

## ANALYSIS OF ROMANIA'S EXPORTS DURING 2020–2024: TRENDS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

Oana CHINDRIȘ-VĂSIOIU<sup>17</sup>

Institute for World Economy, Romanian Academy

**ABSTRACT:** *The paper aims to analyze the evolution of Romania's exports during the 2020–2024 period, with the main objective of identifying key trade trends and assessing the resulting economic impact. The study is based on the premise of an economy affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, followed by a phase of recovery and consolidation in the subsequent years. The dynamics of export value are highlighted, along with the influence of global factors on Romania's external trade performance. The analysis reveals a significant post-pandemic recovery in exports, followed by a deceleration in growth during 2023–2024, driven by external uncertainties and adjustments in the international market.*

**Keywords:** *Competitiveness, international trade, exports, Romania.*

**JEL Classification:** *F10; O24.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of accelerated globalization and European economic integration, exports represent a key driver of sustainable economic development, contributing directly to GDP growth, the balancing of the trade account, and the stimulation of foreign direct investment [1]. Romania, as an emerging economy, has undergone significant structural transformations, marked by a shift from a consumption-driven model to one increasingly focused on external competitiveness.

Romania's accession to the European Union (EU) in 2007 accelerated economic convergence processes and led to a strategic repositioning of its exports, both in terms of product composition and geographical destination. Simultaneously, investments in industrial sectors such as the automotive industry, electrical equipment, and information technology services have increased the value added in exports and reinforced Romania's role within European value chains [2].

However, this positive trajectory has not been without vulnerabilities. Events such as the 2008–2009 global financial crisis and the economic shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the economy's high dependence on external demand and its exposure to Western European markets [3]. In this context, analyzing export dynamics becomes essential to understanding both the trajectory of national economic development and its capacity for resilience and adaptation to external challenges.

This paper aims to examine the evolution of Romania's exports between 2020 and 2024, by identifying key structural trends, assessing the macroeconomic and sectoral impact, and outlining development perspectives considering emerging geo-economic challenges.

---

<sup>17</sup> Ph.D. Scientific Researcher III, oana.vasioiu@gmail.com

## 2. EVOLUTION AND GENERAL CONTEXT OF ROMANIA'S EXPORTS (2020–2024)

Exports are a key indicator of a country's external economic performance, reflecting its level of competitiveness, production capacity, and degree of integration into international value chains. In Romania's case, export performance over the past two decades has followed an upward trajectory, driven by EU integration, the development of industrial infrastructure, and the country's growing attractiveness as a destination for foreign direct investment.

During the post-accession period (2007–2024), Romania recorded a sustained pace of export growth, supported by the liberalization of the European single market, alignment with EU standards, and the relocation of production capacities from Western Europe to Central and Eastern Europe. According to Eurostat data [4], the value of Romanian exports rose from approximately €29 billion in 2007 to over €90 billion in 2023. This growth was accompanied by a diversification in the export structure, with an increasing share of industrial goods, particularly electrical equipment, automotive components, electronics, and metallurgical products.

Between 2020 and 2024, global conditions significantly influenced the trajectory of Romanian exports. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a sharp contraction in global demand in 2020, followed by a strong recovery in 2021–2022. However, the 2023–2024 period was marked by geopolitical instability (such as the war in Ukraine and rising global trade tensions) and disruptions in supply chains, which negatively impacted both the volume and growth rate of exports.

Structurally, Romania's main trading partners remain EU member states, especially Germany, Italy, France, and Hungary, which together account for over 70% of total exports. Meanwhile, exports to non-EU markets (such as the United States, Turkey, the Republic of Moldova, and the United Kingdom) have shown positive developments but remain marginal in total volume. Noteworthy is the increasing share of agri-food and energy exports, supported by regional comparative advantages and the development of port infrastructure (e.g., Constanța Port).

