does not recognize same-sex marriages or



civil unions. Opponents regularly propose a constitutional amendment restricting marriage to heterosexual couples. Further, no major political parties support same-sex marriage, while many political leaders disparage the LGBT community. In a 2023 survey, 41% of Romanians had a supportive or neutral attitude towards legalizing same-sex civil partnerships while 38% had a supportive or neutral attitude toward legalizing same-sex marriage. Support of same-sex unions was highest among Romanians aged 18-27. LGBT Romanians commonly experience harassment but rarely report it.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

Romania's official language is Romanian. Almost 95% of the population has some knowledge of the language, while over 91% speaks it as a first language.

The Romanian language originated when the region's native Dacian language mixed with the Roman Empire's Latin beginning in the 2nd century AD (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). Subsequent invasions and cultural exchanges introduced Slavic, Balkan, and other vocabularies to the developing language. By about 1000 AD, the precursor to modern Romanian had developed. The oldest example of written Romanian is a 1521 letter.



Despite foreign rule, rural peasants continued to speak

Romanian over the decades. Nevertheless, some members of the elite adopted other languages over the years, including German, Greek, Hungarian, and Russian. At the end of the 19th century, Transylvania's Hungarian rulers severely restricted the use of Romanian (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*).

Romanian became the nation's official language following World War I (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*). Attempts to increase the role of the Russian language during Romania's years under Soviet influence (see p. 16-20 of *History and Myth*) had little widespread effect. Today, fewer than 2% of Romanians speak Russian.

Of note, written Romanian employed the Cyrillic script (commonly used for Slavic languages like Russian) for centuries until newly-independent Romania adopted the Latin alphabet with spellings based on Italian in 1859.

Romanian

Romanian belongs to the Eastern Romance branch of the Indo-European language family. While Romanian is most similar to Italian and French, it also retains Latin elements not present in other Romance languages. Further, Romanian shares over 10% of its vocabulary with Slavic languages, such as Bulgarian, Serbian, and Russian. Romanian also contains words from other regional languages, including Greek, Hungarian, and Turkish, as well as some loanwords from English and German.

In spoken Romanian, stress may occur on any syllable of a word, with each letter pronounced individually and corresponding to a particular sound. Some sounds, like those of the letters *â* and *î*, have no English equivalents. Modern written Romanian utilizes a 31-letter alphabet that relies on diacritics to indicate a letter's pronunciation. For example, the Romanian "s" is identical to the English "s," but "ș" sounds like "sh".



Standard Romanian is based on the Southern Daco-Romanian dialect (also known as the Muntenian dialect), which originated in Wallachia. Moldavia is the home of Eastern Daco-Romanian, while Western Daco-Romanian originated in Transylvania. Although these dialects vary slightly, Romanians typically can understand each region's variety.

Other Languages

Over 30% of residents speak languages other than Romanian. Popular 2nd and 3rd languages include English, French, Italian, and German. Some 9% of residents speak a language other than Romanian as their 1st language. Around 220,000 (mostly Roma) people speak Romani (see p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge*), though these numbers are likely higher (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*). Other languages include Ukrainian, Turkish, and Crimean Tatar.

Hungarian: Almost 1.1 million residents (about 6% of the population) speak Hungarian, also known as Magyar, as a 1st language. Romanian law mandates certain language rights for any minority group comprising 20% or more of a given locality. Although Hungarian is the dominant language in a few counties in eastern Transylvania, the government has been slow to

enforce applicable laws and policies, creating tensions that persist today (see p. 15 of *Political and Social Relations*).



English: English has become popular in Romania in the decades

since the end of communism. English-language instruction begins in primary school and continues into secondary school, where nearly all students study the language (see p. 5 of *Learning and Knowledge*). English is more prevalent in urban than rural areas).

Communication Overview

Communicating effectively in Romania requires not only knowledge of Romanian but also the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Romanian communication patterns reflect values like candor, community, and hospitality. Somewhat reserved when meeting new people, Romanians are typically direct and animated when conversing with colleagues, friends, and family. Generally, Romanians tend to be tolerant of interruptions and people speaking simultaneously.

Hierarchy is important in Romanian communications. Formality, respect, and deference to authority figures are key components to successful communication, particularly during initial meetings. Romanians generally value conformity, respecting the needs of their community over their personal preferences, a trait encouraged and instilled during the communist era.

Communication patterns vary depending on age and location. After decades of intrusions into their personal lives and the prevalent threat of informants during the communist era (see p. 18 of *History and Myth*), some Romanians are suspicious of others' intentions. Romanians typically prefer direct conversation while holding little regard for privacy, though young Romanians may be more open than older generations. Romanians sometimes attempt to defuse the tension of an initial conversation through humor.

Greetings

Romanian greetings reflect social customs regarding gender and the nature of the relationship. Youth and men often greet elders and women with the phrase **Sărut-mâna** (I kiss your hand), sometimes accompanied by the action. Less formal verbal greetings include **bună ziua** (good day) and **salut** (hello). Handshakes are more common among men than women. Friends of both genders often kiss cheeks, although hugs are usually reserved for close friends and family.



Forms of Address

Romanians use different forms of address to demonstrate respect and the nature of the relationship. For example, they typically address new acquaintances with **Domnul** (Mr.), **Doamna** (Mrs.), or other appropriate titles followed by their last names. Some people even combine titles, such as **Domnul doctor** (Mr. Doctor). Friends may address each other with the

appropriate title and first name, while only family and close friends tend to call each other by first name alone. Of note, Romanians also use a complex pronoun structure and corresponding verb forms to convey respect or level of formality with their conversation partners when speaking in Romanian.

Conversational Topics

Common initial conversation topics include family, work, sports, and hobbies. Romanians also enjoy community gossip and local politics. Because they are usually direct, Romanians may raise topics that foreign nationals consider sensitive, such as religion, government, or salary levels. The country's history of occupation, the communist era, and relations with ethnic minorities such as the Roma are potentially offensive topics (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*). Although vulgarity is common in some circles, foreign nationals should avoid using it. Romanians also typically appreciate any attempt by foreign nationals to speak Romanian.

Gestures

Romanians may use gestures and facial expressions to



augment or replace spoken words. They tend to use similar gestures as Americans, such as nodding to show agreement and the “thumbs up” gesture to indicate agreement or a positive occurrence.

