

# STUDY MIGRATION PHENOMENON IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA

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## Abstract

International student migration is one of the main factors of the internationalization of higher education institutions. This phenomenon is not new in Romania, a country that before 1989 was one of the top destination countries for students looking for a career in medicine, technology and engineering. Today, this phenomenon can be seen as a vector of social, economic, and in the context of the recent elections, political change.

The Romanian revolution and the admission of Romania to the European Union have caused major changes to the international student mobility phenomenon. Countries participating in exchange programs appear, either as destination countries for mobile students or as source countries for this segment of the population, only a few countries meet standards for being both source and destination for international students. Romania has reversed its role from being primarily a destination country to a source country in the post-Communist period; young Romanians choose to complete their education in countries that have more mature educational systems and offer funding and labor integration opportunities, superior to the ones offered by the Romanian educational system. By contrast, fewer EU students are choosing to study in the Romanian higher education system.

Romanian educational policies reform and the adherence to the Bologna system were a major challenge for Romanias; the alignment to European standards in particular was not an easy task, but today, Romania, has four universities in top 700 universities of the world. Undoubtedly, student mobility, through the transfer of ideas and culture is a positive enterprise for populations; however these benefits are lost if migration is overwhelmingly outbound.

The aim of this paper is to offer a wide perspective and some possible explanations of this phenomenon, using the data from the Romanian Institute for Statistics and the European Commission official statistics. The absence of data in this field makes the phenomenon hard to follow across time, but some patterns do stand out when it comes to the selection of the destination countries. By better understanding these processes, we can ensure that countries like Romania enjoy the opportunities offered by the hard-earned Europeanization of education and student mobility.

**Keywords:** Study mobility, Educational policies, Study migration patterns

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Migration phenomenon is not new in human history, but in contemporary society, it has reached a tremendous level and new forms, that were unthinkable for our ancestral. Human's beings ability and willingness to migrate, to start a new life in a world without geographical barriers, has finally led to

appearance of more elaborated types of migration, which, only recently started to attract researcher's and decision factors attention, both at national and international level. Although it started from a micro-perspective of studying migration (economical, social, etc.), researcher's interest in the field, is now moving to an interdisciplinary way of seeing the phenomenon, considering that human movements influence all aspects of the migrant life, both in the new environment as well as in the origins one.

In search of a better way of life, individuals have developed different types of migration: in search of work, in search of personal protection (refugees), highly skilled migration, romance migration (in search of a partner), environmental migration (characterized by the wish of living in a certain place) and study migration. Of course neither of this forms of migration is not new or unknown to the academic community and our history has plenty examples of individuals that "followed their dreams," still migration phenomenon has never had reached the present magnitude, influenced by developments in all areas of living and especially in communication and transport. Over time, different authors have pointed where the society is heading, considering that, we live either in a "small or global village." (Milgram, 1967) (McLuhan & Powers, 1989)

Recent history and transformations through which human kind has passed lately facilitated access in a new era, an era of collaboration, of knowledge and goods exchange. The development of communication systems, affordable and fast means of travel, products assembled in a country with pieces built in another countless countries and sold on a global market; help us create an image of the global world in which we are living. Globalization is now influencing all aspects of human live, regardless if we talk about social, economical, political, or cultural level. Permanently modified by exchanges and interactions between individuals and social entities, our society is passing through a period of great transformation; social actors with different social, educational, and cultural backgrounds interact at levels never seen before in our history.

In higher education area, globalization identifies itself as the internationalization of higher education institutions and it plays major part in the globalization of education field. The internationalization of higher education institutions represents "the process of introducing, integrating an intercultural, international or global dimension, in the purposes, in functions or in the delivery of tertiary education". (Altbach & Knight, 2007)

In other words, universities have to form global citizens, capable to integrate in every environment, to build a global knowledge database, to attract incomes from fees and scientific materials, rising in the same time the international prestige of the higher education institution. (De Wit, 2012)

