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# ROMANIA AS A STUDY DESTINATION – ACCESS OF FOREIGN STUDENTS TO ROMANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION.

## A b s t r a c t

In the last 30 years, Romania's higher education system has undergone significant transformations as part of the post-communist transition and European accession. Most significantly, access to higher education was liberalized, a change immediately resulting in the proliferation of public and private higher education institutions. The system expanded to 900,000 students, but since it has steadily decreased.

During the '90s, the interest in Romania as a study destination grew. We should mention that there was some tradition in these areas as the communist regime supported and encouraged the flow of international students. At its height, more than 19,000 international students were enrolled in Romania in 1980/1981, although this value was cut in half by the end of the decade mainly due to drastically reducing the scholarships (from 8030 to 590). As of 1988, Romania had incoming student flows from 96 countries, although more than half of the students came from 5 countries: Greece (1,912), Israel (1,093), Syria (809), Jordan (780) and Iran (541).

Overall, the number of international students enrolled in Romanian universities more than tripled during the referenced period, from 6,669 in 1989/90 to over 27,000 in 2019/20. However, if we follow the year-by-year evolution, after reaching a maximum in 1996 at over 14,000 students, the flows start to decrease to a minimum of less than 9,000 international students enrolled in 2004. After that, values increase slowly but steadily from year to year. Even so, Romania reached only in 2012 the record values obtained during the communist regime.

As of 2019, Romania welcomes students from more than 140 countries, with a notable concentration in fields like medicine, especially in the capital city of Bucharest. Even if the top exports have changed, most students now come from Moldavia (more than 7,000), Israel (2,839), France (2,429), Italy (1,821) and Germany (1,311). It is noticeable that the high dependency on a handful of origin countries has been maintained over the years.

Regarding the internal dynamics of these flows, public universities attract most international students, although private institutions have begun to

gain traction in more recent years, accounting for about 10% of enrollments. The proportion of female international students has risen dramatically, from 17% to nearly half of the international cohort in 2018/19. Despite all these changes, international students still represent around 6% of the total student population.

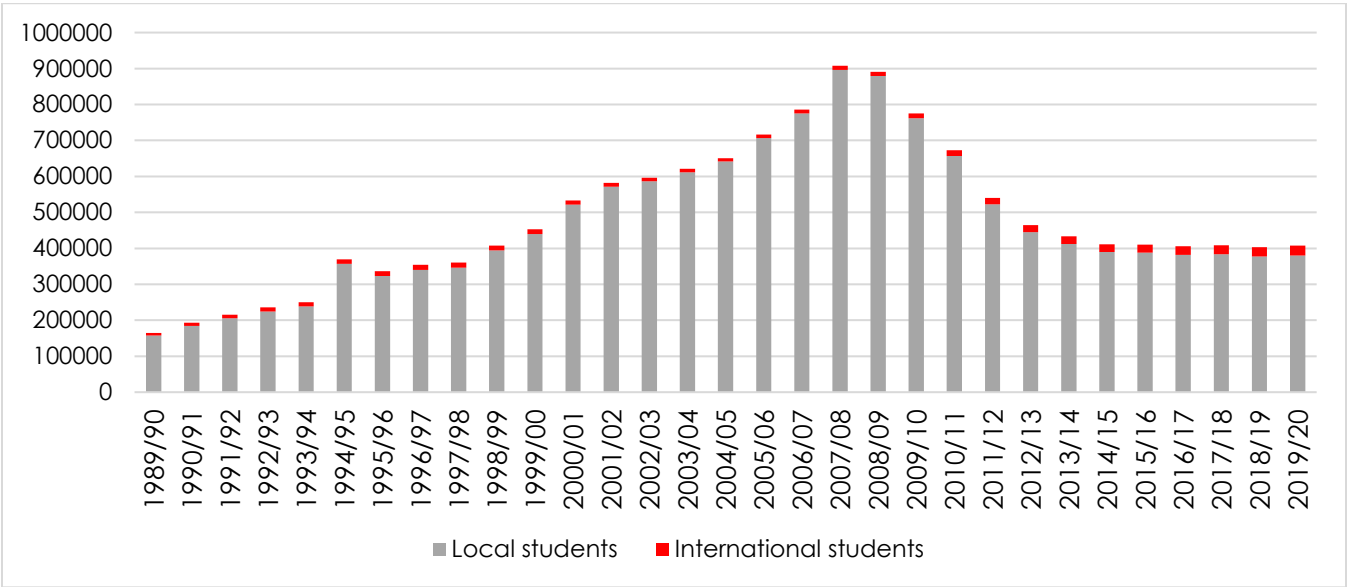


Figure 1: The evolution of the number of students in Romania

Scholarships provided by the Romanian government and universities, the strong relationship with Moldavia alongside streamlined policies for EU and diaspora students have significantly enhanced the accessibility of international students to the Romanian higher education system. Several strong flows with countries from Asia and Africa remained significant, as flows with countries in the European Union became stronger. However, the number of incoming students from Greece became less significant as time passed, and Greece is no longer one of the leading exporters of students towards Romania.