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ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC STATUS OF ROMANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ILLINOIS

Dan-Valeriu VOINEA Assistant, PhD Candidate, University of Craiova

Abstract: Using data from both the American Community Survey (2012) - US Census Bureau and from a survey done on the Romanian communities in the United States of America between August 2nd and October 19th 2013, this study is a first step in the direction of the examination of the importance of the social capital, cultural integration, and economic fulfillment in the development of a major Romanian community. The findings show the importance of cultural values a immigrants hold and the role those values play in the identity blending process known as acculturation. In the same time, the effect of cultural values varies according to the social, economic and legal status of the studied immigrants.

Keywords: immigration, Romanian-Americans, socio-demographic characteristics, statistical analysis, Illinois immigrants

The Romanian community in the United States is the third largest official Romanian diaspora, with a total population of over 462,975¹, after Italy, which has 997,000 immigrants from Romania² and Spain - 798,104³. The community established in Illinois is important, not only because of 34,691 Romanians living there – making it the fourth largest in the USA, with 7,46% of the total population of Romanians living in the United States, but because of the important cultural and social heritage of the Romanian Americans.

	State	Population estimate: Romanian
1	California	67,475
2	New York	56,596
3	Florida	35,837
4	Illinois	34,691
5	Michigan	30,320
6	Ohio	29,751
7	New Jersey	20,584
8	Pennsylvania	19,304
9	Texas	15,958
10	Washington	15,804

Table 1. Top 10 states in the United States of America, by population of Romanian origin.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey, 2010 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates, Table B01003.*

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey, 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0201: Selected Population Profile - Romanian (144-147)”, 2012.

² ISTAT - Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, “Indicatori demografici”, 2011.

³ Instituto Nacional de Estadística, “Population and Housing Censuses”, 2011.

Social and demographic data

As previously noted, according to the American Community Survey, done yearly by the US Census Bureau, there are 31,720 people residing in Illinois that declare themselves of Romanian origin. Their real number of Romanians could be much higher, depending on two factors. The first factor is what we consider as Romanian. Do we include former residents of Romania? People born in the United States that have two parents born in Romania? Or maybe one parent born in Romania? Or two grandparents? Should the former immigrants from Moldova be considered Romanians? The second factor to be taken into account is the persons that do not want to declare their true origin, for various reasons: either they are unaware of it or they want don't disclose it for privacy reasons.

Taking the limitations of the ACS ethnicity data into account, the data it provides is extremely valuable.

Gender	Total population (%)
	31,720
Male	47.9%
Female	52.1%

Table 2. Population of Romanian origin in Illinois, by sex. **Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, “*American Community Survey, 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0201: Selected population profile in the United States, Romanian (144-147)*”, 2012.

Out of the 31,720 Romanians in Illinois, 17,353 have been born in the United States, while 45,29%, or 14,367 are foreign born. Out of the foreign born, 9,297 are currently nationalized U.S. citizens, while 5,070 have not obtained their citizenship.

From the 14,367 Romanians that live in Illinois but are born outside of the United States, the largest part - 66.5% - arrived, according to the American Community Survey, before the year 2000. 30.5% have established their residence in the US between 2000 and 2009, while only 3.0% entered the American soil after 2010. We can see the migration in Illinois is important from both historical and current perspective, being both a past and ongoing phenomenon.

Regarding the reason and scope of immigration, 25% have arrived on a diversity visa, while only 8% have requested political asylum. 22% had a labor contract with a US company before immigrating, and 14% gained their citizenship by marrying an American citizen. 6% have arrived in the United States of America to reunite their family, while only 4% did so illegally.

“How did you immigrate to the USA?”

Response	Chart	Percentage
Diversity Visa		25%
Political asylum		8%
Labor contract (signed before migration)		22%
Marriage to an American citizen		14%
To reunite the family		6%
Clandestine / illegally		4%
Some other means		22%

Table 3. Method and reason of immigration to the United States . **Source:** Voinea, Dan, *“The identity of Romanians in the United States”*, Survey, August 2nd – October 19th 2013.

Another variable from which we see the importance of the Romanian heritage in our group is the language spoken at home and the ability to speak English. From the population 5 years old and over, 76.1% speak English “very well”, while 44.4% speak only English at home. 55.6% speak a language other than English, most likely Romanian.

“How proud are you to...?”

	Very proud	Quite proud	Not very proud	Not at all proud
Be Romanian or of Romanian descent?	48%	46%	6%	0%
Live in the United States of America?	31%	58%	8%	4%

Table 4. Pride in origin and current location. **Source:** Voinea, Dan, *“The identity of Romanians in the United States”*, Survey, August 2nd – October 19th 2013.

