

**LESSONS SO FAR FROM THE ROMANIAN CENSUS.
EMPHASIS ON THE SWINDLING NUMBERS
OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN HUNGARIAN ETHNIC MINORITY**

**A ROMÁNIAI NÉPSZÁMLÁLÁS EDDIGI TANULSÁGAI.
FÓKUSZBAN AZ ERDÉLYI MAGYARSÁG LÉLEKSZÁMVESZTÉSE**

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Based on the latest publicly available data, this study attempts to outline the results of the 2022 Romanian census and its implications for the indigenous ethnic Hungarian population. Besides its undeniable scientific significance, the census also holds numerous practical benefits and is essential for political decision-making. Census data enables the precise mapping and understanding of social, economic, and demographic processes. Consequently, it provides a foundation for various international, national, regional, or local policies and offers assistance in developing long-term strategies, and forecasts. Since the census serves as the starting point of population estimates making it the most reliable source of demographic information, I consider the results of the Romanian 2011 census as the main point of comparison and reference. In the first part, I present the methodological characteristics of the census by reference to census act the official Hungarian version of the census questionnaire. Subsequently, I compare the available official statistics and trends of the 2022 census with the results of the 2011 census, with a particular emphasis on the characteristics of the ethnic Hungarian population in Romania.

Keywords: *census, statistics, national politics, minority, Romania, Hungary, Transylvania*

A tanulmány a legfrissebb publikus adatok alapján megkísérli felvázolni a 2022-es román népszámlálás eredményeit, annak tanulságait az őshonos, magyar kisebbségi lélekszámról vonatkozó adatok függvényében. A népszámlálás megkerülhetetlen tudományos jelentősége mellett számos gyakorlati haszonnal is bír, és politikai döntések számára is nélkülözhetetlen. A népszámlálás adatai ugyanis lehetővé teszik a társadalmi, gazdasági és demográfiai folyamatok pontos feltérképezését és megértését, ezáltal pedig egyrészt megalapozzák a különböző nemzetközi, országos, regionális vagy éppen településszintű intézkedéseket, másrészt segítséget nyújtanak a hosszú távú stratégiák és előrejelzések kidolgozásához. Mivel a lakosságszám becslésének kiindulópontját a népszámlálás jelenti, vagyis ez tekint-

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hető a legmegbízhatóbb demográfiai adatforrásnak, ezért a 2011-es romániai népszámlálás eredményeit tekintem fő összehasonlítási és kiindulási pontnak. Az első részben a népszámlálás módszertani jellegzetességeit mutatom be a népszámlálás lebonyolításáról szóló törvény és a hivatalos, magyar nyelvű népszámlálási kérdőív segítségével. Ezt követően a 2022-es népszámlálás eddig rendelkezésre álló hivatalos statisztikáit, trendjeit vetem össze a 2011-es népszámlálási adatok eredményeivel, külön hangsúlyt fektetve a Romániában élő, de magyar kisebbségi népesség jellemzőire.

Kulcsszavak: népszámlálás, statisztika, nemzetpolitika, kisebbség, Románia, Magyarország, Erdély

Introduction

In line with EU obligations and the European Commission's rules, a census should have been conducted in all Member States by 2021. However, due to the coronavirus pandemic, several countries, including Romania, opted to postpone their censuses, with Romania rescheduling it to take place between March and July 2022. In this analysis, I will endeavour to outline the results of the Romanian census in 2021, based on the latest available data, and its implications for the ethnic Hungarian population. Aside from its undeniable scientific significance, the census has numerous practical benefits and is indispensable for policymaking. Census data provides a precise overview of social, economic, and demographic processes, forming the foundation for various international, national, regional, and municipal policies, as well as assisting in the development of long-term strategies, forecasts, and development proposals. Since the census serves as the most reliable source of population data, I will utilize the 2011 for Romania census results as the primary point of comparison and reference.

To present a comprehensive picture, I will describe the methodological features of the census by reference "the Act on the Conduct of the Census" and the official Hungarian version of the census questionnaire. Subsequently, I will compare the official statistics and trends available thus far for the 2021 census with the 2011 census results, with a particular emphasis on the characteristics of the ethnic Hungarian population residing in Romania. As always, the census holds particular significance for ethnic Hungarians in Romania, as some minority rights they have previously been granted continue to depend on their numbers of.¹

1. Methodological Approach to the Romanian Census

Romania became a member of the European Union on January 1, 2007, entailing both benefits and obligations. As a member state of the European Union, Romania was obliged to conduct a population and housing census in 2021, in accordance with the requirements of Regulation (EU) No. 763/2008 of the European Parliament and the Council, dated July 9, 2008, on population and housing censuses and

¹ PAPP Z. Attila: Az etnikai adatgyűjtés módszertana a Magyarországgal szomszédos országok népszámlálásaiban. *Statisztikai Szemle* (2015) 88/1., 11–12.

its implementing regulations. The compulsory collection of census data was to occur in 2021, making the years 2020 and 2021 crucial for the preparation and implementation of the census under appropriate conditions.

