



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate. Covering 91,700 square miles (237,500 square kilometers), Romania is about the size of Oregon. The Carpathian Mountains, the country's dominant geographical feature, form half of a crown in the north and central regions, nearly surrounding the Transylvanian plateau. The South Carpathians (also known as the Transylvanian Alps) extend westward from the center of the country. Sub-Carpathian hills give way to extended, fertile plains traditionally used for corn and wheat crops. Europe's Danube River runs along Romania's southern border and forms a large delta area in the east before emptying into the Black Sea. Low plains lie along the southern and eastern areas.

The climate is temperate-continental. Romanian summers are warm and winters are cold. The average temperature in July is 77°F (25°C); January averages 27°F (-3°C). About 41 percent of the land is arable and 29 percent is forested. Some regions face severe pollution because of environmentally unsafe industrialization policies. The government is seeking ways to address the problems. A few cities have begun to develop safer industrial processes and recycling programs that meet European standards.

History. The ancestors of today's Romanians were Geto-Dacians, an Indo-European people. Between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C., the Dacians assimilated surrounding influences to form their own unique civilization. By A.D. 106, the Romans had conquered most of Dacia and made the area a province to supply grain, gold, and cattle to the empire. Roman colonization led natives to assimilate into the Roman culture and adopt its language (Latin). The name *Romania* means "Land of the Romans." With the Roman withdrawal from the region in the late third century, various barbarian tribes (i.e.,

Goths, Slavs, Bulgars) invaded between 200 and 1100. However, the language and culture remained Latin. In the 14th century, Moldavia (to the east) and Wallachia (in the south) became independent principalities. In 1500, the principalities fell under Turkish control, but they were never an integral part of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. Complete freedom from Turkish rule was obtained through the Independence War in 1877, after Moldavia and Wallachia had joined together as the state of Romania.

Because of its association with Allied forces in World War I, Romania recovered Bessarabia (a territory that roughly corresponded to present-day Moldova) from Russia, and three Romanian-majority provinces (Transylvania, Banat, and Bukovina) from the defeated Austro-Hungarian Empire. The new territories nearly doubled the country's size and population.

Nazi Germany occupied Romania at the beginning of World War II. Neutral, but faced with the threat of being divided by competing powers, Romania joined the German army in attacking Soviet Russia in 1941. Under military pressure, King Carol II was forced to give up the throne to his son Michael. Pro-Nazi General Ion Antonescu, however, intercepted the ruling power. In 1944, King Michael arrested the dictator, and Romania switched to the Allied side. Shortly thereafter, Russian troops occupied the country, and Romania came under Soviet influence. The monarchy was abolished, King Michael went into exile, and a communist regime was established. Bessarabia was annexed by the Soviet Union as Moldavia. When that area became independent in 1991, ethnic Romanians on both sides initially favored reunification. However, Moldovan desires for independence prevailed.

From 1965 to 1989, Nicolae Ceausescu ruled Romania in a

Romania

brutal dictatorship, isolated even from its former ally, the Soviet Union. His policies led to grinding poverty for most people. He vehemently resisted Europe's democracy movements in 1989. However, during an uprising by the public, he and his wife were executed.

The National Salvation Front replaced the Communist Party and began to govern in 1990 under Ion Iliescu. Initial confidence in his leadership was replaced by more civil unrest in 1991. Following violent repression of the opposition, Iliescu was reelected in 1992. He then sought to improve Romania's international image. Undemocratic laws giving preference to ethnic Romanians hampered strong regional and European relations for years. In August 1996, Romania and Hungary signed a friendship treaty guaranteeing rights for minorities and quelling fears that Hungary would help ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania secede from Romania. The pact has proved vital to Romania's ambitions to join the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The latter ambition was achieved in November 2002.

Fed up with the slow pace of reform, voters elected a strong anticommunist leader as president in November 1996. President Emil Constantinescu promised to hasten reform. However, by late 1997, postelection optimism had been dampened by the slow pace of economic reform. Romania's ongoing economic and social woes have led to political instability and a rapid succession of prime ministers in recent years. Nevertheless, the country continues its effort to strengthen its economy and qualify for membership in the EU.

THE PEOPLE

Population. The population of Romania is about 22.27 million and currently decreasing by 0.21 percent annually. Officially, ethnic Romanians comprise most of the population (90 percent). A significant Hungarian minority (7 percent), which lives mostly in Transylvania, still identifies with Hungary and the Hungarian culture. Ethnic Hungarians demand more language rights and greater local autonomy, but recent agreements may help resolve some of these issues. The government finances schools where statistically significant minorities can learn in their own language. The government also ensures that funds are given to Hungarian and German theaters to help maintain ethnic identity.

