



Last updated: May 2010

## Romania Detention Profile

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An emigrant nation that saw millions of citizens leave in search of work after the demise of the Soviet Union, Romania has recently begun to contend with immigration. As part of its accession to the European Union (EU), the country remodelled its migration policy, aligning it with the EU *acquis* and incorporating provisions for the removal and detention of irregular migrants. Now a key EU border country, Romania has received technical and financial support from the European Commission (EC) to strengthen its administrative detention capacity, including by establishing secure transit centres for processing asylum seekers.

### Detention Policy

Romania's first consolidated migration-related law—the *Aliens Law*—was passed in 2001 (EC 2004, p.17). When the country came under consideration for EU membership in the early 2000s, a number of Twinning projects—EC-sponsored projects aimed at restructuring public institutions—were implemented to improve management of the country's borders and other migration-related matters (EC 2004, p.17). The EC contributed some €1 million towards “enhancing the capacity of the Romanian Border Police in order to further strengthen the Romanian borders, as the future EU Eastern border,” and an additional €4 million to train Border Police and assist border management (EC 2002, p.18).

In December 2002, the Romanian government passed a revised *Aliens Law* to bring it into line with EU regulations. The new law, which has subsequently been amended several times, contains provisions for the rights and obligations of foreign nationals entering, residing, and/or working in Romania, as well as for their exclusion, expulsion, and/or detention.

In 2004, the EU and Romania established a “National Migration Strategy” that aimed to consolidate Romania's migration, asylum, and citizenship laws, and to streamline the coordination of government agencies working on asylum and migration-related activities (EIROnline 2007; Focus Migration 2007). In 2007, the Romanian Immigration Office (RIO) was formed, merging the Authority for Aliens and the National Refugee Office (GDISC “Romania”).

**Grounds for removal.** According to the 2002 *Aliens Law*, immigration authorities can order a “measure of removal from the Romanian territory” for foreign nationals who do not have permission to stay in the country (*Regime of Aliens*, Amendment 482/2004, Art. 79). People issued a removal order are required to voluntarily depart within a specified period of time (Art. 80). If they fail to leave within the specified time, they can be issued a “measure of return” and escorted to the border (Arts. 86-88). A “measure of return” can also be issued to foreign nationals for entering the country illegally; overstaying their visas; failing to leave in accordance with a removal order; or failing to leave the country within the required time after having their asylum applications rejected (*Aliens Law*, amendment 113/2005, Art. 86).

**Grounds for detention (“public custody”).** A magistrate can issue an order “restraining free movement on Romanian territory” (a detention order) for foreign nationals who cannot be returned within the established period of time “as well as against the alien declared undesirable or against whom the court took the measure of expulsion” (*Aliens Law*, amendment 113/2005, Art. 93).

A person issued a “measure of return” can be taken into “public custody” when “the measure of return cannot be enforced within 24 hours” (Art. 87(3)). The Prosecutor's Office affiliated with the Court of Appeal in Bucharest authorises taking a foreign national into public custody after receiving a request to do so from the Romanian Immigration Office or its territorial units (Art. 91(2)). Provisions for appealing a measure of return were introduced in the 2004 *Aliens Law* amendments (Art. 861). Provisions for appealing detention are provided in Article 93, paragraph 8.

Foreign nationals who commit crimes on Romanian territory (*criminal aliens*) can be issued a “measure of expulsion,” which revokes

the right of the person to remain in the country (Art. 91). The court can order that these non-citizens be taken into public custody until removed from the country, for up to two years (*Aliens Law*, Amendment 113/2005, Art. 91 & 93).

A person can be subject to a “declaration of undesirability” from the Prosecution Department affiliated with the Tribunal of Bucharest if they “performed, performs or there is strong evidence that he intends to perform such activities as to endanger the national security and public order” (Art. 83). Such a declaration immediately revokes a person’s right to stay in the country (Art. 83), and the prosecutor who declares a person to be undesirable “shall also take the decision of taking the person into public custody” (Art. 93, para (4)). Grounds for appealing a declaration of undesirability are provided for in Article 85.

Immigration detainees are confined in “accommodation centres,” which operate under the authority of the Minister of Interior (Art. 94(3-4)).

**Length of detention.** Persons detained based on a measure of return can be held in public custody for up to 30 days. If, after 30 days, they still cannot be removed from the country, the Romanian Immigration Office can request the local court of appeal to renew the period of public custody (Art. 93(5)) for up to six months (Art. 93(6)). After six months, the person can be granted “tolerance for remaining on the Romanian territory” (Art. 98). Those detained based on a measure of expulsion can be held in custody for up to two years. If they are not deported within this period, they are to be granted tolerance to remain in Romania and released (Amendment 113/2005, Art.99). Tolerance is never granted to non-citizens declared to be “undesirable” (Art. 99), and observers have noted that they can be detained indefinitely, even if they have been granted some form of protection (JRS website).