The census is a comprehensive statistical survey with the primary objective of generating official national and European statistics, presented as statistical indicators. These indicators encompass the size and geographic distribution of the population, its demographic and socio-economic structure, data on households, housing stock, housing conditions of the population, and the buildings in which dwellings are situated. To meet the established deadlines, a series of activities should have been conducted by member states, including Romania, starting in 2020. These activities were to include:

- Development of the statistical toolkit.
- Procurement and implementation of the components of an integrated IT system, which, among other capabilities, will facilitate the online collection of census data.
- Recruitment of additional staff.
- Division of the localities.
- Execution of the pilot census.
- Launch of a census publicity campaign.
- Implementation of promotional campaigns.
- Recruitment and training of fieldwork staff.
- IT processing of data.
- Development of IT requirements for data processing and validation.
- Implementation of IT methods and applications required for data processing and validation.
- Ensuring data protection and confidentiality.
- Validation of census data.
- Aggregation and processing of census data.
- Territorial distribution of census materials.
- Organization of territorial activities, etc.

As widely known, the primary objective of the census is to furnish essential and high-quality information for government policies in economic and social domains, including areas such as human development, research, and the business environment. Romania's failure to meet the obligations outlined in the aforementioned regulation posed the risk of potential infringement proceedings that could be initiated by the European Commission in the event that the population and housing census could not be prepared within the two years preceding the census year. This risk arose due to the complex situation stemming from the fact that the public debate procedure for the draft law governing the organization and conduct of the 2021 population and housing census in Romania, initially proposed in 2018, could not be concluded owing to changes in the composition of the Romanian government. These changes required the restart of the procedure, rendering it impossible to obtain

all the required reports for the completion of the parliamentary legislative process. Furthermore, the absence of census data has hindered the formulation of specific national and local social policies.

In consequence, it can be asserted that the failure to realise the census would have resulted in the inability to develop both short- and long-term strategies, strategic planning, and action plans for the Romanian state. This would have had severe consequences for public interests, affecting both the central and local levels. Additionally, the absence of a census would have obstructed access to non-reimbursable funds and grants.

European funds for social inclusion would have been jeopardized due to the absence of information on population and housing. Failure to enact this legislation under the emergency system would also have made it impossible to prepare and organize a population and housing census. It should be noted that the elements mentioned above are in the public interest and constitute an exceptional situation that cannot be delayed. Furthermore, it's essential to emphasize that, according to Article 115(4) of the Revised Constitution of Romania, any legislative approach other than the legislative mandate would not have mitigated the negative consequences on society as a whole, as these consequences would have occurred regardless due to the lack of census preparation and execution.

Consequently, it can be affirmed that the aspects mentioned are in the public interest and constitute an exceptional situation as per Article 115(4) of the Revised Constitution of Romania, and their regulation cannot be postponed. Additionally, it should be added that an alternative legislative method would not have prevented these adverse consequences for society as a whole. Given the potential consequences mentioned above, the Government of Romania has issued this Emergency Government Ordinance in accordance with Article 115 of the Revised Constitution of Romania. This Emergency Government Ordinance addresses various aspects, including the organization and conduct of the 2021 Census of Population and Housing in Romania, covering the entire national territory, in compliance with both national requirements and the provisions of Regulation (EU) No. 763/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of July 9, 2008, on Population and Housing Censuses, as well as its transposition into national law. It also considers the recommendations of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe for the 2021 Census and the production of census statistics indicators.²

The primary objective of the 2021 Census is to generate official national and European statistics of high quality regarding the number and geographical distribution of the resident population, demographic and socio-economic structure, population households, housing stock, housing conditions, and dwellings. The census is organized and conducted by the National Institute of Statistics, following the regulations of the European Union and the standards of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe that are applicable in the field of population and housing

² Emergency decree on the organization and conduct of the population and housing census in Romania no. 19/2020 in 2021.

censuses. This is done under the coordination and supervision of the Central Commission for Population and Housing Censuses.³

1.1. Subject of the Census

As per the census law, the census in Romania includes the following subjects and objects:

- Romanian individuals with foreign citizenship or individuals without citizenship who have their habitual residence in Romania;
- Individuals having Romanian citizenship residing in Romania and having their habitual residence in another country for a period of less than 12 months;
- Individuals having Romanian citizenship who are members of the staff of diplomatic missions and consular posts of Romania abroad, members of the national armed forces stationed elsewhere in the world, national staff of national scientific bases stationed outside the geographical territory of the country, members of the crews of fishing vessels, other vessels, aircraft, and offshore platforms operating wholly or partly outside the economic territory of Romania who are of Romanian nationality;
- Family nuclei and family households;
- Residential buildings;
- Buildings used for purposes other than residential, where they contain at least one dwelling;
- Dwellings in any building in the territory of Romania, regardless of the form of ownership;
- Common residential premises.