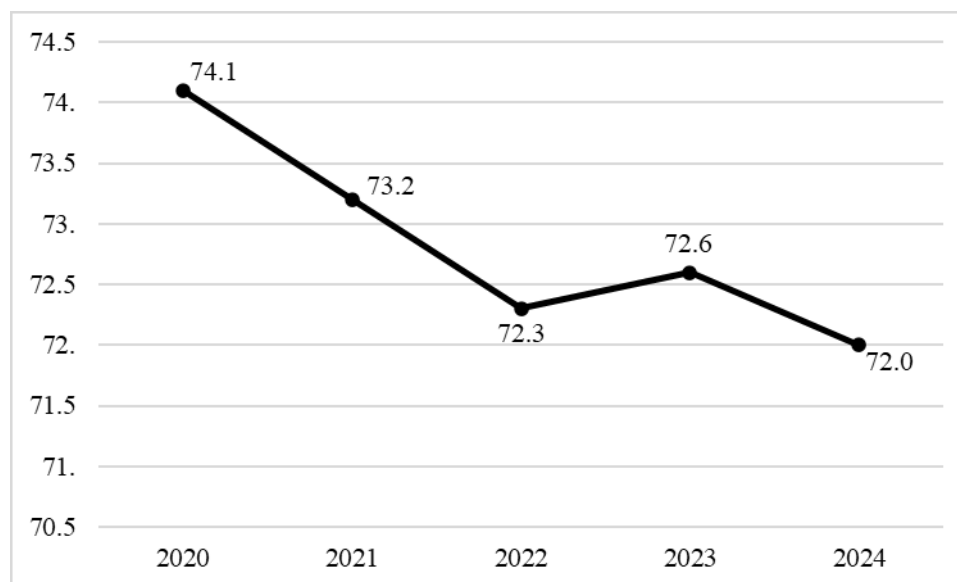
Exports play a multifaceted role in the Romanian economy: they help balance the trade account, contribute to GDP formation, stimulate industrial investment, and generate employment. Nevertheless, Romania remains vulnerable to external shocks, global market volatility, and shifts in international trade policy. The persistent trade deficit and dependence on imports for basic industrial components are structural challenges that call for coherent rebalancing strategies.

Romania's exports have followed a robust upward trend over the last two decades, shaped by both internal factors (industrial development, investment) and external drivers (European integration, global demand dynamics). The sustainability of this growth model will continue to depend on Romania's ability to innovate, diversify export markets, and maintain a competitive framework for its export-oriented sectors.

Within international trade, the European Union remains Romania's primary economic partner, accounting for over 70% of the country's total exports. This share reflects not only geographical proximity and access to the single market but also the structural dependence of the Romanian economy on European value chains.

The following section will analyze the share of intra-EU exports in Romania's total exports after 2020, when the pandemic context triggered significant contractions in global demand.

**Figure no.1. The share of Romania's intra-EU exports in total exports during the 2020–2024 period**



Source: Author owns processing based on Eurostat data (2025)

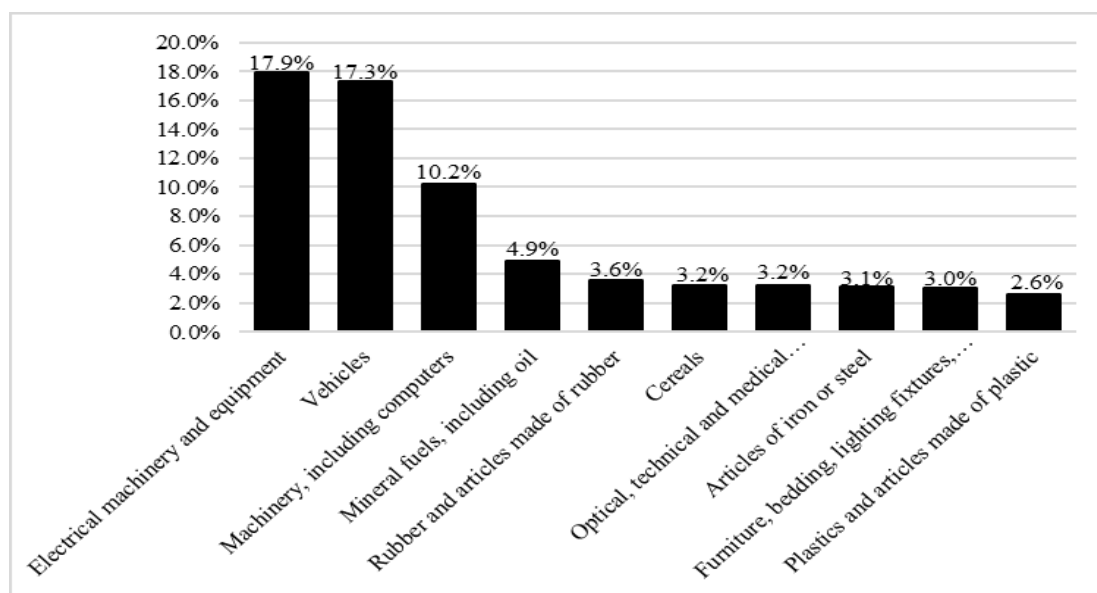
In 2024, the share of Romania's exports directed to the European Union stood at 72.0% in December, according to Eurostat data<sup>0</sup>. During the first half of 2024, total exports declined by 15.1%, significantly impacting trade with EU partners. In 2023, Romania's exports reached €93.09 billion, of which €67.574 billion were destined for EU member states, representing 72.6% of total exports [5].