Other minority groups, which comprise around 2 percent of the population, include Germans, Ukrainians, Serbs, Croats, Russians, Turks, and Roma (Gypsies). The Roma have never been counted accurately and may comprise up to 8 percent of the total population. They tend to live separately from other Romanians and often are not well accepted. Many are poor, undereducated, and underemployed; they do not integrate into mainstream society and are sometimes subject to discrimination. Most Jews and Germans have left the country. More than half of Romania's population (53 percent) lives in cities, largely because of forced urbanization under Ceausescu.

Language. The official language is Romanian, a Latin-based language in the same family as Spanish, French, Italian, and Portuguese. Most children learn English in school from a young age. They may also learn German, Italian, or other languages. French is a common second language among older people. Germans, Hungarians, and other minorities speak their native tongues. The Roma speak Romany.

Religion. Nearly all Romanians are Christian. About 87 percent belong to the Romanian Orthodox Church. Another 6.8 percent of the people are Protestant. About 5.6 percent are

Roman, Uniate, or Greek Catholic. Other Christian religions, Islam, and Judaism are also practiced. During the communist regime, religious organizations were persecuted, churches demolished, and clergy imprisoned; however, people are now free to practice religion as they wish. Government and public events often begin with a religious service. Although interest in religion is increasing in all areas, devotion is especially strong in rural areas.

General Attitudes. Romania is at a crossroads in its history. The euphoric disposition that prevailed after the collapse of Ceausescu's authoritarian regime in December 1989 was replaced by disillusionment. For years, Romanians have not possessed the economic and political freedoms they thought would be theirs. Economic troubles have led to greater poverty, lower living standards, and declining personal wages. Many university-educated youth have emigrated.

Peaceful general elections and a relatively smooth transfer of power have strengthened social stability and given people some hope for the future. Most people want a way of life built on democratic and liberal principles. Looking to the West, an overwhelming majority favors membership in European organizations. Many claim the country belongs with Europe because of its Roman heritage. They want to change traditional Romanian society to make it more similar to other European societies. Others are willing to accept economic reform, but they do not want radical changes in traditional society. A few remain nostalgic for the days of communism. Organized crime has expanded rapidly because of instability and uncertainty about the country's future. Corruption at all levels of authority also remains a challenge.

Personal Appearance. Romanians attach importance to their appearance, although clothing worn in rural areas is often less fashionable. People generally dress conservatively in public. Women wear skirts and dresses. Slacks usually are worn only by men and some younger women. Businesswomen may also wear tailored suits. Businessmen wear conservative suits. Young people prize denim jeans, T-shirts, sport jackets, and other Western-style clothing. People do not commonly wear hats, but in rural areas older women wear scarves. The elderly generally wear dark, conservative colors.

In rural areas, colorful folk costumes may be worn on Sundays, at festivals, or on special occasions. Roma women wear long, colorful skirts. Family members mourning the death of a loved one may wear black from six weeks to a year.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings. Women greet each other with a handshake, or a kiss on each cheek if they are good friends. Handshakes are more common among men. Generally, a man waits for a woman to extend her hand first. When greeting, women often use the phrase *Bună* (Good), while men and young people say *Salut* (Salutation). Young people might also say *Ceau* (Ciao) or *Servus*. In cities, a man might greet a woman by kissing her hand. Even if he does not, he may say *Sărut mâna* (I kiss your hand) as a sign of reverence. Young people also use this greeting with their parents or elders. In rural areas, everyone is greeted individually; people also greet strangers and expect their greeting to be returned.

The most common verbal greeting is *Bună ziua* (Good day). *Bună dimineata* (Good morning) and *Bună seara* (Good evening) are also used. Only close friends and relatives greet each other by first name. However, adults normally address children by first name. When applicable, people use profes-

sional titles (“Doctor,” “Professor,” etc.) before surnames.

Gestures. When one sneezes, family or close friends may say *Sanatate* (Good health) or *Noroc* (Good luck). *Noroc* is also used at parties to mean “Cheers.” Making eye contact during conversation is a sign of honesty. It is impolite for men to keep their hands in their pockets when speaking in formal situations. People also avoid chewing gum during conversation. Friends often hold hands or walk arm in arm. Gentlemen remove their hats before entering churches and buildings other than stores. People also remove gloves before shaking hands. Many women cover their heads when entering a church.

Visiting. Romanians like to receive and pay visits, which usually are arranged in advance. People often gather for birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, or socializing. Hosts generally offer their guests a drink—coffee, tea, brandy, or a popular regional wine—as well as fruit preserves (*dulceață*) or other refreshments. It is polite for dinner guests to bring an odd number of flowers (three or more) or a small gift for the hostess. Guests avoid giving an even number of flowers (which Romanians often associate with funerals). Guests typically ask the hosts for permission before smoking.