Individuals without Romanian citizenship from diplomatic, consular, and commercial missions or representations of international organizations, along with their family members, personnel of foreign armed forces, naval and air merchant fleets (if they are foreign citizens) temporarily staying in the country on the census reference date, are not included in the census. Additionally, buildings occupied by diplomatic missions or consular offices of other states or by representations of international organizations on the territory of Romania, if not inhabited or occupied by Romanian citizens, are not registered in the census.⁴

1.2. Composition of the Census Questionnaire

The official Hungarian version of the 2021 Census questionnaire consists of approximately six pages and is divided into four sections, containing a total of 18 questions. Only individuals registered as household reporter (data provider) had to fill out the housing questionnaire, while others were only required to answer the per-

³ Law on conducting the Romanian census no. 2022. (II. 4/1).

⁴ Law on conducting the Romanian census no. 2022. (II. 5).

sonal questionnaire. It's important to note that the questionnaires were not standardized, and the questions asked varied depending on the household's or individual's situation.

The questionnaire covered six different topics following personal data and the privacy notice:

- Demographic characteristics;
- Domestic and international migration;
- Ethnocultural characteristics;
- Educational level;
- Economic characteristics;
- The impact of the pandemic.

In the third part of the questionnaire, under ethnocultural characteristics, the census question on ethnicity is included, which will be discussed later in this paper, focusing on the Hungarian context. The key questions in this section pertain to ethnicity, native language, and religion.

The questions relevant for ethnicity and national identify in the 2021 Romanian census were the following:

1. What national minority do you identify as belonging to?
2. What is your native language?
3. Which religion or denomination do you claim to belong to?⁵

1.3. Duration and Conduct of the Census

The census reference date was December 1, 2021, 00:00. This census is best thought of as taking a snapshot of the country's population on this specific date. Everyone had to record their status at that time; for instance, if a respondent was single or married, employed or unemployed on December 1, that was the information entered, not the status pertinent to any later date. Importantly, children born after December 1, 2021, were not included, but family members were obliged to report any household member who had passed away in the meantime but was still alive on December 1 of the previous year.

The census encompassed those individuals who had their usual residence in Romania on the reference date, having either lived there in the previous 12 months or intending to live there in the subsequent 12 months. This included a significant portion of temporary residents abroad, such as those having several, seasonal workers or students abroad, road, individuals who had recently relocated or moved within the country (in the questionnaire, they were marked as temporarily absent). Those who had been living abroad for an extended period on a permanent basis could also be included as household members. However, those registered as

⁵ *The official version of the census questionnaire in Hungarian.*
<https://www.nepszamlalas.ro/Mit-kell-tudni-a-nepszamlalasrol>, 2023. március 9.

long-term absentees did not receive a separate personal questionnaire and were not counted in the population.

It's important to emphasize that the census could be filled out in two ways: through online self-reporting or during traditional face-to-face interviews. According to the Census Law, all individuals ordinarily residing in Romania were required to provide their data using the self-reporting method online, with the assistance of a username and password, by filling out their individual P form, which was already partially pre-filled with data from indirect sources. It's worth noting that the online self-reporting phase was completed before the census itself, and those who chose to fill out the questionnaire online had to do so between March 14 and May 15, 2022. Those who did not do so had the opportunity to provide answers to traditional face-to-face interviews from May 16 to July 17, 2022. Individuals who did not participate in the first phase and were not contacted by enumerators by June 27, 2022, had to report to their municipality's mayor's office.

According to the current census law, the census could be conducted in Hungarian, in addition to Romanian, for both self-reporting and personal interviews. This was achieved through imputation using statistical methods for statistical units that did not have a completed form.⁶

1.4. Processing of Census Results

The National Statistical Institute (Institutul Național de Statistică – I.N.S.) carried out the verification, validation, processing, and publication of the collected data between February 2022 and March 2024. The I.N.S. was granted the authority through an Emergency Government Ordinance to collect, store, process, analyse, and publish official census data, provide information required by internal users, and deliver census data in 2021 in accordance with the provisions of Regulation (EC) No. 763/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of July 9, 2008, on population and housing censuses and its implementing regulations.⁷

It's crucial to underline that census data was not processed in a manner that would allow identification of individuals, ensuring personal data protection, guaranteed by the I.N.S. Therefore, individual personal data could not be disclosed. Personnel who handled the data were bound by strict confidentiality rules.⁸

2. Results of the 2022 Romanian census on the Hungarian population and its experience

The census holds particular significance for the Hungarian population in Romania. Many of the minority rights achieved thus far depend on the number of ethnic Hungarians living in the country. Over the next ten years, the results of the census

⁶ Law on conducting the Romanian census no. 2022. (III).