Germany remained Romania's top export partner, accounting for approximately 20% of total exports in June 2024. Italy ranked second, with an estimated share of 10.3%. France and Hungary also held notable shares, with 6.33% and 5.32%, respectively, in Romania's total exports in June 2024. Other significant EU destinations included Bulgaria (4.05%), the Netherlands (4%), Poland (3.81%), and Spain (3.41%). These figures clearly reflect Romania's strong orientation toward Western European markets, reaffirming the roles of Germany and Italy as regional hubs for automotive products, electrical equipment, and high-value-added manufactured goods [6].

While the European Union remains the primary destination for Romania's exports, extra-EU markets represent a strategic component of the country's trade balance. A recent report (July 2025) indicates that 12.3% of Romania's total exports were directed toward non-EU European countries, 9.7% to importers in Asia, 3% to North America, 2.5% to Africa, 0.4% to Latin America, and 0.1% to Oceania [7].

Romania's exports reflect an industrialized economy integrated into European and global production networks, though still characterized by a significant share of assembly and processing activities. Future challenges center around increasing value-added, promoting innovation, and diversifying export markets. In other words, Romania primarily produces parts, components, and subassemblies rather than finished branded goods, with many factories operating under outsourcing or lohn (contract manufacturing) models, limiting the potential gains from value-added.

Romania possesses a solid industrial base and significant agricultural potential; however, to achieve sustainable growth, exports must become more diversified, more innovation-driven, and more focused on high value-added products.

**Figure no.2. The share of Romania's main commodity groups in total exports in 2024**

Source: Author owns processing based on World's Top Exports data (2025)

In macroeconomic terms, the total value of goods exported by Romania accounted for 11.3% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2024 and 12.9% of total GDP in 2023. These percentages suggest a relatively lower dependence on goods sold in international markets for Romania's overall economic performance, although the analysis is based on a short time frame.

### 3. TRENDS IN ROMANIA'S EXPORTS

European forecasts suggest a gradual improvement in external demand as the EU economy returns to a growth trajectory; however, the net contribution of exports to GDP may remain slightly negative in the short term [6].

The European Commission projects modest growth for the EU/euro area in 2025, with only a gradual recovery in external demand. For Romania, the net export contribution is also expected to remain negative, though less so than in 2024, as the slowdown in domestic demand curbs imports and certain sectors (e.g., services, agri-food) show better prospects.

Domestically, high-frequency indicators point to a mixed picture: the manufacturing PMI remains below the 50-point threshold (indicating contraction) by mid-2025, suggesting cautious external orders and underperforming production in export-oriented industries [8].

Disruptions in the Red Sea and the Suez Canal in 2024 extended transit times and increased transportation costs; their aftershocks may still appear intermittently in 2025, affecting inventory turnover and CIF/FOB pricing structures.

Ongoing modernization projects in the Port of Constanța, such as EU-funded upgrades to the electrical distribution infrastructure (phase II), are enhancing operational resilience and may lower logistics costs over the medium term. The impact is gradual but positive, particularly for non-containerized cargo and sustainable quay operations.

The transition to the full implementation of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) in 2026 will target imports into the EU, representing an opportunity for "greener" European producers but also potential friction in value chains. As of May 2025, the European Parliament has supported adjustments that ease the administrative burden for small importers and may delay the start of certificate trading until 2027 (currently under negotiation with

member states). For Romanian exporters, the effects are mostly indirect, reshaping competition in the EU and in third markets (including the UK, which is planning its own CBAM for 2027) [9].