**Criminalization.** In 2002, a *Governmental Emergency Ordinance on Romania’s State Border* introduced criminal convictions and penalties for irregular entry or exit to/from Romania. Article 70 of this Emergency Ordinance provides that, “the entrance or exit of the country by illegal crossing of the state border is a criminal act and is punished with imprisonment from 3 months to 2 years.” The law also introduced penalties for anyone who “recruits, guides or leads one or more persons so as to cross illegally the state border” (Art. 71).

**Asylum seekers.** Romania has ratified the [UN Refugee Convention and its protocol](#). Asylum provisions are contained in the *Law Regarding Asylum in Romania* (2006).

Although asylum seekers are generally not detained in Romania once they enter official asylum procedures, they can be subject to detention for an initial 20-day period after requesting asylum. Article 93(71) of the *Aliens Law* safeguards asylum seekers from detention except when “reasons of national security and public order” require their removal or that they be kept “in public custody up to the moment the asylum procedure is finalised” (*Aliens Law*, Amendment 482/2004, Art. 99).

Asylum seekers are entitled, but are not required, to reside in non-secure “reception and accommodation centres” run by the RIO for the duration of the procedure (Art. 17(1k)). Asylum seekers must adhere to certain obligations, including remaining in their designated city of residence, unless granted the authority to leave by the RIO (previously National Refugee Office) (*Asylum Law*, Art. 19).

People who apply for protection at the border can be detained in “the transit area of the state border checkpoint” for up to 20 days for an initial assessment of their application (*Asylum Law*, Art. 87(1)). The law stipulates that they can be confined in secure “special reception and accommodation centres found in the vicinity of the state border checkpoints, which are established through an order of the Minister of Administration and the Interior and have the same legal status as the transit area.” Foreign nationals detained in transit zone facilities are considered not to have entered Romanian territory (Leonescu 2010); the Global Detention Project categorises these facilities as transit zones. If a decision has not been made on the application for protection within 20 days, the person should be released (Art. 87(6)).

Romania also operates a semi-secure “Emergency Transport Centre” in conjunction with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The facility provides accommodation for people in urgent need of protection outside their home countries (for more information, see “Detention Infrastructure” below).

**Moldova and Romania.** Mobility between Moldova and Romania significantly increased in the second half of the 1990s due to amendments to the 1991 *Romanian Citizenship Law*. As part of the changes, Moldovans with Romanian ancestry—of which there are many due to the pre-1949 unity of the two countries—are permitted to migrate to and obtain citizenship in Romania. The changes to Romanian law received criticism in the United Kingdom, where one media outlet reported, “Hundreds of thousands of migrants from Moldova, Europe’s poorest country, have secured a backdoor route allowing them to flood into Britain” (*London Evening Standard*

2006).

Researchers have estimated that around 250,000 Moldovan citizens received Romanian citizenship during the 1990s (Focus Migration 2007), and applications for citizenship have greatly increased since Romania imposed visa requirements for Moldovans when it joined the EU in 2007. Romanian President Traian Basescu estimated that around one million Moldovans applied for Romanian citizenship in 2007 alone (RFE 2010).

### Detention Infrastructure

Romania operates two dedicated immigration detention facilities, several secure reception centres located in border zones, and one “Emergency Transport Centre,” which is operated in cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

The two dedicated facilities are the Otopeni Detention Centre for Foreigners and the Arad Accommodation Centre (Leonescu 2010; CPT 2006). Both facilities operate under provisions in the *Aliens Law* for accommodating foreign nationals taken into public custody because of their status (Art. 94). They are under the authority of the Minister of Interior, and are managed by the Romanian Immigration Office (Leonescu 2010). The *Aliens Law* states that these facilities must be “established, organised, sanitarily authorised, arranged and equipped so as to offer civilised conditions of accommodation, food, medical assistance and personal hygiene” (Art. 94(3-4)). According to Article 94 of the *Aliens Law*, foreign nationals detained because of their status “shall be confined to accommodation centres” that are “closed places, especially arranged, administered by the Authority for Aliens and ... intended for the temporary accommodation of the aliens against whom the measure of return or expulsion was ordered or who were declared undesirable and who were taken into public custody.”

Rights and obligations of foreign nationals held in detention centres are provided for in Articles 95 and 96 of the *Aliens Law*, including, *inter alia*, access to rights “provided in the international treaties in the field, to which Romania is a party; the right to medical and social assistance; the right to be informed in a comprehensible language to them the grounds on which they have been held in custody and their rights and obligations while in custody; the right to contact diplomatic or consular representatives of their country of origin; the right to fair treatment by centre staff; and the obligation to comply with the rules, the daily program and order of the accommodation centre.”