⁷ Law on conducting the Romanian census no. 2022. (IV/23).

⁸ *Frequently asked questions about the census*. <https://www.nepszamlalas.ro/gyik/>, 2023. március 13.

may impact the enforcement of language and minority rights for ethnic Hungarians, as well as the extent to which their educational and cultural institutions receive state funding. The Romanian government allocates budgets and other public resources to municipalities based on population figures and can reorganize administration accordingly. Depending on the census data, priorities, and funding for the development of settlements may change, as will decisions regarding housing, family, education, health, employment, and social situations. Therefore, a crucial question for the 2021 census is how the number and proportion of ethnic Hungarians in Romania have changed over the last ten years.⁹

The preliminary results of the census were published by the I.N.S. on December 30, 2022, but only in Romanian. According to the published data, compared to the 2011 census figures, the country's population of 20.12 million people decreased to 19.05 million people, representing a total population decline of 1.1 million people. The central question of this study is the extent to which this population loss is constituted of ethnic Hungarians. From the data, it can be inferred that the proportion of Hungarians is substantial. The Hungarian community, which counted 1,227,623 in 2011, has decreased to 1,002,151 in 2022. This means that 225,472 fewer Hungarians lived in Romania in 2022 compared to 2011. It's important to note that the proportional decrease in the number of Hungarians exceeds that of Romanians. Within the total population of the country, the Hungarian proportion has decreased from 6.5 percent to 6 percent over the span of a decade.

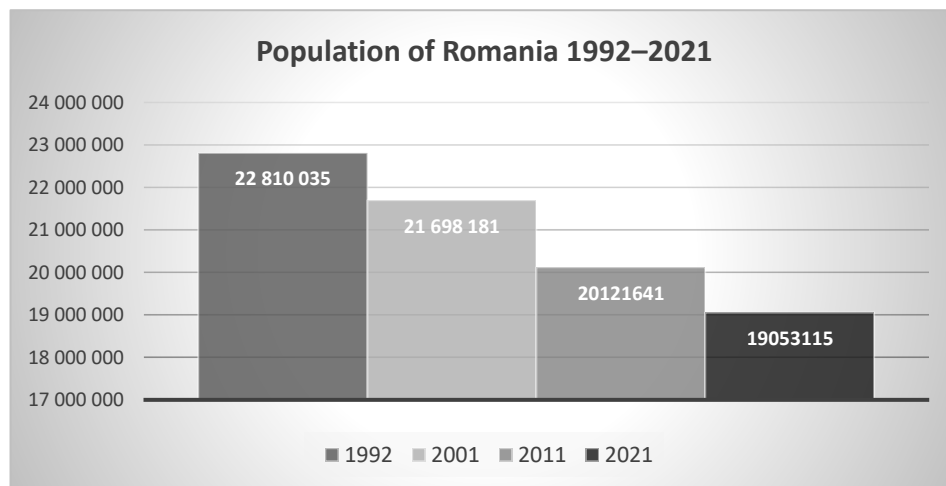


Figure 1. Romania's population in 2011 and 2021
(own editing based on data from the I.N.S.)

⁹ *Frequently asked questions about the census.* <https://www.npszamlalas.ro/gyik/>, 2023. március 20.

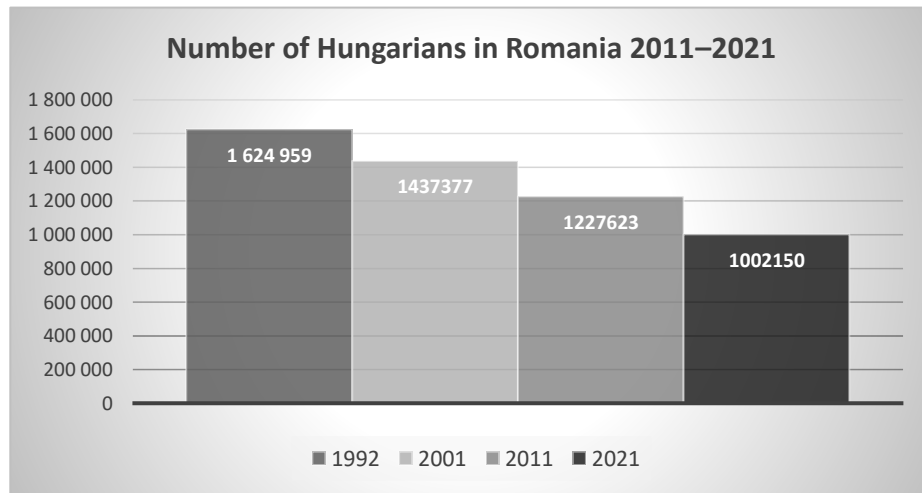


Figure 2. *Number of Hungarians in Romania in 2011 and 2021*
(own editing based on data from the I.N.S.)