Romanians may consider pointing with the index finger impolite, preferring to indicate direction with the entire hand.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on “Resources” for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Words and Phrases

| English | Romanian |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Hello / Good day | Bună ziua / Salut |
| Good morning | Bună dimineața |
| Good evening | Bună seara |
| My name is ____ | Numele meu este ____ / Ma cheama ____ |
| What is your name? | Cum vă numiți? / Cum vă cheama? |
| How are you? | Ce mai faceți? / Cum vă simțiți? |
| I'm fine, thanks | Bine, mulțumesc |
| Please | Vă rog |
| Thank you | Mulțumesc |
| You're welcome | Cu plăcere |
| Yes / No | Da / Nu |
| Goodbye | La revedere |
| Good night | Noapte bună |
| See you later | Până atunci |
| Excuse me | Scuzați-mă |
| I am American | Sunt american |
| Do you speak English? | Vorbiți englezește? |
| I don't understand | Nu înțeleg |
| I'm sorry | Îmi pare rău |
| I don't know | Nu știu |
| I'm lost | Mam rătăcit |
| Help! | Ajutor! |
| Cheers! | Noroc! / Sanatate! |
| What? | Ce? |
| Where? | Unde? |
| Who? | Care? |
| How? | Cum? |
| When? | Când? |

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 98.9%
- Male: 99.1%
- Female: 98.7% (2021)

Early Education

Before the introduction of formal education, the region's early residents informally transmitted values, skills, and knowledge to younger generations. Though short-lived, the Roman Empire's incorporation of the region in the 2nd century AD (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*) resulted in changes that would shape modern Romania's culture and language (see p. 2-3 of *History and Myth*). Nevertheless, formal education was slow to develop in the subsequent centuries. This situation began to change during the 14th century, when Orthodox Christian monasteries (see p. 4 of *History and Myth* and p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*) developed as hubs of intellectual life, becoming the first sources of education for the region's elites.

In 1495, the first secular school opened in Braşov. Focusing on grammar, philosophy, beekeeping, and dance, among other



subjects, the school charged an entrance fee of a bucket of wheat, a wagon of wood, and 3-4 calves. In the 16th-17th centuries, local rulers expanded higher educational offerings, founding Wallachia's Royal Academy of Bucharest and Moldavia's Academia Vasiliană, later the University of Iaşi. Of note, all formal education during these centuries occurred in languages other than Romanian. With the 16th-century introduction of the printing press, the supply of reading materials increased, fostering intellectual growth and the development of written Romanian (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*). By the early 19th century, higher education in Romanian became available (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*).

Transformations in Education

After Moldavia and Wallachia united as Romania in the mid-19th century (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*), Prince Cuza introduced a centralized educational system to provide free and compulsory public primary education in the Romanian language. Nevertheless, implementation of the plan was uneven, and peasants largely remained illiterate. In subsequent decades, the Kingdom of Romania (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*), introduced further reforms, including professional training for teachers. As Romanian national consciousness increased, universities opened that provided instruction in Romanian. Scholars collected oral folklore as Romanian literature experienced robust development (see p. 6 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Meanwhile, Transylvania experienced a different educational environment. Under the late 19th-century policy of Magyarization (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*), Transylvania's



Hungarian rulers closed hundreds of Romanian schools, while mandating education in Hungarian.

After gaining Transylvania and other territories following World War I, Romania became a multi-

ethnic, multilingual state (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*). Consequently, it reformed education policies to allow Hungarian, German, and Jewish minorities to establish their own private schools. Further, it allowed some instruction in minority languages in public schools, though the primary instructional language remained Romanian.

Education under Communism

When the communists took over the Romanian government following the end of World War II (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*), they proceeded to establish full control over all aspects of life, including the educational system. In 1948, the government

closed all private schools, while extending state-sponsored education to the entire country. It also installed a socialist educational system that promoted communist tenets of atheism, collectivism, and Marxist-Leninist philosophy. Fixated on achieving industrialization (see p. 17 of *History and Myth*), the government developed curricula focused on developing a skilled workforce, emphasizing basic literacy and technical subjects. To deepen students' national pride, dictator Ceaușescu (see p. 18 of *History and Myth*) even required students to perform farm work.

These efforts had both positive and negative consequences. Literacy rates improved considerably over the subsequent decades. Further, the government subsidized students pursuing higher education at secondary schools, trade schools, and universities. Nevertheless, students often had little freedom to

choose their educational paths. In the 1980s, for example, over 70% of students studied either engineering or agriculture.

Further, while the state formally allowed education in other languages,

discriminatory policies actually reduced instruction in prominent minority languages like Hungarian.

Modern Education System

Following the end of communism, Romania's 1991 constitution confirmed the right of all Romanians to free public education. Today, some 91% of Romanian schoolchildren (pre-primary to high school) attend public schools. After 2 decades of educational reforms, Romanian high school students' scores on international exams are still lower than the EU average but comparable to those of neighboring Bulgaria. Romania spent 3.3% of its GDP on education in 2021, significantly lower than the EU average of 5%.



Besides Romanian, the government recognizes 7 “mother tongues” as languages of instruction. These include Hungarian, German, Croatian, Turkish, Ukrainian, Slovak, and Serbian. While all minority groups with over 1,000 members have the right to receive at least some instruction in their native language, this policy is not always enforced (see “The Education of Roma” below). Recently, Hungarian activists protested the uneven enforcement of language laws, including the Romanian government’s refusal to open a Hungarian-language university.

Romania’s public education system faces several additional challenges. First, Romania’s chronic political instability (see p. 5-7 of *Political and Social Relations*) impedes educational continuity – there have been 23 different ministers of education in the 30 years since the communists’ downfall. Further, significant disparities in educational opportunities and quality between rural and urban areas remain unresolved. Finally, teachers’ salaries are extremely low, just 1/3 the US average, discouraging qualified Romanians from entering the profession.

The Education of Roma

Romania’s Roma population (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*) exhibits significantly lower educational achievement than Romanians of other ethnicities. According to a 2021 study, at least 18% of Roma children are uneducated, while the majority of Roma (78%) never graduate from upper secondary school. The Roma’s educational underperformance is linked to their severe poverty, societal discrimination, and lack of access to educational opportunities. Further, the Romanian government does not permit use of many Roma’s native Romani language for instruction, even though there are some 220,000 speakers in the country (see p. 2 of *Language and Communication*).

Pre-Primary: Preschool for children aged 3-6 is optional, although since 2012, children aged 6-7 are required to complete a preparatory kindergarten year before entering 1st grade. While some facilities may include a library and offer art, music, and



and dance, many kindergartens suffer from underfunding.