The European educational system has to become attractive and competitive at global level, offering in the same time opportunities and freedom for students to fulfill their education according to their personal goals. The necessity of European Higher Education Area comes from the understanding of differences existing between national educational systems, differences that make almost impossible for a country to recognize a diploma awarded in another European country. The Sorbonne Declaration lays the groundwork for the formation of European Higher Education Area<sup>1</sup>, stating that there has to exist a Europe of knowledge, of intellectual, cultural, social and technological development, facilitated by universities, that in this manner become central actors in the fulfillment of proposed objectives. (Declaration, 1998)

Jane Knight, since 1997, identifies a series of threats associated to the rapid development of the internationalization of universities: over qualification of youth, the lack of correlation between study programs and labor market, the lack of academic staff and material base in universities as well as the lack of competitiveness between higher education institutions in certain research areas. (Knight, 1997)

Study migration is a defining element of the internationalization higher education institutions. This type of migration is by no meaning new in human history, as cases of students traveling to fulfill their education are documented ever since antiquity, but only recently it started to attract researcher's attention in an interdisciplinary perspective, as never before such a large number of students were on move in the same time. Migration for study, a complex phenomenon, presents itself in different forms, such as: intercontinental and extra continental migration, international or national, exchange programs (agreements between universities), free study migration, horizontal or vertical migration, short, medium or long time migration, summer schools, theoretical or practical internships.

Students that study in another country based on an agreement between universities are the strongest indicator of the internationalization of both the origin as well as the destination higher education institution, and they offer the most trustful and reliable as quantification resource for researchers interested in this phenomenon. In 50's, estimations show that there were a number of 200000 international students, studying in another country than the residence one. In 2004, estimation suggested a number of 5.8 million mobile students until 2020 and a plus 2.2 million until 2025. (Bohm et al., 2004) (Altbach & Bassett, 2004)

University becomes a decisive factor in the evolution of society, being the defining element of scientific

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<sup>1</sup> EHEA

and cultural development of individuals, its main goals being permanent development, innovation, identifying new development directions or action ways, in manners that allowed university to remain competitive in global market. (Bode, 2009)

Significant changes in the infrastructure of educational systems correlated with that fact that governments are allocating more funds for higher education might be the best explanation of the accelerated growth in the field. Literature indicates the fact that western countries try both to attract students as well as to keep them in the country after graduation in order to supply the qualified work force, in an attempt to compensate the decrease in population number and ageing.

In the dynamic evolution of the higher education market regarding the suppliers of education, ever since 2006, an OECD report pointed out clearly that the situation evolves and new players are interested in the field. (Marginson & Van Der Wende, 2007)

The main suppliers of international education are the countries that have a tradition in offering education in English: USA, UK and Australia, followed at European level by Germany and France. As Table 1 shows another six countries are interested in becoming suppliers of higher education. At European level, UK, Germany, and France were attracting a number of 3 out of 5 international in 2006. Now the focus of the traditional suppliers of education seems to have switched from attracting students from all over to attracting students from China and India, countries that have a tremendous potential of offering international students.

Table 1. Number of international students studying between 1997 and 2006 in countries identified as main higher education suppliers

No.	Country	Time									
		1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
1	United States of America	457984	481280	490933	514723	547867	582996	586323	572509	565039	564776
2	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	198064	213264	219285	224660	230870	242755	275270	300055	318400	330080
3	Australia	100383	109285	119988	138381	168916	193621	218654	236142	255925	281633
4	Germany	151870	154435	165994	175065	187027	206141	227026	246136	246334	248357
5	France	N/A	118433	151969	160533	174557	196748	221471	244335	255585	265039
6	China	43712	43030	44711	52150	61869	85829	77715	110844	141087	162695
7	Japan	51047	51298	55755	64011	78812	95550	109508	117302	121812	117927
8	Canada	30264	29203	37695	44335	52523	49746	46381	41338	42590	39008
9	New Zealand	6169	9293	11922	16809	26565	41461	47121	50450	47369	42652
10	Singapore	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	50000	50000	50000	N/A	72000	N/A
11	Malaysia	N/A	27731	66000	N/A						

Data source: OECD statistics (L. F. Statistics, 2013)

The new players in the global market as China, Japan, Canada, New Zealand, Singapore and Malaysia have already expressed their intention of becoming important destination countries for international students and data show they are on the right track.