The data clearly show that both the Romanian population and the Hungarian population shrank significantly. But what is behind the numbers? According to experts, the published figures paint a rather distorted picture. One significant change in the figures occurred at the time of the 2011 referendum when the I.N.S. finalized the data. During that period, demographers considered the provisional population figure of 19.05 million to be realistic, while the finalized figure of 20.1 million was seen as exaggerated. However, in the current census, it is no longer possible to use the same method to further inflate the population, as the I.N.S. had already used this technique in the provisional aggregation and extracted data on one million individuals from statistical and administrative databases.

The accuracy of the 2021 census data is considered questionable and met with scepticism by many sociologists and experts for several reasons. One reason is that if we add the number of Romanian citizens registered as permanent residents in other EU countries or the number of Romanian citizens living abroad according to World Bank and UN global statistics, the total number of Romanian citizens would be unrealistically high, potentially reaching 24 million. Another indication of data inaccuracy is the insufficient time and enumerators to collect data at home and the possibility of incomplete questionnaire submission. Experts have also pointed out that the questionnaire did not include an option to opt out of declaring one's religion or nationality, leading to further inaccuracies and skewed data. One significant concern is that if someone filled out the online questionnaire incompletely, they were not necessarily contacted by enumerators to retrieve their data. Overstated results may have occurred because Romanian citizens living abroad on a permanent basis were able to complete the online questionnaire. Experts also complain that the census was not conducted in the homes of many people, and that enumerators may not have fully counted those living in informal settlements (e.g. slums in

major cities, unregistered dwellings etc). A further concern is that I.N.S. communicates vaguely about why it does not know what it does not know. These shortcomings suggest that for 2.5 million Romanian residents the cultural characteristics of their ethnicity are not known, such as their native language, and religion, according to Bucharest sociologist Mircea Kivu. Thus, the data on linguistic and religious communities paints a distorted picture. It is important to note that inaccurate statistics also clearly undermine faith in good governance, as they provide a false picture of the age, education, income distribution and housing needs of the population. For instance, the National Commission for Strategy and Forecasting in Romania also relies on inaccurate data, as the I.N.S. provides information for its bi-annual county-level forecasts. These forecasts include population figures, average wages, unemployment, school-age population, and more, which decision-makers use to plan local or national measures.¹⁰

In this context, the ethnic Hungarian population of approximately one million and the drastic decrease compared to the 2011 census raise several questions. Based on the data, the current decline in the Hungarian population is the largest in the three censuses since the fall of communism. According to demographic experts, one of the biggest questions is the composition of the 1.1 million population loss, as statistics show that the country's migration loss is only 423,000. According to demographers, it is almost inconceivable that fewer than half a million Romanian citizens have emigrated to Western European countries in ten years. This contradicts official immigration figures from the UK, France, Germany, Italy, and other Western European countries, which provide a detailed record of the influx from Romania. It is estimated that around four million Romanian citizens have emigrated to both EU and non-EU countries. It should be noted that the majority of these individuals have not resettled in the last ten years, but the number of recent emigrants from Romania may be much higher than the number recorded in the official statistics by Bucharest in the census data. Tamás Kiss, a sociologist at the National Institute for Minority Research in Cluj-Napoca, also questions the data released by the I.N.S. In his opinion, the 19 million population figure for Romania is unrealistic, but his biggest reservations are about the figures on migration losses. The demographer acknowledges that the methodology of the census makes it challenging and difficult to obtain an accurate picture of the migration loss, but that it could have been measured much better than in the previous Romanian census. According to the sociologist, questions should have been included in the questionnaire that would have clearly indicated who is living permanently abroad and who is living in Romania. Mirror statistics available in Western European countries could have also been utilized. Compared to the current statement, the migration phenomenon in Romania could have been much more precisely defined. However, this is not necessarily in Romania's interest, as the aim of a census is not solely to

¹⁰ BILBÓK Karola: *A népszámlálás addig jó, míg nem nézünk a számok mögé. Jóvanazúgyis?* <https://atlatszo.ro/napi-politika/hirek/nepszamlalas-romania-elozetes-magyarok-romak-romanok-anyanyelv/>, 2023. március 2.

describe reality, but to convey some form of representation. In this light, it is understandable that it is in the fundamental interest of the Romanian state and, and to a certain extent, society that Romania's weight, measured not only in terms of economic performance but also in terms of population, should not be reduced within the European Union. This is one of the fundamental reasons why the census data can be distorted, as access to structural funds and the number of seats in the European Parliament depend on it. Therefore, if Romania's weight is reduced due to the population, it may not necessarily be advantageous for the Romanian political elite, the state, or society.¹¹