Basic: Consisting of 8 grades starting at age 7, basic schooling is compulsory and comprises primary school (grades 1-4) and lower secondary school (grades 5-8).

The curriculum generally includes Romanian language and literature, history, geography, math, science, religion, physical education, art, music, and foreign languages. As a rule, basic schooling is highly standardized with little differentiation based on aptitude. In 8th grade, students must pass a series of national exams to graduate. A student's performance on these examinations helps determine his further education opportunities.

Secondary: While secondary school (grades 9-12) is optional, most Romanians enroll. Students may choose among a variety of institutions, including prestigious national "colleges," military schools, and those that focus on particular subjects, such as economics, technical disciplines, or industrial training programs.

Secondary students may choose among 3 educational tracks.

The theoretical track

focuses on the humanities and sciences in preparation for university studies. By contrast, the technical track prepares



students for work in technical, services, or natural resources and environment protection careers. Finally, the vocational track prepares students for a skilled trade or profession, such as careers in sports, arts, theology, and the military.

Post-Secondary: To pursue post-secondary academic and vocational education, students must graduate from secondary school and pass certain exams. Between 1991-2019, the number of higher education institutions more than doubled to 92 and the number of students more than quadrupled. As of 2022, almost 25% of Romanians aged 25-34 held post-secondary degrees. While the country is on track to exceed its national



target, this rate remains significantly below the EU average of 42% for this age group.

While women predominate in education, health, and humanities subjects, they also comprise the majority

of students studying science, math, and computing subjects. As of 2021, women comprised 55% of post-secondary students. Prominent universities include the University of Bucharest and Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași.

Religious Education

Romanian law allows all 18 officially recognized religious groups (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*) to use state subsidies to create their own educational institutions. Further, all 18 may hold religion classes in public schools. For over 2 decades following the fall of communism, public school students were enrolled by default into Romanian Orthodox Christian religion classes. After a Romanian court declared this policy unconstitutional, Romania's Parliament changed the law in 2015 so that parents must now formally request religion classes of any type for their children. Still, many observers allege that the Orthodox Church and school administrators continue to force students to enroll in Orthodox classes.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Romanians believe that trust and respect are fundamental to building strong personal and professional relationships. They are typically generous and hospitable hosts.

Time and Work

Romania's work week runs from Monday-Friday with most business occurring between 9:00am-6:00pm. While hours vary by store size and location, most shops are open weekdays from 9:00am-8:00pm and Saturdays from 9:00am-1:00pm. Many stores close or have reduced hours on Sundays, although major shopping centers are typically open every day, often for longer hours.

Most banks are open Monday-Friday from 9:00am-5:00pm with reduced hours on Saturdays. Post offices typically open Monday-Friday from 7:00am-8:00pm and from 8:00am-12:00pm on Saturdays. Some banks, post offices, and shops stay open later in urban centers than in rural areas. While most businesses close on public holidays, some large stores and supermarkets in urban areas remain open.



Working Conditions:

The standard workweek is 40 hours with up to 8 hours paid overtime, although some sectors such as agriculture often require longer hours.

While Romanian labor laws provide comprehensive regulations to protect workers, enforcement is sporadic and violations frequently occur. In addition to paid public holidays, Romanians receive 21 days of annual paid leave.



Time Zone: Romania observes Eastern European Time (EET), which is 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 7 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Romania follows daylight savings from the end of March-October, which makes Romania 3 hours ahead of GMT during that period.

Date Notation: Like the US, Romania uses the Western (Gregorian) calendar. Unlike Americans, Romanians write the day first, followed by the month and year.

National Holidays

- January 1-2: New Year's Celebration Days
- January 24: Unification Day
- April / May: Orthodox Easter Sunday and Monday (dates vary each year)
- May 1: Labor Day
- May / June: Orthodox Pentecost Sunday and Monday (dates vary each year)
- August 15: Assumption Day
- November 30: St. Andrew's Day
- December 1: Great Union Day / National Day
- December 25: Christmas Day
- December 26: Boxing Day

Time and Business

Business tends to move slower in Romania than in the US. Most Romanians prefer to build trust and develop personal relations before doing business, which requires extra time and communication. While Romanians appreciate punctuality in business, arriving late to a meeting is typically acceptable given prior notification. Most business discussions occur during scheduled office meetings, although informal meetings in other locations or during meals are also common.

When meeting for the first time, Romanian businessmen greet and shake hands (see p. 4 of *Language and Communication*). Potential business partners typically exchange gifts such as wine, alcohol, or chocolates to help establish rapport. Building

interpersonal relations is essential, so Romanians often begin and end business meetings with light conversation on topics such as health, family, and pastimes (see p. 5 of *Language and Communication*). To ensure trust and confidence among colleagues, Romanians may rely on personal favors or hire family members and friends.



Romanians value competence and flexibility in their business relations, while maintaining formality, respect, and

deference to authority. Some Romanians use vague language to avoid causing distress, loss of face, or public humiliation. Similarly, Romanians rarely make business decisions during initial meetings or without management's approval. Managers generally deliver feedback and criticism in private in order to avoid conflict and embarrassment.

The presence of foreign firms and European Union regulations have helped align the Romanian workplace with international business standards. The Romanian workplace is typically hierarchical. Senior officials or upper management tend to run meetings and make most decisions with support from subordinate staff. Consequently, deference to age, title, and

position remains vital in office relations. For example, only superiors typically use informal Romanian language forms when speaking to others (see p. 4 of *Language and Communication*).



While not the norm, some businesses have begun to follow informal, consultative, and democratic decision-making styles.

Personal Space

As in other societies, the use of personal space depends on the nature of the relationship. When conversing with strangers and acquaintances, Romanians typically maintain a closer distance than Americans and very little space when conversing with close friends and family.

Touch

Romanians tend to engage in more conversational touching than Americans, especially among close friends and family. Same-sex friends of both genders frequently touch and embrace to demonstrate the close nature of their platonic relationships.

Eye Contact

Direct eye contact is important during any greeting (see p. 4 of *Language and Communication*) or business meeting to convey interest, respect, and transparency. While constant eye contact is not always necessary, Romanians typically prefer to maintain at least periodic eye contact during conversations.

Photographs

Banks, churches, museums, secured areas, and similar places may prohibit photography. Foreign nationals should always acquire a Romanian's permission before taking his photo.