## 2. ROMANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SITUATION

The economical and social relation that ex- communist Romania leader, N. Ceausescu developed with countries from Africa, Asia and Middle East, are according to the specialty literature one of the main reason why Romanian universities were considered to be so attractive for international students from those regions. In 1981, the Romania educational system has attracted the maximum number of international students, when statistics estimates a number of 16962 international students enrolled in Romanian universities, which ranked in the upper sample of higher education suppliers.

The last 20 years were years of true challenges for Romanian higher education field, both regarding the massive request for higher education, as well as because of the necessity to adapt to the global marker of education suppliers, a dynamic marker, permanently restructuring, changing and evolving. The spectacular growth of the request for higher education is clearly show by statistics. Academic year 1988- 1989 ended with a record of 157465 students, all enrolled in state universities.

Seventeen years later the situation completely changed, and we find a number of 891089 students, enrolled in tertiary education, only 58.4% in state universities. The academic year 2005- 2006 is show as the peak in the development of higher education institutions in Romania. Same statistics show that in the 90's there were a number of 56 universities offering 257 majors and covering a geographical area of 21 cities, while seventeen years later the landscape entirely modifies showing 107 recognized universities spread all over Romania in 60 cities. (Pricopie, NICOLESCU, Reinhardt, & ALMĂSAN, 2009)

Following the global economic crises, in 2014 responsible factors from the Romania Ministry of Education, released a press communicate warning about the major decrease in students number and the disappearance of 300 majors, as universities themselves considered those programs unprofitable.

At national level, there is no exact statistic regarding the number of Romanian students that study abroad. As the present paper main aim is to offer a wider statistical overview of the phenomenon, we will try to show an accurate perspective using existing data. Because of the space limitations of the paper, we are only going to use data from statistics offered by the European Commission (Lifelong Learning program - identifying only students that access study mobility or training grant) and UNESCO. This will allow us to follow this phenomenon across nation, continents and more important to create an image of the flows of international Romanian students among nations.

Beyond student decision of studying abroad, the specialty literature identifies two major theories. Lack of study opportunities in their own country and the wish of obtaining a better job are the main push factors of student mobility. A Romanian study, from 2013, coordinated by SmartDreamers Company reveals the fact that 78% from a sample of 1500 international Romanian students motivates their decision based on economical and financial reasons, while the rest consider personal development and evolution as main factors for studying abroad. The same study shows that Romanian students trust in studying abroad is on a downward slope, as it is not helping them in fulfilling their needs. In 2014 a new tries to capture the Romanian students perception regarding studying abroad. Outcomes of the study show that finding a better job, personal development, diversity, curiosity, and experience are the main reason for applying for a period or academic cycle abroad. Individuals that do not want to study abroad motivate through the lack of money, lack of time and the absence of the wish of continuing their education after high school. (Bardașuc, 2014)

As every country defines international students according to their national policies, in our paper we will define international (mobile) students as any individual born in Romania, which graduated at least high school in Romania, and obtained a diploma confirming the graduation and then moved to another country with the express objective to study. Data used in this paper belong to UNESCO and European Commission, and the decision to use this data is justified by the accuracy and reliability of data.

UNESCO defines international students as students that cross a border with the aim to accomplish education and are enrolled in a study program outside their residence country. (U. I. f. Statistics, 2006)

In the declared aim of collecting data regarding international students, each country has defined international students according to national regulation. Generally, data are limited to the origin country of students, sex and specialty (major). In literature, we can find differences between the concept of international students and mobile students. International students are individuals moving to another country to study, while mobile students are students that have residence in the country where they study but they are not citizens: depending of the country, those mobile students are count or not in the official statistics.