Romanians living in Illinois have not forgotten their origin. When asked how proud they are to be Romanian or of Romanian descent, 48% declare they are very proud and 46% declare they are quite proud. Only 6% are “not very proud” of their origin. In the same time, 31% are very proud to currently live in the USA, and 58% are quite proud. Only 8% are not very proud of their adoptive country and 4% are “not at all proud”.

47.9% of the Romanians in Illinois, or 15,193, are male and 52.1% - 16,527 people - are female. There are more Romanian women, and their percent is higher then that of total women in Illinois – which is 50.9%.

Age group	Percent
Under 5 years	5.5%
5 to 17 years	13.5%
18 to 24 years	8.6%
25 to 34 years	16.5%
35 to 44 years	16.1%
45 to 54 years	14.9%
55 to 64 years	12.4%
65 to 74 years	7.4%
75 years and over	5.2%

Table 5. Population of Romanian origin in Illinois, by age group. **Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey, 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0201: Selected population profile in the United States, Romanian (144-147)”, 2012.

The age distribution is mostly in line with the general distribution of age groups in the US population – 5,5% are under 5 years in the Romanian population, lower than the 6,3% in the general population. 13,5% of Illinois Romanians are 5 to 17 years old, compared to 17.5% of all Illinoisans. In our selected population profile, 8.6% of the persons are between 18 and 24 years old, 16.5% are between 25 and 34 years old, 16.1% between 35 and 44 years. There's a slight procentual decline in the following age groups: 45 to 54 year old represent only 14.9% of the population, while 55 to 64 years old account for 12.4%. Only 7.4% is between 65 and 74 years old, while 5.2% is 75 years and over.

As previously noted, there are small differences between Romanians and general Illinois population in all the age groups – but overall the median age in our selected population group is 38.8 years while the median age in the total Illinois population is 37 years. We can note that we have an aging population compared to the state average.

Age group Gender	Romanians (Illinois)	Total population (Illinois)
Under 18 years		
Male	47.6%	51.1%
Female	52.4%	48.9%
18 years and over		
Male	48.0%	48.4%
Female	52.0%	51.6%

18 to 34 years		
Male	48.1%	50.6%
Female	51.9%	49.4%
35 to 64 years		
Male	48.4%	49.1%
Female	51.6%	50.9%
65 years and over		
Male	46.3%	42.6%
Female	53.7%	57.4%

Table 6. Population of Romanian origin in Illinois, cross-tabulation: age group and gender.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, “*American Community Survey, 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0201: Selected population profile in the United States, Romanian (144-147)*”, 2012.

When analyzing the marital status of the people of Romanian origin living in Illinois, 53.2% of the 26,862 of the persons who are 15 or over are currently married, 6.5% have been widowed, 9.4% divorced and 2.0% separated. Summing up, 71.1% of our target group are or have been married, while only 29.0% have never been married.

Out of the 22,994 Romanian-Americans that are over 25 years old, only 9.5% did not manage to earn a high school diploma. 26.7% have managed to graduate high school or equivalent, while 23.1% earned a college or associate’s degree. 22.2% have been enrolled and finished a bachelor’s programme, earning a degree, while an excellent 18.5% continued with a graduate or professional degree. We can conclude that Romanians living in Illinois have a high level of educational attainment, spending many years in formal education programs. This is different from other minority groups, especially of foreign Latino origin, which are underachievers. On the other hand, African immigrants have been the most highly-educated group in the United States since the 1990s.

Cultural data

Illinois is the home of the largest Romanian festival, the Romanian Heritage Festival (*Festivalul Origini Românești*), organized by the Niles, Illinois based Romanian Heritage Center and the Romanian-American Network, with over 15,000 participants in 2013. The Romanian Heritage Center estimates that there are over 150,000 people of Romanian origin living in the Chicago metropolitan area and its proximity, including in this estimate people both from Romania and Moldova. Also based in Illinois are the Romanian Tribune Newspaper (*Tribuna Românească*), an important free newspaper distributed in the Chicago area Romanian diaspora, founded on 24 January 2002 ⁴, Romanian Radio Hour of Chicago -

⁴ Romanian Tribune, “Despre ziarul Romanian Tribune”, <<http://www.romaniantribune.net/DespreZiar.aspx>>, November 2nd 2013.

WEEF 1430 AM, a broadcast Romanian radio show, and Radio Voice of Romania – a daily Romanian radio show.