Global economic forecasts point to modest growth in 2025–2026, alongside a gradual recovery in trade flows. Within the EU, declining inflation and the resumption of public investment may support demand for industrial goods, though the pace remains moderate. Logistically, maritime routes continue to face episodic volatility (e.g., traffic rerouting through the Red Sea corridors), impacting transit times and shipping costs for goods originating from or destined for Asia [10].

Romania's export structure is dominated by capital goods and the automotive sector, including wiring systems, electrical equipment, machinery, and appliances, alongside relevant segments from metallurgy, chemicals, and agri-food. The country's integration into European value chains has amplified its correlation with the EU industrial cycle [11].

In the baseline scenario, Romania's exports are expected to grow slowly, in line with the gradual recovery of EU demand and normalization of logistics costs. Services (notably IT&C and transport) may partially offset goods volatility. In a favorable scenario, increased investment and better absorption of EU funds in infrastructure could expand delivery capacity and attract new OEM projects. In an adverse scenario, stagnation in European industry and renewed logistical disruptions could suppress external orders. Over two-thirds of Romania's exports are directed to the EU single market, with Germany, Italy, and France as top partners; diversification toward non-EU markets with logistical proximity (e.g., the Balkans, Caucasus, MENA region) could reduce cyclical vulnerability. In terms of products, Romania retains competitive advantages in automotive components, electrical equipment, and industrial intermediates, while expansion into "green" segments (e.g., electric mobility parts, energy efficiency technologies) could support a qualitative upgrade.

Strengthening Romania's export performance requires an integrated approach capable of addressing logistical, industrial, and trade challenges while aligning with green transition imperatives. Modernizing port and transport infrastructure, by completing major projects in the Port of Constanța and improving rail and road connectivity to European hubs, can transform logistics from a vulnerability into a competitive edge. More effective risk management for trade routes, supported by alternative transport solutions and digital tracking technologies, could help mitigate delays and losses from global trade disruptions.

On the industrial side, Romania's external competitiveness increasingly depends on the ability of energy-intensive sectors to reduce their carbon footprint: this includes energy efficiency measures, electrification of processes, long-term renewable energy contracts, and decarbonization projects, especially as the full CBAM regime approaches. These efforts should be complemented by support schemes for Romania's extra-EU suppliers, ensuring that input flows remain both competitive and compliant.

At the same time, developing human capital, expanding vocational training programs, and offering incentives for digitalization and automation could enhance the value-added of exports, facilitating access to new markets both within and beyond the EU. Strengthening financial instruments and credit guarantees, especially for SMEs, can broaden the base of internationally competitive firms. Finally, the establishment of a national monitoring system for foreign trade indicators, integrated with global cycle signals, would allow for timely adjustments in public and corporate strategies.

Looking toward 2025–2026, Romania's exports are expected to grow at a moderate pace, in line with the gradual rebound in European demand. Shifting from cost-based to quality-based competitiveness, via technology, environmental standards, and delivery reliability, will be key to differentiating high performers. A coherent mix of public policies and private

investments can enhance Romania's export competitiveness and contribute to a gradual correction of external imbalances.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Over two-thirds of Romania's exports are directed toward the EU, anchoring national trade performance to the European industrial cycle. This integration provides institutional stability and standardization, but also increases pro-cyclicality: the slowdown in Germany, Italy, and France quickly translated into reduced Romanian export orders in 2023–2024.

Romanian exports have been dominated by capital goods and vehicles, reflecting the country's positioning within European value chains. This specialization supports productivity and technology transfer, but also creates dependence on OEM cycles and core EU industrial policies.

Export growth in 2021–2022 was heavily influenced by international price dynamics (energy, transport, inputs), which boosted the nominal value of exports without a proportional increase in volume. In 2023–2024, as prices corrected, export performance softened—highlighting the need for a qualitative upgrade (economic complexity, product and process innovation).

Increasing the value added of Romanian exports increasingly depends on the adoption of digital technologies (automation, data-driven quality control) and the availability of technical skills (mechatronics, industrial software). The 2020–2024 period revealed both progress in some clusters and skills shortages in medium-to-high-tech sectors.