Driving

Some Romanians have aggressive driving habits, passing vehicles on blind corners at high speeds or ignoring traffic signals. Horse

carts and stray dogs are common road hazards even on major highways. At 10 per 100,000 people in 2019, Romania's rate of traffic-related deaths was on par with neighboring Ukraine and the highest in the EU, yet still lower than the US rate of 13. Although traffic enforcement has improved in recent years, it still suffers from corruption. For example, officials sometimes accept bribes instead of issuing fines. Like Americans, Romanians drive on the right side of the road.



9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Traditional dress, recreation, music, and arts in Romania reflect rural traditions, modern global trends, and a desire to diverge from the nation's repressive communist past.

Dress and Appearance

Traditional: Romanians sometimes wear traditional dress for special events such as festivals, and national holidays, though residents of rural areas may wear it more frequently. While styles and fabrics vary across regions, garments are made traditionally from flax, wool, cotton, or rough silk, and typically incorporate colorful embroidered patterns. Men's coats, vests, jackets, and other items are traditionally made from sheepskin or leather.

Women's wear typically includes a white, wide-sleeved blouse decorated with bright red, black, or gold embroidery. The blouse is worn tucked into a long skirt, usually

topped by an apron and tied at the waist with a sash. Skirts and aprons often feature woven or embroidered bold, geometric patterns.

On special occasions, women

sometimes add scarves and long silk veils. Married women typically wear a distinct, colorful headdress that reflects regional styles or a **naframa**, an intricately embroidered silk or cotton handkerchief.

Men's traditional wear usually includes a white blouse secured at the waist with a leather belt or wool sash. The blouse is typically accompanied by white or black narrow breeches. Depending on local tradition and time of year, men complete their traditional look with a hat made of black felt, straw, or lambskin along with rawhide **opinchi** (galoshes) or felt boots bound by string.



Modern: Romanians attach substantial importance to their appearance. Although specific styles vary by age and geographic location, Romanians typically wear clothing that reflects the latest European fashion trends. Denim jeans, pants, t-shirts, and sport jackets are popular among younger Romanians. In business settings, Romanians prefer more formal attire, with both men and women favoring tailored suits. Generally, older Romanians tend to dress more conservatively than younger generations.

In rural areas, clothing tends to be less fashionable, with comfort and utility taking precedence over style. Older rural women commonly wrap their heads with brightly colored scarves. Of note, Roma women (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*) often wear colorful, long skirts or traditional Indian-style garments and men don Turkish- or Syrian-style suits and pointed shoes.

Recreation and Leisure

Romanians prefer to spend their leisure time with close friends and family. When going out, Romanians often socialize as a group of couples. Popular activities include meeting at bars and cafes, going to the theater or ballet, watching movies at the cinema, attending concerts and sports events, and dancing at clubs. Shopping and billiards are popular among the young.



While groups of men may gather at bars or in casinos, women often socialize at home or outdoor cafes.

During the summer, Romanians enjoy outdoor barbecues, taking long walks, and meeting friends in parks and gardens. During the cold winter months, they typically socialize indoors or play winter sports (see “Sports and Games” below). Favored destinations for holidays and vacations include the seaside or the Carpathian Mountains, where visitors enjoy snow

sports, hiking, and mountain climbing. Other Romanians prefer to spend their holidays abroad.

Festivals: Romania holds a number of public festivals to mark important religious, historical, and cultural events. To celebrate Great Union Day, which commemorates the post-World War I union of Transylvania with Romania (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*), the capital city of Bucharest hosts a large military parade. During the Christian Easter holiday, communities observe traditional rituals and customs, such as fasting, attending an all-



night church service, and painting, breaking, and eating boiled eggs (see “Arts and Handicrafts” below).

Other festivals celebrate seasonal events, some rooted in ancient, pre-Christian traditions (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*). For example, Romanians popularly celebrate the beginning of spring with **Mărțișor**. During this festival, they traditionally give their friends and loved ones a colored string with a hanging tassel as a sign of affection. To bring strength and

good health, Romanians then wear the string throughout the month of March. On the summer solstice, Romanians celebrate **Sanzienele**, whereby women gather flowers, roots, and leaves to chase away evil spirits and encourage love, luck, and wealth.

Folk song, dance, and music festivals are popular across the country year-round. For example, the annual Songs of the Old festival celebrates Romania’s rich history of folk music. By contrast, the George Enescu International Festival, held every 3 years in Bucharest, focuses on classical music. Other notable festivals include the Cheese Polenta and Blues Festival, International Jazz Day, the Cheese and Plum Brandy Festival, and the Parade of Traditional Costumes, among others. Romanians typically celebrate festivals and holidays by socializing with close friends and relatives, hosting large feasts, and enjoying music and dance.

Sports and Games

Sports: During colder months, Romanians enjoy various winter sports such as skiing, ice skating, and ice hockey. Swimming, cycling and hiking are popular during the summer. Romanians also enjoy playing basketball, rugby, and volleyball, although football (soccer) is the most popular team sport. In addition to a national soccer team, most large cities have stadiums for professional league teams. While the national team has enjoyed periodic international success, corruption scandals among players, coaches, and owners cripple the sport.



Romanian athletes have performed well in the Olympics, medaling in gymnastics, tennis, and rowing. Prominent athletes include Nadia Comaneci, who famously earned a perfect score for her gymnastics routine in the 1976 Olympics, and tennis star Simona Halep.

Traditional Games: Romanians enjoy traditional games, especially during holidays. Resembling baseball, the traditional game of **oina** is played with a leather ball and bat. A popular children's game is "the fox and the rabbits," a type of tag where children hop closer toward a designated child as he attempts to catch them. Checkers and chess are popular among all ages.

Music

Traditional: It is customary to perform traditional music at weddings, funerals, festivals, and other special occasions. Orally passed through generations, styles vary by region. Often compared to the American blues, the **doina** is a semi-improvised style with soulful and sometimes melancholy lyrics. Other folk styles include energetic dance music, ballads, and pastoral music. Transylvania is especially rich in folk music, influenced by a unique blend of Hungarian and Romanian traditions. The Roma are notable folk musicians.

Simple reed and stringed devices, horns, and flutes, are common traditional instruments. Popular types include the **tambal**, a stringed instrument played with small mallets; the **cobza**, a short-necked lute; **buchium**, a long wooden instrument



similar to an alpenhorn; and the **nai**, a panpipe. Similar to a viola but with only 3 strings and a flat bridge, the **kontra** is specific to the Transylvania region.