It is clear that there are several professional concerns regarding the published census data, but it is official statistics and must be taken as a starting point. The central issue of this study is the change in the Hungarian population in Romania. Based on the published data, it must be stated that the ethnic Hungarian minority is shrinking at a higher rate than the majority Romanian population. According to the data, the ethnic Hungarian population is proportionally shrinking at twice the rate of the national population. Hungarians are represented in the death statistics at twice the rate of the country's overall population, with 85,000 ethnic Hungarians deceased in ten years, representing 13% of all deaths in Romania. This dramatic population decrease can be explained by the fact that the age profile of ethnic Hungarians in Romania is less favourable than that of the majority Romanian population, meaning there are proportionally more elderly people among ethnic Hungarians in Romania than among Romanians. There are many reasons for this, but the main driver of the decline in the Hungarian population is emigration. It's important to note that while the Romanian population started emigrating in large numbers after regime change in 1989, the emigration of ethnic Hungarians from Romania began earlier due to persecution fostered against ethnic Hungarians during the later period of the Ceausescu regime. This process intensified in the 1990s. It's evident that the majority of the emigrees (refugees) came from the younger age groups, and their children were no longer born in Romania. This was compounded by the fact that during the years of communism, the fertility rate among ethnic Hungarians remained lower than among the majority Romanian population, further reducing the relative proportion of ethnic Hungarians. So, it is not that ethnic Hungarian families in Romania are currently having fewer children than Romanian families, but rather that fertility was lower in the past. For this reason, the ethnic Hungarians have a much more unfavourable demographic profile, to put it simply: the ethnic Hungarian community is older than the national average. However, this trend was already detectable in previous censuses, between 1992 and 2002. The fertility rate has now levelled off to some extent, and according to sociologists, it can be said that in the last ten years the emigration of Transylvanian Hungarians has been

¹¹ KISS Tamás: *Romániai népszámlálás: torzíthatnak az adatok*. <https://www.vg.hu/nemzetkozi-gazdasag/2023/01/romaniai-nepszamlalas-torzithatnak-az-adatok>, 2023. március 4.

slightly lower than that of Romanians, but the negative demographic consequences of the unfavourable age structure inherited from previous decades remain.¹²

2.1. Professional debate around the Romanian census

Following the publication of the partial data from the Romanian census, a heated debate has erupted in Romanian public life regarding the decline in the ethnic Hungarian community. The primary reason for this debate are the previously mentioned questions and concerns about the accuracy of the statistical data. Sociologists and public figures have differing opinions on the exact number of ethnic Hungarians, as well as on the 2.5 million Romanian citizens without declared ethnicity. Sociologist Valér Veres, in a study¹³ on the processing of the preliminary census data, argues that the proportion of ethnic Hungarians in this population is less than six percent, around 4.5 percent. According to the university lecturer's calculations, there are thus 112,000 more Hungarians living in Romania, which would bring the total number of Hungarians in Romania to 1,140,000.

Valér Veres based his claim on the extensive campaign of the Hungarian Democratic Alliance in Romania (RMDSZ), which led to the majority of ethnic Hungarians declaring their Hungarian ethnicity in the census. Therefore, the ethnic Hungarian population was underrepresented in the official statistics. Sociologist Tamás Kiss, however, considers this to be an assumption because, in his view, official statistics serve as the starting point, and a more accurate picture can only be obtained after the publication of settlement and county-level figures.¹⁴ Hunor Kelemen, President of the Hungarian Democratic Alliance in Romania, holds a different view on the published data, stating that they present a realistic picture. According to Hunor Kelemen, the ethnic Hungarian and Romanian communities in Romania are affected by the population decline in roughly the same proportions. In his statement, he emphasized that the ethnic Hungarian community in Romania is a strong community envisioning its future in Transylvania, and thus he sees no reason to be concerned about the figures. He added that, in his opinion, the number of ethnic Hungarians in Romania could be over one million, and there is no question of a 250,000 population decrease. He based his statement on the law of large numbers, suggesting that among the 2.5 million citizens who did not declare their

¹² MAKKAY József: *Népszámlálás: megszépitett román statisztikák?* <https://magyar-nemzet.hu/lugas-rovat/2023/01/nepszamlalas-megszepitett-roman-statisztikak>, 2023. március 16.

¹³ VERES Valér: *Hogyan csökkent a magyarok száma Erdély megyéiben, ha az „ismeretlen” nemzetiségűekkel is számolunk?* <https://transtelex.ro/best-of/2023/02/04/nepszamlalas-teruleti-adatok-romania-magyarok-csokkenese-veres-valer>, 2023. március 19.