It's also important to note that the Chicago community has a distinct Consulate General of Romanian in Chicago, with a staff of 5, which serves besides Illinois the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska and Wisconsin.

Another important Chicago-based initiative is the ROCX – Romanian Cultural Exchange, a “nonprofit organization, dedicated to promoting creative programs and projects focused on intercultural and educational exchange”, with a “mission to collaborate with Romanian-American and other local organizations to promote Romanian cultural values and to help create a stronger, more unified community”⁵, the organizer of another important Romanian cultural event in the USA, the Romanian Film Festival in Chicago, currently at its fifth edition – part of the Romanian Cultural Marathon. The Romanian – American Yellow Pages, with over 5 editions, is another important product of the Illinois Romanian community – an yellow pages index of the business and culture of Romanians established in the United States of America. Radio Diaspora Online and Diaspora TV Online are also initiatives partially started in Illinois in 2010 –online only radio and TV stations targeting the Romanians living abroad.

Another important Romanian presence in Illinois is the Romanian Students' Club, at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, established in 1999, with over 300 members between 1999 and 2011.

The Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas, an autonomous Eastern Orthodox Diocese of the Romanian Orthodox Church, with 31 parishes in the United States of America and 25 other in Canada has its diocesan center in Chicago, Illinois. The Archdiocese publishes a trimestral magazine, The Faith Magazine (*Credința*), a yearly - The Faith Almanac (*Almanachul Credința*), an online newsletter dubbed ROAA and many, many books. It is also one of the main organizer and host of Romanian events, with weekly community meetings after the Sunday service.

The Philadelphia Romanian Church of God in Chicago, Illinois, the main Romanian Pentecostal Church in Chicago celebrated their 40th anniversary in 2013, while its younger sister church, the Elim Chicago Pentecostal Church reached a parish of 900 souls in just 12 years. A very interesting aspect is that the Elim Church broadcasts all the church services live, online, via their website, at www.elimro.com.

The Romanian Baptist Church of Metropolitan Chicago, founded on the 26th of July 1970, also has live and on-demand video access to church services and holds sermons in both English and Romanian.

Speaking of online, there are many important Romanian Illinois communities on Facebook. Out of the 25,626 Romanians in the United States that have Facebook accounts, 2,582 are in or from Illinois – representing 10,07% of the total population - compared to the 7,46% in the official US Census. There are also 5 open Facebook groups related to the

⁵ Romanian Cultural Exchange <<http://www.romanianculturalexchange.org/>>, November 3th 2013.

Romanians living in Chicago, with a total of 944 members and daily updates from their members.⁶

	State	Facebook Users of Romanian Origin
1	California	4,154
2	New York	3,205
3	Illinois	2,494
4	Florida	2,451
5	Texas	1,113

Table 7. Top 5 states by Facebook users of Romanian origin.

Source: Facebook.com, *Facebook user statistics by state, country of origin and language spoken*, 2013.

Economic data

Continuing our analysis of the Romanian community in Illinois, United States of America, using both the American Community Survey and self-research done in August - October 2013, we will next analyze the employment status of the Romanian population group. 69.2% of the 26,509 Romanian Illinoisans who are 16 or older are in the civilian labor force, 61.5% are employed, and only 7.6% are unemployed (representing 11% of the civilian labor force). 0.1% are members of the armed forces, while 30.8% have yet to join the labor force.

Regarding the daily work commute, of the 16,033 workers of 16 years and over, 68.0% drive alone in a car, truck or van, while 9.5% carpool. Only 11.1% go to work via public transportation, excluding those who take a taxicab. Just 2.7% live within walking distance of their workplace, while 7.1% work at home. The mean travel time to work is 30.6 minutes.

Civilian employed population 16 years and over	Total	Male	Female
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	42.9%	44.7%	41.0%
Service occupations	21.1%	10.4%	32.4%
Sales and office occupations	16.5%	11.1%	22.2%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	8.1%	15.1%	0.6%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	11.5%	18.7%	3.8%

Table 8. Population of Romanian origin in Illinois: occupation. **Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey, 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0201: Selected population profile in the United States, Romanian (144-147)*, 2012.

⁶ Data collected on the 1st of November 2013.

We can see interesting occupational differences based on gender in the civilian employed population of over 16 years and over: the “female occupations”, where only 11.1% of males are in sales and office occupation, while 22.2% of the females are in the same sector of business, and 32.4% of women have service occupations, compared to 10.4% of men. On the other hand, regarding “manly jobs”, only 0.6% of females hold a job in natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations, compared to 15.1% of males, and 18.7% of men are in production, transportation, and material moving occupations, compared to a meager 3.8% of women.