## 2.1. Erasmus Romanian students

Erasmus program is part of the European Lifelong Learning program. This program allows students and academic staff to study and/or teach outside the residence country for a period, going from minimum 3 month to maximum 12 month, based on an agreement between sending and receiving institutions, with no tuition fees and having part of the living expenses covered by a scholarship. Changes in economic and social environment force universities to restructure and permanently adapt to new requests and challenges in the market. From 2007 Romania is a member of European Union, fact that led to the emergence of major changes regarding the design of development strategies on short, medium, and long time. Among the most impacted fields, we can identify higher education field that has to be restructured according to European regulations, but to remain competitive in a market that is now facing an unprecedented evolution.

We will present Romanian students situation in respect to Erasmus program, the longest and the most successful European mobility program, as in 2013 it has reached his target of attracting over 3 million students. The program target to attract 20% of the higher education graduates in a mobility period until 2020, seem now to be a reasonable one.

The last report of the European Commission, shows a 5% increase in the number of Romanian students involved in the program, as in 2012 there were a number of 4578 Romanian students that applied and

received a mobility grant and in 2013 there are a number of 5011. The average length of a study grant of 5.8/ 5.9 months ranks Romania in the middle of the classification, although at European level statistics show a small decrease since 2007.

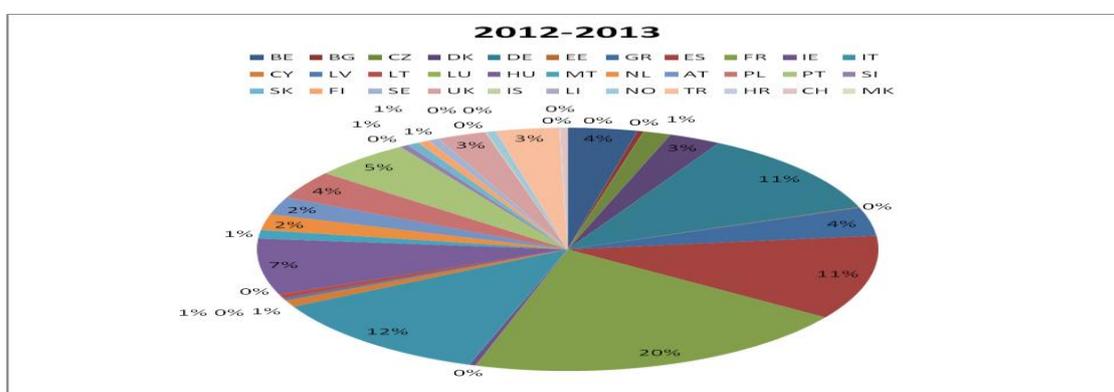
The total number of study mobility granted to Romanian students from 2000 until now is 35171 and Romania has submitted 15 projects under the Erasmus framework, with seven accepted and financed.

Table 2. Romanian students in Erasmus mobility 2012- 2013

BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	GR	ES	FR	IE	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK	IS	LI	NO	TR	HR	CH	MK
181	16	12	136	564	4	190	563	1020	17	604	46	14	29	0	373	57	106	118	188	260	22	31	30	28	127	3	1	25	164	3	19	0

Data source: European Union <sup>2</sup>

Fig.1 Romanian Erasmus students 2012- 2013. Figure shows the destination countries in percentage for Romanian students.



According to the data, France is the preferred destination country for Romanian Erasmus students and a possible explanation of the phenomenon might be found in the fact that both countries speak a romance language and in Romania, French is learned as second language starting from kindergarten.

In the academic year 201- 2012, Romania managed to send a number of 5011 students abroad although it managed to attract only 2164, a small increase comparing to the academic year 2010- 2011. This confirms the fact that Romania has switched direction and has become from a country- supplier of higher education into a country supplying international students for universities that have understood what competitively means.