¹⁴ KISS Tamás: *Arányaiban az országosnak a kétszerese a magyar népesség fogyása.* <https://transtelex.ro/best-of/2023/01/07/kiss-tamas-szociologus-aranyaiban-az-orszagosnak-a-ketszerese-a-magyar-nepesseg-fogyasa>, 2023. március 28.

nationality, there ought to be as many Hungarians as Romanians. Therefore, he said there was no reason for celebration or panic.¹⁵

Hunor Kelemen's claim is considered erroneous by several sociologists, including Tamás Kiss, who estimates that the population loss is 5.3% nationally and 10.3% among Hungarians. The ethnic Hungarian population loss is double the national rate. Kiss explains this significant discrepancy with several factors. Firstly, there is the loss in natural population movement, which is twice the national rate and, unlike the previous period, is not offset by migration gains. Additionally, there is the aforementioned loss due to identity changes, which is much higher among Hungarians due to the unfavourable age structure in Transylvania.¹⁶

Béla Markó, the former president of the Hungarian Democratic Association in Romania, also expressed a clear opinion on the decline in the ethnic Hungarian population. According to him, several factors have contributed to the decline of the ethnic Hungarian population in Transylvania. One of the primary reasons for the decrease in the population can be attributed to the alleviation of conditions for granting of Hungarian citizenship (sometimes, mistakenly referred to as "dual citizenship") to ethnic Hungarians living abroad. From his perspective, the institution of "dual citizenship" significantly simplified the acquisition of Hungarian citizenship for Hungarians living abroad, leading to increased emigration. While the introduction of alleviated citizenship conditions and a simplified procedure improved Romanian–Hungarian relations, it resulted in a one-way movement, as reflected in the census data.¹⁷ Béla Markó's claim is not unfounded, as the introduction of alleviated conditions for citizenship substantially eased legal and social integration, leading many ethnic Hungarians from Romania to choose to settle in Hungary or elsewhere. With the introduction of citizenship changes, a gateway was opened that naturally attracted Hungarians from abroad, primarily students, to the homecountry, thereby clearly affecting the proportion of the Hungarians in Romania.

2.2. Solution suggestions

At the same time, it should be noted that the primary reason for the dramatic population decline is not migration itself, as emigration from Romania decreased overall compared to previous censuses. The question is whether this drastic decline in the ethnic Hungarian population can be stopped, and if so, by what means? Just as in

¹⁵ BORSI Balázs: Népszámlálás 2022 – Kelemen Hunor a Maszolnak: nincs ok az ünneplésre, de a pánikra sem. <https://maszol.ro/belfold/Nepszamlalas-2022-Kelemen-Hunor-a-Maszolnak-nincs-ok-az-unneplesre-de-a-panikra-sem>, 2023. március 29.

¹⁶ KISS Tamás: *Arányaiban az országosnak a kétszerese a magyar népesség fogyása*. <https://transtex.ro/best-of/2023/01/07/kiss-tamas-szociologus-aranyaiban-az-orszagosnak-a-ketszerese-a-magyar-nepesseg-fogyasa>, 2023. március 29.

¹⁷ VIG Emese: Markó Béla: *Az erdélyi magyarság létszámcsökkenése a kettős állampolgárság intézményének is köszönhető*. <https://transtex.ro/kozelet/2023/01/03/marko-be-la-az-erdelyi-magyarsag-letszamsokkenese-a-kettos-allampolgarsag-intezmenyenek-is-koszonheto>, 2023. április 1.

the assessment of the rate of population decline, many ideas have emerged in response to its solution. According to a less optimistic and somewhat pessimistic perspective, neither the ethnic Hungarian political elite in Romania nor the Romanian Hungarian Democratic Union have any influence on these processes. This perspective is based on the fact that these forces were not able to influence the census process itself to the extent that the ethnic Hungarian community in Romania would have expected. As is well known, they were not able to provide the adequate help needed for the problems that arose with the online questionnaire, and because of this, statistically, a large number of Hungarians dropped out of the system.

After this, the pessimistic approach arises that if the political elite could not respond adequately to the problem that appeared during the census, they have absolutely no adequate means to stop the population decline itself. According to the representatives of this point of view, an additional problem is the lack of imagination in public policy, as it mainly revolves around family policy and scattered issues, which would need to be expanded to stop the population decline. An example of such an issue is the transformation of the minority institutional system for Hungarian-speaking Roma, since 8–9% of the Hungarian-speaking population are Roma, the vast majority of whom also identify as Hungarian. The problem, however, is that only 15% of ethnic Hungarian elementary and primary schools have Roma students, as the majority of them study in segregated schools with equipment and teaching staff far inferior to non-Roma educational locations. The problem of the decline in ethnic Hungarian population could also be remedied with a new family policy measure, an increase in fertility, which would also clearly improve demographic processes.