During the communist era (see p. 16-20 of *History and Myth*), the

government organized performances called “**Cantarea Romaniei**” (“Song of Romania”) to highlight the nation’s rural peasantry and glorify the ruling regime. Held in regional centers and televised nationally every week, these performances showcased thousands of Romanians clad in traditional costumes performing folk songs reflecting patriotic values. During this era, the government limited Western-style music – particularly rock, pop, and jazz – instead promoting classical music. Most cities had at least 1 government-subsidized philharmonic orchestra or opera house which provided affordable concerts to the public.

Modern: Remaining popular today, Romania’s orchestras and opera houses host a range of musicians performing in a variety of styles. For example, well-known composer George Enescu is famous for integrating folk music into classical compositions. Other prominent musicians include Gheorghe Zamfir, a legendary folk artist, violinist Alex Bălănescu, and gypsy ensemble Taraf de Haidouks. In addition to local artists, Romanians enjoy international pop, rock, and jazz music.

Dance

Traditional Romanian folk dances vary by region yet exhibit certain common characteristics. Groups of dancers typically perform in lines or circles, sometimes while singing or exclaiming

loud shouts known as **strigături**. Dances are usually performed methodically and in a fixed order, from slowest to fastest.

The **hora** is a popular dance in which participants gather in a circle holding each other's shoulders and perform a series of repetitive steps. Also common, the **ceată de feciori** (men's group dances) consist of an odd number of men dancing in unison in a variety of styles. Generally, performers do not link hands or arms and may combine stomping, clicking of the heels, leaping, and other steps into the routine. Some male dances incorporate sticks or swords.

Over time, dance traditions from other European countries influenced and altered Romanian folk dances. Modern and artistic dance began to develop in the early 20th century, and during the communist era, classical ballet became an important form of dance.

Literature

Prior to the 19th century, most folklore and folk poetry was orally transmitted through ballads. Accompanied by music, ballads typically related stories of love, hardship, and the bond between man and nature. Modern Romanian literature began to develop in the mid-19th century following Romania's adoption of the Latin alphabet (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*) and a late 19th-century flourishing of literature, art, and education (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*). These new literary works often incorporated themes, language, and imagery from traditional Romanian ballads and folklore. For example, poet Mihai Eminescu created a school of poetry that influenced many later Romanian authors. Eminescu used simple language, bold metaphors and distinctive rhyme and verse forms to explore a range of themes such as nature, love, hate, and contemporary society.



Under the communist regime (see p. 16-20 of *History and Myth*), some artists were subject to censorship, while others emigrated to Western Europe or the US to escape oppression. Poet, novelist, and essayist Andrei Codrescu and writer and film director Petru Popescu continued to have active careers after defecting to the US in the 1960s and 1970s. Innovative playwright Eugène Ionesco was born in Romania though he spent most of his life in France.

Following the 1989 transition from communism (see p. 20 of *History and Myth*), some Romanian artists and intellectuals began to focus on documentary literature, history, and journalism. Today, non-fiction accounts of life during and after the communist era are popular works. Because few works of Romanian literature have been translated, they remain largely inaccessible to readers outside the country.

Arts and Handicrafts

Like other creative works, Romania's arts and crafts often reflect Romania's folklore, its peasant history, and rural life. Traditional handicrafts include intricate woodcarvings, elaborate folk costumes, woven carpets, pottery, and Orthodox Christian icon paintings. Folk art sometimes



incorporates geometric or abstract designs and stylized images of animals and plants.

or animal designs as well as Christian symbols. Specific styles, symbols, and colors vary by region.

Egg painting (*oua incondeiate*) is particularly popular during Easter time (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*). Painted eggs feature geometric, abstract,

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Romanians are very hospitable and enjoy entertaining family and friends at home. Meals are typically informal occasions consisting of simple, hearty dishes prepared from fresh, local ingredients.

Dining Customs

Romanians typically eat 3 daily meals and snack throughout the day. While lunch is traditionally the largest meal, dinner can also be substantial. In most families, women prepare the meal, set the table, and wash the dishes. During outdoor barbecues, men typically cook the meat while women prepare salads and side dishes.



Visits to the home are usually arranged in advance, and guests are expected to arrive on time. For short visits, hosts typically offer drinks and light snacks. When invited to a home for a meal, guests may bring flowers or a small gift for the hostess. Upon entering the home, guests usually remove their shoes and replace them with slippers provided by the hosts.

To begin a meal, diners say “*poftă bună*” (“enjoy the meal”) to one another. Hosts usually first serve their guests, who may begin eating immediately without waiting for others to be served. After guests finish their portions, they usually must decline several offers of additional servings if they do not want more food. Of note, Romanians consider it rude to prop elbows on the dining table.

Alcoholic beverages are present during most meals. Romanians tend to toast frequently, particularly on special occasions. Common toasts include “*noroc*” (“good luck”) and “*sanatate*” (“to your health”).



Diet

Romanian cuisine varies by region and reflects the nation's unique geography and history of foreign presence (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*). For example, Hungarian cuisine heavily influences Transylvanian dishes, which often incorporate Hungarian paprika and other bold spices. By contrast, Romanian fare in Moldavia and Wallachia resembles Greek and

Turkish cuisine. For example, dishes incorporating eggplant and peppers are common, while desserts are often dense confections of honey and nuts. Romanians across the country enjoy several varieties of bread, usually accompanying every meal. Pork is the most popular protein, followed closely by beef, lamb, chicken, and fish. Meats are often served alongside staples like potatoes, cornmeal, and rice.

In addition to meat, Romanians consume a variety of native vegetables including beans, cabbage, beets, onions, cucumbers, carrots, and eggplant. Grapes, apples, cherries, pomegranates, and oranges are popular fruits. Many dishes incorporate pickled and soured vegetables and dairy products such as milk, cheese, sour cream, and cottage cheese. Generally, dishes are mildly seasoned and served with thick, fatty sauces.

Popular Dishes and Meals

Breakfast usually consists of eggs, cheese, and bread served with coffee, tea, or juice. In rural areas, **mamaliga** (thick, ground



cornmeal served cold) is a popular breakfast item. Lunch often begins with **ciorba**, a thick soup of meat, noodles, and vegetables, followed by meat served with a starch and vegetables. Dinner tends to be smaller and might include rice, pasta, or potatoes served alongside meat, chicken, or fish with salad.