Eating. Lunch traditionally is the main meal of the day; however, because of work and school schedules, many families can eat lunch together only on Saturday and Sunday. Supper is similar to lunch, but the servings are somewhat smaller. Romanians eat in the continental style, with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right. They keep both hands (not elbows) above the table during a meal. When starting a meal, people wish each other *Poftă bună* (Enjoy the meal). If they are at home, after the meal they thank the person who cooked and served the meal and say *Sărut mâna pentru masă* (I kiss your hand for the meal) or *Mulțumesc pentru masă* (Thank you for the meal). Toasting is usually a part of formal and informal lunches and dinners. It is impolite to eat in front of someone who is not eating; if one must do so, it is polite to offer to share the food.

LIFESTYLE

Family. The family has always been important to Romanians, and the father maintains a dominant role. Urban families tend to be smaller than rural families because of a shortage of housing and the high cost of living. Most women work outside the home, but they are also responsible for the upkeep of the home and the children. Men are generally less involved in household chores. Grandparents often live with the family and care for grandchildren. Young people often live at home until they finish college or longer.

A private farm includes a two- or three-bedroom home surrounded by a fence, a garden and orchard, and small farm buildings. Ceausescu attempted to destroy these farmsteads—and with them, rural individualism—by tearing down homes and forcing people to move into large housing blocks. These apartments had no running water or heat, and strict regulations limited the amount of electricity each apartment could use. While forced urbanization and limits on electricity use are no longer practiced, improvements in living standards have not occurred because of the poor economy. Many families still lack proper housing and may have only sporadic access to heat or electricity.

Dating and Marriage. Young men and women usually begin to socialize in high school. Popular activities include taking walks and going to movies, parties, sporting events, and school dances.

Most adults expect to marry and have a family in spite of economic difficulties. In urban areas, men and women are between 25 and 30 years old when they marry. People in villages still marry at a young age. Local and ethnic customs regarding courtship and marriage vary by region. People in rural areas hold engagement ceremonies in which the groom’s family brings the wedding ring to the bride’s family. Both families celebrate the event with dinner, singing, and dancing. Often, engagement rings are not used; instead, the wedding ring is worn on the right hand until marriage, when it is transferred to the left hand. Before the wedding ceremony, the groom may carry a pine tree on the way to the bride’s house as a sign of long life. Weddings usually involve church ceremonies. Godparents are expected to take an active part in wedding activities. Friends wish the young couple *Casă de piatră* (“House of stone,” meaning a long and durable marriage).

Diet. Romanian food is characterized by distinctive ethnic specialties, including *mititei* (spiced, minced beef, pork, or lamb in sausage form), *mamaliga* (cornmeal mush served like mashed potatoes), and *sarmale* (minced meat with rice, rolled in pickled cabbage or grapevine leaves). Breakfast usually consists of eggs, cheese, rolls or other breads, and coffee. Lunch begins with soup, followed by meat, potatoes, and a vegetable. Romanians favor pork over other meats. Most people eat bread with every meal. Wine or beer is usually served as well. A plum brandy called *tzuica* is also popular. Pastries are common desserts. Food in Transylvania has been heavily influenced by Hungarian cuisine. Romanian food in Moldavia and Wallachia is similar to Greek or Turkish food. Larger cities usually have several restaurants, including fast food establishments like McDonald’s.

Recreation. Romanians enjoy sports, particularly soccer. Many men spend a lot of time watching soccer matches. Romania’s national team participated in the 1998 World Cup. Romanian athletes have done well in international competitions, especially in gymnastics, weight lifting, rowing, and tennis; however, general participation in such sports is low because facilities are limited. Leisure activities include meeting with friends or family, watching television, taking walks, reading, and going to the movies, theater, or concerts. Swimming, aerobics, and skiing are also popular. Many rural people enjoy folk shows with music and dancing.

The Arts. More than 1,500 museums can be found throughout Romania. Excellent orchestras, theaters, and opera houses are available in major cities. Even in remote areas of the country, performing groups provide access to puppet shows, operas, dance productions, and other arts. Medieval castles and monasteries are significant examples of Romanian architecture.

Flutes and stringed instruments are common in folk music. The *cobza*, a short-necked lute, and the *tambal*, a stringed instrument played with small mallets, are two examples of Romanian folk instruments. Romanian folk art includes woodcarvings, carpets, elaborate costumes, pottery, and icon paintings. Easter-egg painting is celebrated; painted eggs often feature religious symbols and animal designs. Painting religious icons on glass is another notable tradition.