Regarding the industry in which they are employed, 24.8% work in educational services, and health care and social assistance, 15.6% in professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services and 9.7% finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing. Only 8.5% of Romanians in Illinois work in construction, 8% in transportation, warehousing and utilities, 7.9% in arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services, 7.7% in manufacturing and 5.9% in retail trade. 5.7% are employed in other services, and 2.3% are in wholesale trade. Only 2.1% work in public administration and 1.5% in information. As Illinois is not a major agri state, only 0.1% of our study group work in agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting or mining. When analyzing the class of the workers, 80.7% are private wage and salary workers, while 7.8% are government workers. Showing great business initiative, 11.5% are self-employed workers in their own not incorporated business.

Romanians in the Illinois, following the general trend of Romanians in the United States, have earned above-average incomes in the past 12 months. In 2012 inflation-adjusted dollars, the median household income was \$60,862, \$5,725 higher than the median Illinoisan household income, while the mean earnings were situated at \$83,952. 21.9% have Social Security income, with a mean of \$15,777, while 4.0% claim Supplemental Security Income, with an average of \$10,753. Only 1.9% cash public assistance income – which was on average \$5,391 in 2012. 6.8% had Food Stamp or SNAP benefits for nutrition aid. The median family income was situated at \$73,720 for the average family. It was higher for the 80.2% of married-couple families, at \$86,304 and the 5.2% male householder, no spouse present, families - \$74,519. Very disadvantaged families are the 14.6% with female householder, no husband present, that have a median income of only \$29,086.

The per capita income for the 31,720 individuals is \$34,865, much higher than the \$28,741 for the average Illinoisan.

There are important gender differences regarding the earnings for full time, year-round workers. If the mean earnings for male full-time workers are \$81,904, female workers only earn \$54,914. The median earnings are at \$54,757 for men and \$41,880 for women.

Regarding health insurance coverage, which is an important factor of economic fulfillment in the United States of America, only 21.2% have no health insurance. 23.4% have public coverage, while the largest part – 63.2% - have private health insurance.

Only 5.8% of the families accounted in our study could be considered under the poverty level, representing 9.5% of all Romanians in Illinois.

65.3% of Romanians live in owner-occupied housing units, while 34.7% live in renter-occupied housing units. We can see that Romanians keep their habit of preferring to own the

places they live in. The average household size of owner-occupied units is 2.71, compared to 2.20 for renter-occupied units. 89.7% of Romanians households own 1 or more vehicles. The median gross rent paid for the 4,518 occupied units paying rent is \$943.

“During the past year, did your family?”

Response	Chart	Percentage
Save money		54%
Just get by		38%
Spent some savings		0%
Spent savings and borrowed money		2%
Don't know / No answer		6%

Table 9. Economic gains in the past year. **Source:** Voinea, Dan, “*The identity of Romanians in the United States*”, Survey, August 2nd – October 19th 2013.

When asked how their family fared in the past year, over 54% of Romanians in Illinois declared that they saved money, while only 2% borrowed money or spent savings.⁷

“Can you please tell me which were your total revenues in the past year, including wages, pensions, allowances, money from lease, dividends, etc.?”

Response	Chart	Percentage
up to \$8,925		2%
\$8,925 to \$36,250		22%
\$36,251 to \$87,850		38%
\$87,851 to \$183,250		24%
\$183,251 to \$400,000		10%
\$400,000+		4%

Table 10. Total revenues in the past year, self-declared. **Source:** Voinea, Dan, “*The identity of Romanians in the United States*”, Survey, August 2nd – October 19th 2013.

4% of Romanians in Illinois declare they earn over \$400,000, while 10% earn between \$183,251 and \$400,000. Just 24% have received revenues between \$87,851 and \$183,250, while the other 52% earn under \$87,850.

⁷ Voinea, Dan, “*The identity of Romanians in the United States*”, Survey, August 2nd – October 19th 2013.

In conclusion

From the analysis of statistical data from three distinct data sources – the *American Community Survey 2012*, by the U.S. Census Bureau, *The identity of Romanians in the United States of American 2013*, by the present author, and the study of Facebook presence of Romanians in the United States of America, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. The Romanians in Illinois are a large and integrated group of immigrants.
2. They have strong cultural ties to both the local community and the local Romanian groups, as seen by the events they often organize.
3. The church has a very significant role in the local immigrant community.
4. Romanian - Illinoisans are over-achievers – they have higher educational attainment and higher mean and median incomes than the average Illinoisan.
5. Romanian immigrants are proud of their origin and have not forgotten their mother language.