Article 97 requires foreign nationals convicted by a final court sentence to be detained separately from other non-citizens in public custody. According to JRS, the *Law for Foreigners* does not stipulate visitation rights for persons in secure centres. Yet in practice, detainees receive visits from family members, friends, lawyers, NGOs, and UNHCR staff (JRS website).

The **Bucharest Otopeni Accommodation Centre** is located near the Otopeni Airport (Leonescu 2010; BPT 2006). It was opened in January 1999 and was originally used to detain both irregular migrants and asylum seekers (UNHCR 1999). As part of a 2001 Twinning project, the European Commission invested in the expansion and renovation of the facility (EC 2001), which was completed in 2004. The facility, which can hold up to 164 people (Leonescu 2010), offers residents a medical clinic, library, special places for worship, sports hall, and football court (RICB website). The average number of people detained at the facility at any one time is 20 (Leonescu 2010).

The **Arad Accommodation Centre** is located in Horia, Arad, in Western Romania, close to the border with Hungary (JRS website). The facility has a capacity of 56, and there are, on average, six people detained in the facility at a given time (Leonescu 2010). The Arad accommodation centre is, according to JRS, used to detain foreign nationals who are required to remain in public custody for longer than one month (Leonescu 2010).

**Transit accommodation centres.** In the early 2000s, Romania opened a number of transit accommodation centres for the medium-term (maximum 20 days) administrative detention of people who request asylum at the border. Foreign nationals detained in these facilities are considered not to have entered Romanian territory (Leonescu 2010), and the Global Detention Project therefore categorises them as *transit zones*. They are managed by the General Inspectorate of the Border Police, under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior. According to one observer, the average length migrants are held in the transit facilities is between 2 and 15 days (Leonescu 2010).

Six transit facilities were in operation by 2006, with a combined capacity of 1,312 (Focus Migration 2007). Transit facilities include those located at airports, such as the Bucharest-Baneasa International Airport (CPT 2006); the Bucuresti Henri Coanda Airport (formerly Otopeni Airport), which opened on 11 July 2001 (JRS website; CPT 2006, EC 2003, p.8); a facility at the Constanta Harbour;

and a centre in Romanesti, at the border with Moldova (Leonescu 2010). Because two-thirds of Romania's border is shared with non-EU countries, observers speculate that the transit facilities were introduced in anticipation of the enforcement of the EU Dublin II regulation, which requires the state where an applicant first enters EU territory to process the asylum claim (Focus Migration 2007).

**Emergency Transit Centre.** In May 2008, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and the Romanian government signed a Tri-Partite Agreement (TPA) to establish an Emergency Transit Centre (ETC) in Timisoara. According to UNHCR, the ETC has two distinct operations: (1) it operates as a semi-secure accommodation centre for UNHCR-recognized refugees who require "temporary evacuation" from their first countries of asylum and are "in urgent need of international protection" while awaiting "onward resettlement"; (2) it operates as a non-secure reception centre for asylum seekers being processed under Romanian national law (Li Rosi 2010a).

Refugees assigned to the ETC provide their consent to conditions at the ETC facility before entering the country and are issued with temporary identity documents by the Romanian Ministry of Home Affairs and Administrative Reform (MIRA) allowing them to stay in Romania for up to six months (UNHCR et al. 2009, p.3, 5, 15). Up to 200 refugees can be accommodated at the facility and administrative limitations are placed on their freedom of movement. According to UNHCR, "Refugees accommodated on the grounds of the TPA may only leave the centre accompanied by authorized UNHCR, IOM, or UNHCR implementing partner NGO staff" (Li Rosi 2010a). This form of custody is coded by the Global Detention Project as *semi-secure*. However, UNHCR contends that this facility should not be considered a "detention centre," despite the limitations on individual freedom. According to UNHCR, "A deprivation of liberty underlines the concept of lack of will, autonomy, or a lack of freedom of choice. Refugees evacuated to the ETC had freely expressed their free will prior to arrival to Romania by deciding to sign a Consent Form, which specified the main modalities of their stay in the Timisoara ETC" (Li Rosi 2010a).

The ETC is jointly managed by the three signatories of the TPA (Li Rosi 2010b). UNCHR identifies persons in need of evacuation, provides them with refugee status, secures their onward resettlement and, together with implementing local NGO partner Generatie Tanara, provides food and domestic items, psycho-social support, education, recreational activities, language training, and medical care. IOM handles the transportation of refugees to and from Romania, conducts health screenings on arrival and prior to final departure, and provides cultural orientation programmes. The government of Romania provides security and maintains order at the facility, issues refugees with identity documents, and approves each new UNHCR refugee before he/she can enter the country (UNHCR et al. 2009, p.8).