Also, the leaders of the political elite should work on developing tools with which they can integrate the internal “immigrants” who settle in localities inhabited by Hungarians, so that at least some of them will assume the ethnic Hungarian identity in the long term.¹⁸ Another solution could be to redefine the ethnic Hungarian community in Romania in such a way that the Hungarian community would be a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural community, which includes Roma, those born into mixed marriages, and possibly even immigrants as well. The importance of this can be well demonstrated through the situation of Roma, who are connected to ethnic Hungarian institutions yet only in such a way that they do not benefit from equal social participation and inclusion. For this reason, redefining the ethnic Hungarian community, including in it, for example, the Roma, would clearly improve the statistics of the Hungarian population.¹⁹

The Transylvanian Hungarian Association has a different vision of the causes of the dramatic population loss and the tools and measures aimed at solving it. The

¹⁸ MAKKAY József: *Népszámlálás: megszerpített román statisztikák?* <https://magyar-nemzet.hu/lugas-rovat/2023/01/nepszamlalas-megszepitett-roman-statisztikak>, 2023. március 16.

¹⁹ BILBÓK Karola: *A népszámlálás addig jó, míg nem nézünk a számok mögé. Jóvanazúgyis?* <https://atlatszo.ro/napi-politika/hirek/nepszamlalas-romania-elozetes-magyarok-romak-romanok-anyanyelv/>, 2023. március 2.

national presidency of the Transylvanian Hungarian Association sees the loss of the ethnic Hungarian population much more seriously and dramatically. They calculate the amount of loss and its severity from the regime change, stating that the number of Hungarians in Romania decreased by more than 620,000 as compared to the 1992 census, which means a decrease of almost 40%. The national presidency of the Transylvanian Hungarian Association believes that with this dramatic reduction, the ethnic Hungarian community has fallen to the level of the 1850s, and warns that if drastic changes are not made, Transylvanian Hungarians may disappear completely by the end of the century. According to their point of view, the reason for the large-scale population decrease is not only the bad economic situation and the lack of education but rather the crisis of values resulting from faulty political practices. According to their opinion, to improve the situation, putting individual interests in the background, and full political cooperation is needed.²⁰ According to sociologist Tamás Kiss, the position of the Transylvanian Hungarian Association is too polarized and politically one-sided, which can further increase national anxiety and the sense of ontological security among ethnic Hungarians.

Conclusion

The census provides information about the entire population that serves as a point of reference, making its study unavoidable. Using the published data from the 2021 Romanian census, this study aims to present the evolution of the population with Hungarian origin living in Romania over the past 10 years. The 2021 Romanian census was preceded by heightened anticipation, especially due to its ethnic aspects. Understandably, as always, the census held particular significance for Transylvanian Hungarians, as access to structural funds and the number of seats in the European Parliament depend on the count of Transylvanian Hungarians living in the country.

In light of the published results, one thing can be said for certain: the number of Hungarians in Transylvania has significantly decreased over the last ten years. The results show that just over one million people declared themselves to be of Hungarian ethnicity, which is only six percent of the Romanian population. The study revealed in detail that the credibility and reality of the provisional results published so far raise several questions. The doubt surrounding the numbers primarily pertains to the data on the composition of the population decline and the approximately 2.5 million people who did not declare their nationality. Despite concerns raised regarding the authenticity and accuracy of the census data, it must be stated that the data from the I.N.S. considered official and must be regarded as authoritative. Based on the data, it can be asserted that the number of Hungarians living in Romania has drastically decreased in the last ten years, raising concerns about the

²⁰ VIG Emese: Erdélyi Magyar Szövetség: *Drámai méretű az erdélyi magyarság lélekszámvesztése*. <https://transtelex.ro/kozelet/2023/01/03/erdelyi-magyar-szovetseg-dramai-meretu-az-erdelyi-magyarsag-lelekszamvesztese>, 2023. március 22.

long-term survival of the Hungarian community in Transylvania. The census data can serve as a lesson for the political elite, emphasizing the need to rethink and broaden the toolbox of public policy. Furthermore, addressing Hungarian voters living in the diaspora, who have been largely neglected in recent decades, is essential. It is important to note that the demographic situation is challenging throughout Europe, making it crucial to consider proposed solutions for the current situation. To halt the decline of the Hungarian population, the leaders of the political elite should work on developing tools that account for the unfavourable age profile of ethnic Hungarians and address the challenges of globalization.

Regarding the results of the study, it should be noted that the data published so far by the I.N.S. is provisional and therefore does not provide a complete picture of the evolution of the Hungarian population in Romania. However, it should be added that, unlike the 2011 census, we cannot expect significant changes after the I.N.S. finalizes the dataset, as it has already transferred the data of one million people from the statistical and public administration database during a temporary aggregation. To confirm the findings of the study, further thorough, multivariate analyses are needed after the publication of the final census results, which already contain detailed statistical data for each settlement.

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