Holidays. Most people celebrate Christian holidays according to the Orthodox calendar. Christmas is both a children’s holiday and a feasting holiday. Easter celebrations include a midnight candle lighting and family feasts. Romania’s National Day (1 Dec.) marks the proclamation of Romania as a unified state in 1918. New Year’s (1–2 Jan.) is one of the most popular holidays. For *Mărțișor* (1 Mar.), men give women and girls

Romania

small brooches. Also celebrated are Women's Day (8 Mar.), Labor Day (1–2 May), and Children's Day (1 June). On certain days (such as Wednesdays and Fridays), on some religious holidays, or before Christmas or Easter, Orthodox Romanians may fast; or they may not eat or cook any animal products, sometimes for as long as 40 days.

Commerce. Many Romanians work in factories. Factory workers usually work morning, swing, or night shifts. Most factories close on Saturday and Sunday. Government offices are open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., while banking offices are open from 9 a.m. to noon and 2 to 4 p.m. A few stores may close around lunchtime but remain open later in the evening. General department stores are open all day. Except for restaurants, coffee shops, and some private shops, most businesses are closed on Saturday afternoons and Sunday. Depending on their seniority, workers enjoy two- to four-week vacations. Maternity leave of up to 2 years is paid at a percentage of the worker's salary.

SOCIETY

Government. Romania's new constitution established it as a republic in 1991. The directly elected president (currently Ion Iliescu) is head of state but also has broader powers. Romania's prime minister (currently Adrian Năstase) is head of government. The country's bicameral Parliament has a 140-seat Senate and a 345-seat Chamber of Deputies. There are also local governments for each of Romania's 40 counties and the capital city of Bucharest. The voting age is 18.

Economy. Primarily an agricultural nation before World War II, Romania continues to suffer from the rapid and forced industrialization policies of former governments. Large state industries with low productivity have drained finances for decades. Efforts at large-scale privatization have had only limited success. A few foreign companies have been attracted by tax incentives, skilled workers, and Romania's extensive industrial complex, but overall, foreign investment has been minimal.

The economy has been growing recently, but inflation and unemployment have also been high. The government's economic goals are to cut inflation, increase economic growth, increase foreign investment, encourage privatization, and hold the budget deficit in check. Most people struggle but are able to meet basic needs. Food is plentiful but expensive, often taking more than half of a family's monthly income.

Natural resources include iron, and timber. The most important exports are textiles, metals, machinery, consumer goods, foods, and fuels. However, natural gas and crude oil reserves are declining, and the country now relies on Russia for much of its energy. Romania's currency is the *leu* (ROL).

Transportation and Communications. Public transportation in the cities is reasonably efficient and inexpensive. Roads are in poor condition and are not developed to handle an increased number of cars. The train network links major cities, and although there are several modern trains, many are poorly maintained and lack heat in the winter. In rural areas, travel by bicycle and horse- or donkey-drawn carts (called *cărușă*) is still common. All major cities have local TV and FM radio stations; many people also have their own telephones. Mobile

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	72 of 175 countries
Adjusted for women	57 of 144 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$5,830
Adult literacy rate	99 percent (male); 97 (female)
Infant mortality rate	18 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	67 (male); 74 (female)

phone use is developing. Many Romanians have cable television. In several places, however, communications systems are limited; some rural areas have no phone service at all. Freedom of speech and press are guaranteed.

Education. Education is compulsory and free for students between the ages of six and sixteen. After they graduate, students seek employment, enter vocational training, or prepare for a university education. Most students complete some education beyond the required 10 years. Admission to a university is determined by entrance examinations and the number of available spaces. University students are among the most vocal supporters of political change.

Health. Many severe health problems face the people of Romania. Because of unsanitary medical practices, many children have contracted HIV/AIDS. Many women also have AIDS. Hepatitis B and tuberculosis are other dangers. Respiratory and other illnesses associated with heavy pollution and smoking are common. Health facilities are free to all citizens but may be poorly equipped and understaffed; some private clinics are available. Large groups of abandoned children in state institutions do not receive necessary attention or care. With the help of Western nations, the government is trying to address these problems.

AT A GLANCE

Events and Trends.

- After laboring to achieve various democratic reforms, improve military readiness, and reduce corruption, Romania was invited into NATO in November 2002. Voters approved a new constitution in 2003 that would bring the country closer in line with members of the European Union.
- Since January 2002, the Roma in Romania have been required to show border officials proof of wealth (at least \$250) to leave the country. Restrictions tightened after French officials complained about the social burden of having Roma in their country. Also, laws banning child marriages are now being strictly enforced among the Roma.
- Having served from 1990 to 1996, leftist Ion Iliescu returned to the presidency in 2000. The Social Democratic Party (PSD) won parliamentary elections and made Adrian Năstase prime minister.

Contact Information. Embassy of Romania, 1607 23d Street NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 232-3694; web site www.roembus.org. Romanian National Tourist Office, 14 East 38th Street, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10016; phone (212) 545-8484; web site www.romaniatourism.com.

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