Popular entrées include **mititei** (sausages made from minced and spiced beef, pork, or lamb); **tocana** (a stew of chicken or lamb, potatoes, carrots, peppers, and beans, flavored with garlic and onion); a type of **ciorba** made from fermented wheat bran or, more recently, from grapes, sorrel, and lemon juice; and **sarmale** (leaves of pickled cabbage or grapevine rolled with minced meat, spices, and rice). **Piftie** (pork feet jelly) and **caltabosi** (sausages made from a pig's liver, lungs, and heart) are popular holiday dishes.

For dessert, Romanians enjoy various pastries such as thin pancakes filled with fresh fruit or chocolate, **baclava** (a thick honey pastry made with crushed nuts), and chimney cake, a traditional, tube-shaped sweet bread cooked over coals and sprinkled with nuts and sugar.

Beverages

Alcohol is inexpensive and widely available. Popular alcoholic beverages include **tzuica** (a plum brandy), customarily consumed before meals and during holidays. **Palinca**, a more potent plum brandy of Hungarian origin, is popular in Transylvania. Romania

also has a rich history of wine production dating to the 1st century BC. Today, both wine and beer are popular across the country. Romanians also enjoy coffee, typically served black with sugar.



Eating Out

Restaurants and bars are popular socializing locations among younger Romanians, couples, and groups of men. Serving primarily national and European cuisine, restaurants

range from upscale establishments to small casual eateries offering inexpensive and hearty meals.

Romanian men may gather in **birt-uri** (small, casual bars) which serve alcohol and light refreshments. Food vendors in urban areas sell fresh fruits, seasonal vegetables, and light snacks of *mititei* served with mustard, green peppers, French fries, and sour pickles. Establishments do not automatically add a surcharge to the bill. In upscale restaurants, waiters expect a 10% tip for good service, while in more casual settings, it is acceptable to simply round up the bill.

Communist Era Hardships

During the communist era (see p. 16-20 of *History and Myth*), the government imposed rations on basic food items, often resulting in massive nation-wide food shortages. Common staples like bread, cheese, and eggs were scarce, while fresh vegetables were often entirely unavailable. Further, meat and other “luxury” items were obtainable only through the black market or high-ranking government officials with connections to suppliers. For most Romanians during this time, a common meal consisted of a thin soup made with rice and flavored with chicken or pork bone.

Health Overview

Romanians' overall health has improved considerably since the fall of communism. Between 1990-2024, life expectancy at birth increased from 70 to 77 years, while maternal mortality dropped significantly from 124 to 10 deaths per 100,000 live births. In addition, Romania is one of the EU's leanest nations: roughly 10% of adults are obese, less than the EU average (15%) and much lower than the US rate (33%). Notably, in 2016 Romania,



banned smoking in public areas as a means of improving overall public health.

Nevertheless, Romanians' life expectancy remains below the EU average of 81 years. Although infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) declined from 31 to 5.5 deaths per 1,000 live births between 1990-2024, it remains significantly above the EU average of 3. Most Romanians in urban areas have access to free, modern healthcare facilities, although quality of care diminishes significantly in rural areas. Finally, heavy pollution resulting from unchecked and harmful industrial processes severely impacts residents' health in some cities (see "Europe's Most Polluted City" below).

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Romanian medicine centers on the use of home remedies, often concocted by female healers. Most towns have a **plafar** (natural pharmacy) selling medicinal plants, herbal remedies, honey, beeswax, and other bee-derived products.



In addition to herbal treatments, some Romanians practice apitherapy, which uses products derived from bees to heal a variety of afflictions. For example, bee venom is used to treat multiple sclerosis and pollen for indigestion. Other patients prefer homeopathy, a form of alternative medicine developed in 18th century Germany. Administered orally, treatments consist of diluted plant, mineral, and animal substances to trigger the body's natural system of healing. Some Romanians use other traditional remedies to neutralize curses or other magical afflictions, which they view as the potential causes of ill health. For example, Romanians may use wormwood, monkshood, and garlic to ward off harmful spirits.

Modern Healthcare System

The Ministry of Health oversees and regulates Romania's healthcare system, providing free universal healthcare for all residents through the compulsory National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF). The NHIF covers most medical services and procedures, from preventive care, specialist treatments, and dentistry to emergency care, prescription medicine, maternal care, and rehabilitation.

In 2022, Romania had 544 hospitals. While rural medical facilities provide basic and emergency care, municipal and district ones provide a full range of services such as specialized disciplines like oncology and neurosurgery. Private clinics offer exceptional care to the wealthy. Some urban physicians make house calls, while rural doctors typically administer care throughout an entire region.



Healthcare Challenges: Romania's healthcare system suffers from insufficient funding. Many urban hospitals are dilapidated and overcrowded, while rural facilities are ill-equipped and understaffed. In addition, corruption permeates the industry. Bribery is commonplace, both by doctors hoping to secure jobs and by patients wishing to receive preferential treatment.



Although most medical procedures are free under the NHIF, Romanians must pay out-of-pocket for some services like lab tests and X-rays. According to a 2023 report, 3.8% of Romanians reported having unmet medical care needs due to

costs, travel, or wait times. It is also likely that the NHIS system may still be coping with a backlog of COVID-19 cases.

Low wages force some Romanian physicians to seek employment elsewhere in Europe. In 2021, there were 3.5 doctors per capita, lower than the EU average of 4.1. Nearly 30% of hospital positions are vacant and the health ministry estimates 1/5 of Romanians have insufficient access to essential healthcare. Besides the challenges posed by this shortage of medical personnel, Romania's healthcare services must also adapt to an aging population: experts predict that over 31% of Romanian citizens will be aged 65 or older by 2050.

Health Challenges

As in other countries with aging populations, non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular illnesses, malignant tumors, stroke, and liver disease account for over 74% of deaths. Respiratory diseases associated with smoking and air pollution are also common. In addition, Romania has the highest number of drug-resistant tuberculosis cases in the EU. Significantly, Roma (see p. 15 of *Political and Social Relations*) experience higher rates of chronic disease and have an average life expectancy 6 years less than the national average. Further, more than 40% of Roma report they regularly forgo medical treatment due to cost. Preventable "external causes" such as accidents, suicides, and drug use result in about 3% of all deaths.