## Facts & Figures

Romania maintains two dedicated immigration detention facilities as well as six secure transit accommodation centres for asylum seekers.

According to the Romanian Immigration Office (RIO), 3,872 migrants received removal orders in 2007 (JRS 2008). During the first six months of 2007, 2,916 people were found to be residing irregularly in Romania, of which 401 were returned by force and 257 were placed in administrative detention. Countries to which migrants were returned included Moldova, Turkey, China, India, Morocco, Nigeria, Iran, Liberia, Sudan, Cameroon, and Somalia (JRS website).

During the first six months of 2008, roughly 6,000 irregular migrants were identified (JRS website). The Romanian Border Police reported in July 2008 that the number of irregular migrants in Romania doubled between July 2007 and July 2008. The majority of them reportedly reside in Bucharest, Lasi, and Constanta, as well as the border towns of Galati, Timis, Arad, and Bihor (JRS 2008).

The number of asylum applications in Romania fluctuates. A total of 15,605 applications were made between 1991 and the end of 2006. The number of persons applying for asylum in Romania significantly decreased between 2002 (1,150 asylum applications) and 2006 (380 applications), which one observer claims could be due to Romania's relatively low asylum acceptance rate (Focus Migration 2007). Applications for asylum in Romania were projected to increase as the EU Dublin II regulation is enforced, which requires the state where an applicant first enters EU territory to process the asylum claim (Focus Migration 2007). During the first six months of 2008, 87 people were granted refugee status through the asylum procedure and seven were granted subsidiary protection. Fifteen people were granted refugee status in court procedures, and 28 subsidiary protection (JRS website).

At the end of 2008 there were 303 pending asylum applications in Romania (UNHCR 2009), and in 2008 a total of 931 people applied for asylum, an increase of 45 percent from the year before (JRS website). Some 350 asylum seekers entered the country legally, 554

irregularly. Nearly 90 asylum requests were submitted from non-citizens in detention. Asylum seekers in Romania often originate from Pakistan, India, Iraq, Bangladesh, and Turkey (JRS website). The asylum procedure generally lasts between six and eight months. Romania has been, and remains, a source country of irregular migration. One research institution places the number of irregular Romanian residents in Italy at 600,000, which is in addition to the 300,000 legal Romanian residents recorded by Italian authorities in 2005 (Focus Migration 2007).

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## Romania Detention Profile

### List of Detention Sites

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Name	Status (Year)	Location	Facility Type	Detention Timeframe	Security	Authority	Management	Capacity	Reported Population	Demographics & Segregation
Arad Accommodation Centre	In use (2010)	Horia, Arad (Western Romania)	Migrant detention centre	Long-term	Secure	Ministry of Interior	Romanian Immigration Office	56 (2010)		Adult males and females. Segregation of criminal detainees and administrative detainees.
Bucharest Otopeni Accommodation Centre	In use (2010)	Otopeni	Migrant detention centre	Long-term	Secure	Ministry of Interior	Romanian Immigration Office	164 (2010)		Adult males and females. Segregation of criminal detainees and administrative detainees.
Bucharest-Baneasa International Airport Transit Accommodation centre	In use (2006)	Bucharest-Baneasa International Airport	Transit Zone	Medium-term	Secure	Ministry of Interior	General Inspectorate of the Border Police			Adult males and females
Bucuresti Henri Coanda Airport Transit Accommodation Centre (formerly the Bucharest-Otopeni Airport)	In use (2010)	Bucharest-Henri Coanda Airport	Transit Zone	Medium-term	Secure	Ministry of Interior	General Inspectorate of the Border Police			Adult males and females
Constanta Harbour Transit Accommodation Centre	In use (2010)	Constanta Harbour	Transit Zone	Medium-term	Secure	Ministry of Interior	General Inspectorate of the Border Police			Adult males and females
Romanesti Transit Accommodation Centre	In use (2010)	Romanesti (at border with Moldova)	Transit Zone	Medium-term	Secure	Ministry of Interior	General Inspectorate of the Border Police			Adult males and females

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(This is only a partial list. More detailed information is available upon request.)

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## Romania Detention Profile

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## Government Agencies

Ministry of Administration and Interior

<http://www.mai.gov.ro/engleza/english.htm>

Romanian Immigration Office

<http://ori.mai.gov.ro/home/index/en>

## Regional and International Organizations

International Labour Organisation – Budapest

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/eurpro/budapest/info/country/romania.htm>

International Organization for Migration – Romania Country Information

<http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/activities/europe/central-europe/romania>

UNHCR – Romania Country Information

<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48df96.html>

## NGOs and Research Institutions

Generatie Tanara

<http://www.generatietanara.ro/en/index.php>

## Media

Inside Romania

<http://www.insideworld.com/romania/>

Romania Times

<http://www.romaniantimes.at/>

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