The EU green transition, including the implementation of mechanisms like CBAM and stricter emission reporting across supply chains, is changing the rules of the game. For Romanian exporters, competitive advantage will increasingly rely on energy efficiency, decarbonization, and supply chain traceability. Energy-intensive sectors will require accelerated investment to avoid margin erosion and loss of orders.

Despite medium-term export growth, Romania's trade deficit has remained high, particularly in years of strong domestic demand and elevated external prices. The macroeconomic implications are twofold: pressure on the current account and increased reliance on portfolio inflows and foreign investment, making the economy more vulnerable to shifts in global financial conditions. A sustainable correction requires both boosting net exports and managing imports through efficient domestic substitution where feasible.

Expansion toward non-EU markets (Balkans, MENA, Caucasus) has progressed gradually, but EU market concentration remains dominant. The key lesson from 2020–2024 is that smart diversification, anchored in logistical proximity and trade risk mitigation tools, can buffer against cyclical shocks in core European markets.

Service exports (IT&C, industrial support services, transport) have shown relatively higher resilience compared to goods during periods of volatility. Expanding and integrating these services with product offerings can smooth out business cycles and improve exporters' overall margins.

Export-oriented SMEs have faced financing constraints during periods of high interest rates and elevated input costs. Strengthening frameworks for guarantees, factoring, and export credit insurance is essential to consolidating the exporter base and reducing the order-to-delivery cycle.

The 2020–2024 period demonstrated that cost-based advantages are fragile. Competition is shifting toward reliability, compliance, innovation, and after-sales services. Exporters that invested in certifications, traceability, and automation navigated periods of stress more effectively.

Positive export performance is maximized when infrastructure investments, workforce training, decarbonization programs, and financial tools are aligned in a predictable package, with measurable targets (delivery times, logistics density, specific energy consumption, share of medium/high-tech products in exports).

In conclusion, 2020–2024 served as a stress test for Romania’s export model. The results point to overall resilience, but also a clear need for modernization—ranging from infrastructure and human capital to decarbonization and supply chain governance. Transitioning from nominal growth (price-driven) to real growth with higher economic complexity is key to reducing the external deficit and anchoring Romania in high-productivity European value chains over the long term.

## REFERENCES

1. Bălăceanu, C., 2015, *Economia internațională și politicile comerciale*, ASE Publishing House, Bucharest.
2. Eurostat, 2025, *EU trade flows and market integration*, available online <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/>
3. International Monetary Fund, 2023, *World Economic Outlook: Navigating Global Shocks*, available online <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2023/April/groups-and-aggregates>
4. Eurostat, 2025, *International Trade in Goods – Romania, 2024*, available online <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/>
5. Eurostat, 2025, *Share of trade with the EU27 (from 2020)*, available online <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tet00037/default/table?lang=en>
6. Trend Economy, 2025, *Romania Exports*, available online [https://trendeconomy.com/data/export\\_hsm/Romania/TOTAL](https://trendeconomy.com/data/export_hsm/Romania/TOTAL)
7. World’s Top Exports, 2025, *Romania’s Top 10 Exports*, available online <https://www.worldstopexports.com/romanias-top-10-exports/>
8. Trading Economics, 2025, *Romania Manufacturing PMI*, available online <https://tradingeconomics.com/romania/manufacturing-pmi>
9. European Commission, 2025, *Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism*, available online [https://taxation-customs.ec.europa.eu/carbon-border-adjustment-mechanism\\_en?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://taxation-customs.ec.europa.eu/carbon-border-adjustment-mechanism_en?utm_source=chatgpt.com)
10. European Commission, 2025, *Spring 2025 Economic Forecast: Moderate growth amid global economic uncertainty*, available online [https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-forecast-and-surveys/economic-forecasts/spring-2025-economic-forecast-moderate-growth-amid-global-economic-uncertainty\\_en](https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-forecast-and-surveys/economic-forecasts/spring-2025-economic-forecast-moderate-growth-amid-global-economic-uncertainty_en)
11. INSSE, 2025, *Comerțul internațional cu bunuri – structură pe secțiuni CAEN și grupe de produse*, available online <https://insse.ro/cms/ro/tags/comunicat-comertul-international-cu-bunuri>