Europe's Most Polluted City

Once known as Europe's most polluted city, the Romanian city of Copsa Mica was home to 2 factories that for over 60 years contaminated city air, water, and soil. Toxic industrial discharge left buildings, vegetation, and animals blackened with soot, while poisoning the water and soil with zinc, lead, and other chemicals. Despite clean-up efforts, some residents today continue to suffer from lead poisoning, asthma, bronchitis, stunted growth, birth defects, and other medical issues. Astoundingly, the average life expectancy of Copsa Mica residents remains 9 years less than the Romanian average.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

For centuries, most Romanians subsisted as peasants in an agrarian and trade-based economy primarily controlled by Germans, Hungarians, Turks, or other non-Romanian residents (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*). Other Romanians toiled as herders or traders. Despite decades of significant investment in the manufacturing and oil industries during the late 19th century, independent Romania remained primarily agrarian through the end of World War II.

From 1948-89, Romania followed economic policies prioritizing heavy industrialization and farm collectivization modeled on the centrally planned Soviet system (see p. 17 of *History and Myth*). As a result, industry grew from contributing 35% of GDP in 1938 to over 68% in 1986. The economy expanded and living conditions initially improved in the 1960s and early 1970s. Nevertheless, the communist regime's corruption, inefficient policies, and underinvestment resulted in gradual economic decline. By the mid-1980s, shortages of food and household items became widespread, resulting in rationing.

Following the 1989 collapse of communism (see p. 19-20 of *History and Myth*), Romania's transition to a liberal free-market economy was difficult. Using the West

as an economic model, Romania sought to reform its economy by privatizing land and state-owned companies, curbing price controls, and opening the Bucharest Stock Exchange to entice foreign direct investment (FDI). Despite these efforts, the economy shrank during much of the 1990s due to financial instability, skyrocketing inflation, rampant unemployment, and low FDI.



By around 2000, the economy began to recover: inflation and unemployment steadily declined, more enterprises were privatized, and FDI increased. Despite some structural issues and persistent corruption, Romania began to modernize its



industrial sector. It also strengthened its financial and services sectors and introduced a new currency in 2005. Having established some economic stability, Romania joined the European Union (EU) in

2007, facilitating further economic expansion. With average annual real growth of nearly 8% from 2002-08, Romania's economy quadrupled in size.

The global financial crisis of 2008-09 hit Romania hard. Budget, banking, and inflation concerns forced Romania to accept over \$25 billion in multilateral financial assistance, stipulating certain fiscal austerity measures and public sector reforms. From 2009-10, the Romanian economy shrank by over 7% as unemployment rose above 8%. Nevertheless, successful reform implementation and new investments enabled Romania to slowly return to growth in 2011.

Romania's current economic outlook is somewhat positive. In 2022, Romania's annual GDP grew by 4.7%, due to strong gross fixed capital formation and private consumption, which was supported by a strong labor market and wage growth, in combination with government support measures to mitigate the impact of high energy prices. In 2023, experts predicted that the negative impact of still high inflation, tight financing conditions and the slowdown of the other EU economies would lower GDP growth in Romania to 1.8%.

Although Romania has successfully transitioned to a modern free-market economy, it has the EU's 6th lowest per capita income. Other challenges include persistent corruption, net emigration, rising debt, poor infrastructure, and the socio-economic exclusion of the Roma population (see p. 15 of *Political and Social Relations*). For example, the unemployment rate among Roma is over 48%. Further, around 54% of Roma

suffer “absolute” poverty, meaning they lack 1 or more basic human needs, such as food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, shelter, and education, compared to about 13% among non-Roma.

Services

Accounting for about 58% of GDP and 51% of employment, the services sector is the largest and fastest-growing segment of Romania’s economy. Significant sub-sectors include wholesale and retail trade, transportation and storage, banking and financial services, public administration, and tourism.

Tourism: Despite steady growth in recent years, Romania’s tourism market remains one of Europe’s smallest. In 2022, Romania hosted just over 11.3 million tourists. Key attractions include the Bran Castle (the mythical home of Dracula—see p. 5 of *History and Myth*); Bucharest’s historical center; health spas near Transylvanian salt lakes and the Black Sea; and winter sports areas in the Carpathian Mountains. Most tourists come from Hungary, Bulgaria, Italy, Germany, and Poland.



Industry

As the 2nd largest component of the economy, the industrial sector accounts for about 29% of GDP and 30% of the labor force. The most significant sub-sectors include manufacturing, oil and gas production, construction, and mining.

Manufacturing: Accounting for nearly 19% of GDP, Romania’s manufacturing sector consists of metalworking, electronics, auto assembly, light machinery, textiles, and chemical processing.

Oil and Gas: Romania is one of Central and Eastern Europe’s largest oil and gas producers, with a significant capacity for oil refining. In 1857, Romania became one of the 1st countries to establish an oil industry. Today, majority Austrian-owned OMV Petrom is Romania’s largest corporation and southeastern Europe’s largest oil and gas producer. In 2022, the oil and gas industry employed about 61,000 people, while refined petroleum exports were worth over \$2.6 billion in 2022.

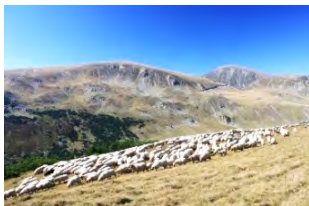
Construction: Construction accounts for nearly 6.6% of GDP and provides over 427,500 jobs. The \$12 billion industry has been a catalyst to economic recovery, with projections of continuing annual growth of almost 6-9% through 2026.

Mining: Roșia Montană in Transylvania is Europe's largest gold mine, potentially worth about \$20 billion. Since 2013, protests citing environmental concerns have prevented a Canadian firm from developing the mine. Romania also has large deposits of coal, iron, copper, and salt.

Agriculture

The agricultural sector, including farming, livestock, fishing, and forestry, is the smallest component of the Romanian economy, accounting for about 5% of GDP and 19% of the labor force.

Farming and Livestock: About 39% of Romania's land area is dedicated to cultivation. Primarily due to a rejection of communist-era collectivization (see p. 17 of *History and Myth*), the average farm size is among Europe's smallest. Few Romanian farmers have adopted modern technologies or techniques, resulting in low productivity. Major crops include grains, corn, potatoes, legumes, sugar beets, vegetables, and grapes. Romania's thriving wine industry is now Europe's 7th largest. Sheep, pigs, cows, and poultry are the most common livestock.