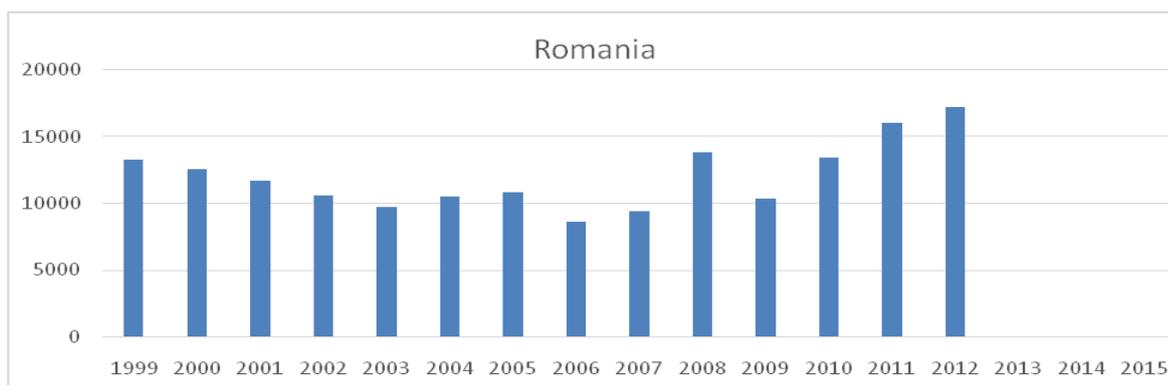
At European level, Romanian students seem to choose more mature education systems, which invest a lot in education, regardless of social, economical, cultural or historical connections that Romania had over time as a previous study of the author showed. (Lastun, 2014)

## 2.2. Romanians international students' situation according to UNESCO statistics

When it comes of seeing Romanian international student at a global level, the situation remains mainly unchanged: having the world at their disposal international Romanian students choose in large numbers to study in France, but more research needs to be done in order to capture the complexity of the phenomenon.

Fig. 2 Total inbound internationally mobile students, both sexes (number)

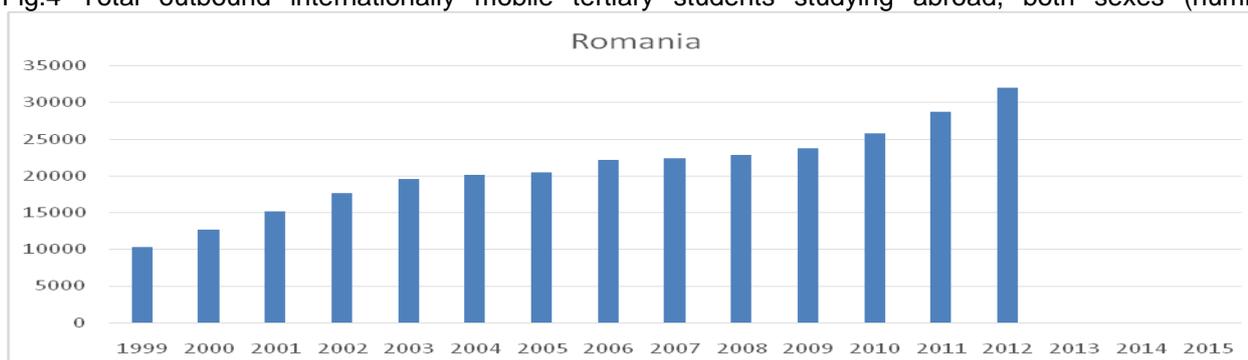
<sup>2</sup> Data available at [http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/statistics\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/statistics_en.htm)



Data source: UNESCO statistics<sup>3</sup>

As UNESCO data show, the numbers of international students coming to Romania ten years after the fall of the communist regime, starting with 1999 was a constant phenomenon ranging from 13279 to 17219 students in 2012, year in which according to the same statistics was registered the largest number of international students coming to Romania. Apparently, there is resurrection in the field, but Romanian universities do not seem capable, at least for the moment, to take advantages from the opportunities offered by international students. As it is a very important issue on the internationalization agenda, Romanians higher education suppliers need to focus more on attracting international students by the changing curricula and restructuring their ways of regarding study mobility.

Fig.4 Total outbound internationally mobile tertiary students studying abroad, both sexes (number)



Data source: UNESCO statistics<sup>4</sup>

When analyzing data regarding students that decide to continue their education beyond Romanian, the numbers reveal a different situation. Starting from 1999 when 13279 international students came to Romania and only 10284 went abroad for study, the situation dramatically changed in 2004 when 20000 students went studying in another country and in 2012, the number of Romanian students studying outside Romania almost doubled, as 32017 students oriented themselves to international providers of higher education.