Fishing: In 2022, the relatively small Romanian fishing industry consisted of around 172 small seafaring vessels harvesting about 3,175 tons of sprat, turbot, shark, and whelk. Romania's commercial aquaculture and inland fishing sectors employed about 4,100 people who harvested and processed nearly 11,714 tons of carp, shad, perch, goldfish, and bream.

Forestry: With over 29% of its territory covered by woodlands, Romania has a highly-developed forestry industry. Furniture, timber, paper, and other wood products account for around 3.3% of exports. While about 50% of Romanian forests are under state protection, commercial yields include oak, beech, and fir trees.

Currency

The New Romanian Leu (**lei**), Romania's currency since 2005, is issued in 7 banknote values (1, 5, 10, 50, 100, 200, 500). A leu subdivides into **ban** (cents), issued in 4 coin values (1, 5, 10, 50). With exchange rate fluctuations, \$1 has been worth between lei 3.94-4.58 in recent years. Some businesses accept credit cards, although some smaller vendors only accept cash in small denominations.

Foreign Trade

Romania's exports, which totaled \$129.3 billion in 2022, primarily consisted of vehicle parts/accessories, cars, insulated wire, refined petroleum, and wheat. Primary export partners were Germany (19%), Italy (10%), Hungary (7%), France (6%), and Bulgaria (4%). In the same year, Romania imported \$149.2 billion in crude petroleum, vehicle parts/accessories, refined petroleum, packaged medicine, and cars from Germany (17%), Italy (8%), Hungary (6%), Turkey (6%), and Poland (6%).

European Union (EU)

EU membership (see p. 10-11 of *Political and Social Relations*) provides a large common market, a secure business environment, and easier access to FDI. In 2022, about 73% of Romanian trade was with EU countries. Disadvantages to EU membership include restrictions on the flow of some goods and services and easier emigration of Romanians to other EU countries, thereby reducing Romania's labor force.



Foreign Aid

The EU has granted Romania about €6 billion per year for regional development and structural assistance. In early 2016, the US pledged \$3.4 billion in military support for Eastern Europe in response to recent Russian military aggression (see p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations*). In early 2023, US announced more than \$3.75 billion in new military assistance to Eastern Europe in support of Ukraine, European allies and partners.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Romania's pervasive corruption and limited investment have resulted in some of Europe's most underdeveloped physical infrastructure. Romanians generally enjoy free speech and media, unrestricted Internet access, and a rapidly developing telecommunications network.

Transportation

While the percentage of Romanian families using a privately-owned vehicle (POV) has risen steeply in recent years, car ownership is well below the European Union (EU) average. Many Romanians travel by bus, taxi, train, *maxitaxi* (minibus), oxcart, bicycle, or foot. Bucharest has an extensive transport system, primarily trams and a 4-line underground metro. Most cities have efficient public transit systems that run daily from 5:00am-11:00pm. Travel between cities is fastest by POV or plane, as trains and buses typically make many stops.



Despite its potential to become a trade and transport hub, Romania ranks worst in the EU for transport infrastructure. While Romania and the EU have invested heavily in dozens of large infrastructure projects, progress is often slow with several projects still incomplete. In 2020, the EU pledged to invest €118 billion, in addition to Romania's €17 billion budget for the period of 2021-2027, to improve existing infrastructure, develop sustainable urban transport, and increase energy efficiency.

Roadways: In 2022, Romania had over 53,562 mi of roads, with about 69% paved. With many roads deteriorating or under construction, Romania has some of the world's worst road conditions, ranking 119th out of 141 countries for road quality in 2019. The A2 "Sun Motorway" is the only highway that connects major cities (Bucharest and Constanța). Underinvestment and

corruption have significantly delayed the construction of other planned highways.

Railways: Romania has 6,690 mi of railways that connect its cities and towns with the rest of Europe. While Romania's extensive rail network serves many small towns, some 54% of routes transport 90% of traffic, the state carrier **Căile Ferate Române** (Romanian Railways) transports most passengers and freight. Due to a severe lack of maintenance and investment, much of the network is in disrepair, causing trains to travel slowly. Between 2021-2022, passenger transport increased by 2% while freight volume decreased by nearly 1%.

Ports and Waterways: Romania has nearly 1,100 mi of inland waterways, primarily along the Danube River. Tulcea, Galați, Brăila, and Giurgiu are principal river ports, while Constanța is Romania's largest Black Sea port.

Airways: Romania has 45 airports, 26 with paved runways. The largest, Bucharest's Henri Coandă International Airport (widely known as Otopeni), served over 12.6 million passengers in 2022. While TAROM is Romania's national flag carrier, low-cost carrier Blue Air now has a larger fleet and market share. These and other global carriers, especially Hungary's Wizz Air, connect Romania to a wide range of international destinations.

Energy

Romania has a rich and diversified mix of energy resources. Significantly, renewable energy accounted for over 50% of its total energy produced in 2023. Hydroelectric



plants generate around 33% of electricity production, while nuclear energy accounts for about 20%. Other renewable sources, such as wind, supply over 13% of electricity, and large coal and lignite reserves account for 14%.

Romania's large oil and natural gas reserves accounted for 36% and 22%, respectively, of its total energy consumption in 2023. Nevertheless, at current consumption rates, Romania's oil and

gas reserves will be depleted by 2040. To fulfill its residual energy requirements, Romania imports additional oil, gas, and coal primarily from Russia and the Middle East.

Media

Romania's constitution protects freedom of speech and media although it prohibits insults to the country. While censorship is rare, political interference or interruption of service sometimes occurs because just a few firms control most media outlets.

Print Media: The Romanian press includes hundreds of local and national periodicals that comprise southeastern Europe's most vibrant media market. Publications in Romanian, English, Hungarian, and German are most common. *România liberă*, *Evenimentul zilei*, and *Libertatea* are the most popular national newspapers. While *Krónika* has the highest circulation of any Hungarian-language paper, *Nine O'Clock* is a popular English-language daily.

Radio and TV: The public Romanian Television (TVR) network broadcasts popular radio and TV programs. TV is Romanians' preferred media form. Households are able to subscribe to cable, satellite, or Internet services that provide international content in Romanian, English, and other languages.



Telecommunications

While Romania has an increasingly extensive and modern telecommunications network, it is largely underdeveloped by EU standards. In 2022, Romania had about 11 landline and 118 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people.

Internet: Romania has the EU's lowest-quality Internet services.

Romania's 32 fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 people, compared to the EU average of 39. Only about 86% of Romanians are regular Internet users, compared to EU average of 89%. The government offers few online public services.



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