Table 3. Students from Romania, both sexes (number) - TOP 5 countries Romanian students go to

No.	Country	Total
1	France	51495
2	Germany	45267
3	United States of America	38160
4	Hungary	33997
5	Italy	31843

Data source: UNESCO statistics<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> data extracted on 20 Apr 2015 03:28 UTC (GMT) from UIS/ISU, Dataset : Education

<sup>4</sup> data extracted on 20 Apr 2015 03:28 UTC (GMT) from UIS/ISU, Dataset : Education

<sup>5</sup> data extracted on 20 Apr 2015 03:28 UTC (GMT) from UIS/ISU, Dataset : Education

The top five receiving countries for Romanians students show France as a preferred destination followed by Germany, United States of America, Hungary, and Italy. Taking into account the fact that France and Italy have education in romance languages, maybe one of the reasons why Romanian students choose to study here might be find here. A possible explanation for the German and Hungarian options might be offer by the large minority of German and Hungarian ethnics living in Romania and, maybe the geographical distance between Romania and Hungary.

When it comes to analyzing student's decision to study in the United States of America, it is clear that, no matter how hard it is (Romanians need visa to travel in USA and the travel and living expenses are high), international Romanian students follow their dreams of fulfilling their education in an environment that suits their needs. All top five receiving countries have strong, challenging educational systems and treat education trade as an important resource economically and socially.

Table 3. Europe : Students From Romania, Both Sexes (Number) 1999 Until 2012

<b>Country</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Total</b>
Albania	5	Greece	1470	Oman	2
Armenia	2	Grenada	1	Philippines	1
Australia	780	Holy See	148	Poland	670
Austria	10066	Hungary	33997	Portugal	888
Azerbaijan	1	Iceland	56	Qatar	15
Bahrain	1	India	83	Republic of Korea	196
Belarus	2	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	16	Republic of Moldova	5269
Belgium	2581	Ireland	864	Russian Federation	78
Brazil	26	Israel	19	Saudi Arabia	69
Bulgaria	917	Italy	31843	Serbia	25
Canada	4259	Japan	1475	Slovakia	1057
Chile	8	Jordan	146	Slovenia	72
China	7	Kazakhstan	7	South Africa	26
Croatia	30	Latvia	18	Spain	11610
Cuba	2	Liechtenstein	4	Sweden	1848
Cyprus	237	Lithuania	13	Switzerland	6773
Czech Republic	420	Luxembourg	126	Thailand	36
Denmark	4404	Malaysia	163	The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	10
Ecuador	3	Malta	32	Turkey	769
El Salvador	2	Mauritius	3	United Arab Emirates	125
Estonia	158	Morocco	5	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	21695
Finland	1442	Netherlands	2765	United States of America	38160
France	51459	New Zealand	73	Venezuela	4
Germany	45267	Norway	1603	Viet Nam	21

Data source: UNESCO statistics<sup>6</sup>

As the above table shows, regardless of geographical distances, Romanian students go in study migration all over the world. There are 72 countries were Romanian students went in search of an experience different from what they can find at home.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Researches in migration field have highlighted the fact that international students can become the most important ambassador a country can have, in promoting and defending the stat of origins interests. We can

<sup>6</sup> data extracted on 25 Apr 2015 03:28 UTC (GMT) from UIS/ISU, Dataset : Education

talk about international students ability of promoting their own culture, traditions, habits, etc., getting to a point where all cultures meet, interact, are exposed to new experiences, knowledge transfer and melt, emerging a global culture.

According to the author knowledge, this paper is the first academic work that summarizes the number of international Romanian students from different statistical resources. The main finding of our approach is that Romanian international students are a very important resource for Romania, both as an image capital as well as the best ambassadors our country can have. Unfortunately, this resource is not used at full potential and Romania really faces the "brain drain" phenomenon, as Romanian youth are more and more disappointed of the Romanian educational landscape.

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